A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF GAY MALES' EXPERIENCE
WITH CHRISTIANITY: IDENTITY, INTERSECTION,
AND COUNSELING CONSIDERATIONS

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A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF GAY MALES' EXPERIENCE WITH
CHRISTIANITY: IDENTITY, INTERSECTION, AND COUNSELING
CONSIDERATIONS (270 pp.)

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The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to understand the narratives of gay male individuals who identify as Christian. Although some researchers have focused on conducting studies on religious topics and others on various aspects of the LGBTQ community, there remains a paucity of research that has examined the intersection of these elements for the field of counseling and their implications. Of the limited studies conducted in this combined area, most studies are conceptual in nature or based in quantitative research approaches. The rationale for this study was to capture the narratives of gay males who are Christian and discover themes through the analysis of semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the researcher sought to answer, "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?"

The participants were eight adult males who self-identified as gay, male, and Christian. A narrative analysis was conducted in order to gain, understand, and analyze salient narratives from participants. From this understanding gained through the participants' narratives, better programing, support, and educational opportunities all related to the professional field of counseling can be generated for gay Christian males.

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Successfully scaling this mountain called "dissertation" has been a journey unlike anything I have experienced and a process where I have done much self-reflection. This adventure allowed me to develop my own understanding of self, experience a mosaic of emotions, and establish a sense of worth that is all my own. These accomplishments would not have been possible if it were not for the many people who made this expedition possible. I would like to thank the eight wonderful individuals who agreed to be the participants of this dissertation study. I have heard people say one should never talk about sexuality or religion, and yet these are the exact topics I asked them to discuss. These eight men spoke on these topics through their personal narratives in ways that allowed me to glimpse into their lives, almost tangibly see specific moments, and share what I witnessed with the readers of this study. The amount of transparency and courage exhibited by these participants left me with a sense of awe, humility, and I cannot say thank you enough for what each of you gave.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There were many stories throughout my life that I could have utilized to illustrate my relationship between my religious identity as a Christian and my sexual identity as a gay male. These narratives illuminate the symbolical "teeter-totter" of experiences that represent a good majority of my life between these two identities. Elements of my life allowed me to "teeter" at times very strongly towards my religious identity as a Christian: raised in a conservative religious family, became a member of a church that clung to traditional values, accepted early leadership opportunities within my youth group as an adolescent, and attended a private Christian college for undergraduate and graduate degrees. All these experiences deeply cultivated my identity as a Christian, supplied me with wonderful opportunities, and sometimes provided moments that were detrimental to my sexual identity. As my religious identity flourished, my sexual identity as a gay male was often ignored, ignorantly dismissed, or unknowingly verbally abused by others during these life experiences.

At other times my life strongly "teetered" towards my sexual identity as a gay male. It was in college, the same private Christian institution, where I first met another individual who secretively disclosed to me that he too was gay. I began to discern similarities between us as more conversations occurred and a deep friendship developed. It was also during this time in my life when I experienced my first romantic relationship with a man, attended my first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) event, and eventually disclosed to close acquaintances my own sexual identity as a gay

male. I felt my life "teetered" more towards my sexual identity as a gay male through these pivotal events and less towards my religious identity as a Christian. Balancing these two identities had been a challenge throughout my early life.

This teeter-totter of identity can also be illustrated through a personal narrative from college. Eight years ago I was completing my bachelor's degree at a Christian college in the Midwest, and an internship experience was designed to be the capstone of my college experience. Taking place within a young, but steadily growing, church on the east coast of the United States, this church was my first-choice internship location as I had previously visited this church on mission trips, loved the general geographical location, and worked well with the staff. The excitement I felt preceding this anticipated educational experience was almost palpable. Due to my previous brief experiences working alongside their members, interning at this church was my "dream" and I had felt at the time that this overall internship was going to be a learning and growing experience.

During my brief time at this internship location, the pastor launched a sermon series entitled, "The Elephant's in the Room." This series was designed to discuss one "hot button" issue during Sunday services over the course of a few weeks, such as politics, environmentalism, or homosexuality. Being a Christian who was gay but not yet "out," I was interested in the staff's position on the "elephant" of homosexuality. I quickly found out their beliefs on the matter, as one of my routine requirements was to attend the weekly staff meeting where church leaders met to update each other concerning various ministry plans, church events, and the upcoming Sunday service. I felt most of these staff meetings were dry, routine, and scheduled just to keep everyone

on the "same page." Yet, the meeting on this particular topic grew to be quite dynamic and intense at times. At the heart of the discussion were two opposing views within the staff: a junior church leader thought the church should be supportive of individuals who identified as LGBTQ, whereas the more senior leader of the staff, who was my direct supervisor, thought the church should adopt a conservative stance and not be accepting of "that lifestyle."

I unquestionably had an opinion on this topic, but I felt trapped at the time and did not feel as if I could voice my opinion. This church was my internship site, and I knew at the end of the academic experience a grade would be assigned to my performance, which would be determined by the sum of all my activities. I had a near 4.0 grade point average towards the end of this undergraduate academic program, so I sought to be the model intern. Going against my supervisor in any way did not seem as if it would secure the grade I sought. Furthermore, I felt as if I could not address this topic at this time for fear of "outing" myself. I knew verbally stating my opinion on this topic might spark my passion for the topic and I might say more than was needed. Disclosing my sexual identity to the staff at this church would have had repercussions, possibly even in the form of dismissal from my internship site. More so, as my supervisor was closely connected to my main academic institution, he could have undoubtedly reported any disclosed personal information that could have initiated more severe academic repercussions. I resigned myself to sit in silence because of all these uncertain, but possible, outcomes, listening to people discuss this topic and, in essence, discuss me. I felt as if I was the "elephant" in the room the sermon was all about. At the end of the

discussion, the opinion of my supervisor prevailed among the staff and the meeting was called to an end.

Justification for Autobiographical Beginning

This dissertation started with an autobiographical account that narratively displayed a single episodic personal-life event. The narrative illustrated one of many personal-life events when my religious identity as a Christian and my sexual identity as a gay male collided. The self-examination displayed in the opening narrative benefited the overall dissertation study, as narrative researchers benefit from initial self-examination and are thus better able to attend to participants who may come to share their own stories (Clandinin, 2013). Probing and excavating my own personal narrative, which related to the dissertation topic, framed the way I entered into a research relationship with my participants of this study. I could more fully appreciate the transparency and courage it took for participants to share their own personal narratives related to this research topic. Furthermore, without researchers taking time to deeply consider their own salient personal narrative, they jeopardize future research by potentially missing important narrative components shared by research participants (Clandinin, 2013). These components could potentially be captured in research if researchers are more self-aware of their own narrative.

Yet, there was a more personal and overarching rationale for developing this opening narrative. Narrative researchers have found it important to establish work and clarify for readers why their research is personally significant (Clandinin, 2013). Researchers can more closely examine who they are as individuals in the context of

constructing an opening narrative to their research (Clandinin, 2013). It was within my own life-narrative that the preliminary question concerning the relationship between religious identity and sexual identity first originated. Clandinin (2013) claimed that narrative researchers begin with a personal justification to explain the "inquiry in the context of their own life experiences, tensions, and personal inquiry puzzles" (p. 36). The tensions experienced in my life between "teetering" back-and-forth between my religious identity as a Christian and my sexual identity as a gay male became a meaningful place for me to inquire into this research.

My experienced tension drove my need for more profound contemplation and study about the intersection between a Christian religious identity and a gay sexual identity. This tension led to a practical justification of this research. Clandinin (2013) stated that narrative researchers need to go beyond a personal justification, as seen above, and consider the practical justification within research. The practical justification for this dissertation was established in a need to understand more deeply the narratives of gay males and their various storied-experiences as Christians. Narratives that were gained and analyzed in this dissertation concerning the intersection between an individual's religious identity as a Christian and sexual identity as a gay male can better inform the work and practice within the profession of counseling in a myriad of ways as described throughout this dissertation study. The relationship and intersection of these identities framed this narrative analysis as well as the overall purpose of this research study.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this dissertation, the following functional definitions were used:

Bridling—refers to the researchers' action of reflection so as not to make hasty decisions in data collection and analysis (Dahlberg, 2006), take into consideration their worldview throughout the research process, restrain pre-understanding, and assist in the process of understanding (Ellett, 2011).

Christianity—refers to a world religion that centers on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ who is believed by adherents to be the son of God and savior of humanity (Woodhead, 2014).

Gay—refers to male individuals who engage in any physical act of sex involving sexual arousal with another man and/or a male who is emotionally attracted only to other men (Bullough & Bullough, 1994). This definition accounts for both the physical and the psychological components of a gay identity.

Narrative analysis—refers to a form of qualitative research where data are systematically gathered through told storied-experiences from participants, are analyzed, and then the meaning from these narratives is reported (Creswell, 2005). Clandinin (2013) wrote that narrative analysis is "an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17). Due to this definition by a leading figure in this field of research, narrative analysis and narrative approach are used interchangeably within this document.

Peer reviewer—refers to someone who assists in the research process through providing researchers with critical questions and an outlet to test knowledge as it is developing (Guba, 1981).

Reflexive journaling—refers to the procedure of critically reflecting upon the self as researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Religious identity—refers to a personal identification with a set of beliefs, practices, and symbols that are connected to a religious organization. Collectively, these features are designed to facilitate a relationship with a higher power and designed to connect individuals with others in a community setting (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001).

Sexual identity—refers to how individuals recognize and identify their sexual predisposition that is constructed by individuals throughout their life (Plummer, 1975; Troiden, 1989; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002).

Thematic analysis—refers to the qualitative research method that allows researchers to recognize, categorize, and disseminate significant patterns, or themes, within research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The subject of religion has been studied for decades by researchers (Allport & Ross, 1967; Hill & Pargament, 2003). This previous scholarship could be due, in part, to the predominance of religion in the lives of Americans, as approximately 71% of Americans identify with some form of Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Despite positive aspects of adhering to a religious organization such as Christianity

(Levin, 2010), not all individuals may feel accepted (Cook & Baldwin, 1981).
Individuals who identity as LGBTQ+ may discover their sexual identity may not be accepted by some religious groups or organizations affiliated with Christianity. These individuals' expressed sexual identity and held religious beliefs may be perceived as an existing dichotomy by other individuals (Balkin, Watts, & Ali, 2014; Levy, 2011; N. Wright, 2014). Although many researchers have focused on religious topics of interest, and other researchers on various aspects of LGBTQ+ studies, there is a paucity of conducted research that examines the intersection of these two identities. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to understand the narratives of gay male individuals who identify as Christian. From understanding these narratives, implications for the field of counseling were developed.

Counseling Research

There is a limited amount of research conducted that examines the intersection of these two identities. Of the limited studies that have been conducted in these research areas, some are conceptual in nature (e.g., Krondorfer, 2007; Rosik & Popper, 2014; Wood & Conley, 2014) and others are based in quantitative approaches (e.g., Meladze & Brown, 2015; Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013; Reese, Steffens, & Jonas, 2014; N. Wright, 2014). Therefore, this research was conducted in order to qualitatively examine participants' stories related to their religious and sexual identities. This research can better inform counseling education practice, service, and supervision. Approaching this study through narrative analysis further developed the existing body of counseling

research, as very little research within the counseling field has been conducted through this methodology.

Counseling Practice

Counseling practitioners need to understand the significance of addressing the topic of religious identity within the lives of their clients, as it can play a substantial role in life situations, clarify values, and provide solutions to problems (Bishop, Avila-Juarbe, & Thumme, 2003). Other researchers indicated the need for professional counselors to be able to work with clients who identify with various sexual identities, as LGBTQ+ clients are more likely to seek counseling compared to heterosexual counterparts (Burckell & Goldfried, 2006; J. A. Murphy, Rawlings, & Howe, 2002; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004) with a variety of presenting concerns. Counselors have an obligation to consider cultural implications for clients and possess a degree of multicultural counseling competence (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). This mandate includes understanding and working with a client's religious identity and sexual identity. Researchers illustrated both negative responses (Levy, 2011) and positive responses (Rodriguez, 2009) that can be experienced by individuals who seek to integrate their religious identity of Christianity and their sexual identity as a gay male. Counselors can begin the process of exploring their clients' religious identity and sexual identity from the very beginning of the professional relationship, as treatment goals are discussed, and in greater detail as the professional relationship progresses. Therefore, this research becomes critically needed for professional counselors who address these areas of a client's identity.

Counselor Education

Due to the importance of clinically exploring these issues, counselor educators need to address these topics in the classroom and train novice counseling students how to navigate religious concerns (Henriksen, Bornsheuer-Boswell, & Polonyi, 2013) and sexual issues (Millner & Upton, 2016). Counselor educators could easily incorporate these topics into such courses as Orientation to Clinical Mental Health, Orientation to School Counseling, Multicultural Counseling, Ethics, or a number of other courses. Albeit applicable to many courses, some counselor educators may find it difficult to address the topics of religious identity and sexual identity either out of lack of knowledge (Garnets, Hancock, Cochran, Goodchilds, & Peplau, 1991; Liddle, 1996), comfort level (Rudolph, 1990), or from a sense that they would violate a separation of church and state (Kelly, 1994). Yet, the primary organization for counselor education, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), mandates that counselor educators teach students how to interact professionally with a wide variety of diverse clients (CACREP, 2016), including those who identify as gay or as Christian. This research can inform material already being presented in classes and possibly modify how it is presented to counselors-in-training.

Counselor Supervision

Counselors are required to provide supervision to junior members of the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). There are opportunities in this role for supervisors to discuss with supervisees the topics of sexual identity and religious identity as they relate to a client's presenting concerns. Some clients may present with concerns

of homophobic actions or beliefs due to religious principles (Eriksen, Marston, & Korte, 2002) or struggles to reconcile a held religious identity with their sexual identity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Possibly more problematic for supervisors than either of these examples is when supervisees appear homophobic towards clients due to their own religious beliefs (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009) and would possibly resist seeing such clients. These presenting concerns could then be discussed in supervision. This research provided needed information for supervisors and supervisees regarding the intersection of religious and sexual identities.

Counseling Service

There are a variety of ways to interact with individuals who identify as gay or Christian through service opportunities within the counseling profession. The American Counseling Association (ACA) has two professional divisions directly related to this research, the Associate for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) and the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC), that offer counseling professionals the opportunity to serve in a variety of ways. Chi Sigma Iota (CSI), the third largest counseling association in the world (Gibson, 2015), included within its leadership principles the mandate for counselors to provide service to others, counseling associations, and the profession (Chi Sigma Iota [CSI], 2017). Counselors can also engage in service through professional advocacy efforts, such as staying abreast of public policy or lobbying for the passages of laws, to help advance the profession (Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013; Newsome & Gladding, 2014). All of these are examples of service opportunities that connect the field

of counseling with the topics of an individual's religious identity and sexual identity, thus making this research needed to better inform actions of service within the profession of counseling.

Counselor Ethics

Various ethical and legal incidents related to the areas of religious identity with sexual identity build upon this rationale for this research. For instance, the 2001 case of *Bruff v. North Mississippi Health Services, Inc.* involved a federal appeals court upholding the job termination of a counselor who asked to be exempt from counseling a client presenting with relationship issues due to the client's sexual identity as a lesbian which conflicted with the counselor's religious beliefs (Hermann & Herlihy, 2006). Another example is the 2009 case of *Julia Ward v. Wilbanks*. This case involved a counseling practicum student, Julia Ward, who sought to refer a client seeking counseling due to concerns of depression because the client had previously disclosed to another counselor a gay identity (Hancock, 2014). Ward reportedly refused a remediation plan that was offered by the academic department, chose a formal hearing, and was eventually dismissed from the program due to a violation of the ACA ethical codes (Hancock, 2014). These actions also violated multicultural competencies put forth by the counseling profession that counselors should adhere to (Sangganjanavanich & Reynolds, 2015). This case was eventually settled with the student receiving a settlement from the university she attended at the time and the dismissal removed from her academic record (Hancock, 2014). More current legislation intersecting the topics of religious identity and sexual identity has also occurred. The state of Tennessee passed Senate Bill 1556 that

allowed professional counselors in the state to conscientiously object to serving certain clients based upon their own values or beliefs (ACA, 2017). This legislative action resulted in ACA removing their 2017 national conference from the state and relocating it in San Francisco, CA (ACA, 2017). Despite the various repercussions that have occurred over the passage of this law, other states such as Mississippi (Green, 2016) and Arkansas (DeMillo, 2016) passed similar religious exemption legislation, and still other states have attempted to do so (T. Wang, Geffen, & Cahill, 2016).

Research Problem

With the apparent connection of this dissertation research topic to the areas of counselor research, education, supervision, practice, service, and ethics, there was a noticeable need within the counseling profession to research the narrative experiences of gay males (sexual identity) related to their experience with Christianity (religious affiliation). Previous research has mainly considered these topics together through conceptual (e.g., Krondorfer, 2007; Rosik & Popper, 2014; Wood & Conley, 2014) or quantitative means approaches (e.g., Meladze & Brown, 2015; Page et al., 2013; Reese et al., 2014; N. Wright, 2014). A qualitative study allowed for "rich, thick descriptions" that are lost in quantitative methods (Merriam, 2002, p. 15). Although there are various qualitative approaches that one could have utilized in this research (Creswell, 2007), a narrative analysis was the best research approach.

Narrative analysis was appropriate for this dissertation study as it can distinctively display human experiences through narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). I was able to showcase through a narrative analysis the complex storied-experiences of individuals

who identify as gay and as Christian and add to the current professional understanding regarding these narratives (Creswell, 2005). I was then able to take this complexity of participants' storied-experiences and make it visible through this dissertation study (Clandinin, 2013). This increased visibility of participants' narratives served to highlight the distinct voices of individuals who identify as gay and Christian (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is through this unique research lens that this study explored the question: "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?"

Review of the Literature

A summary of the professional literature follows. This review is introduced with an overview of religion that focuses particularly on Christianity, introduces various religious developmental models, and culminates in mental health considerations for this topic. The subject of gay males is then incorporated into this literature review first through the inclusion of gay identity developmental models, then through other salient topics in this research. Next, the intersection of these two identities, Christian religious identity and a gay sexual identity, is discussed. Subsequently, significant counseling considerations for this research, including a historical view of treatment, multicultural influences, and related counseling competences, are brought into the literature review. This chapter then concludes with the present need for this study and the research question.

Religious Identity

The subject of religion has been studied for decades by researchers (Allport & Ross, 1967; Hill & Pargament, 2003). Although religion has been defined in various

ways (Oppong, 2013), it has been noted as somewhat difficult to concisely define

(Griffith & Griggs, 2001). Koenig et al. (2001) defined religion as the "organized system

of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols" intended to facilitate a relationship with a

higher power and designed to connect one with others in a community setting (p. 18).

This area of research may be common because more than half of Americans

(approximately 54%) reported that religion was very important in their lives (Pew

Research Center, 2015b). Among adolescents in the United States, 95% reported a belief

in God and 45% reported either belonging to a religious-affiliated group or attended

weekly worship services (Gallup & Bezilla, 1992).

Conducting research in this area is important, as religion can provide values and

principles in early childhood that guide actions and provide a belief in a higher power

(Fellows, 1996). Religion can be a source to be consulted in various areas of life such as

morality, responsibility, sex, procreation, and death (Garcia, Gray-Stanley, &

Ramirez-Valles, 2008). Entire cultural and community events, such as holidays and

weddings, are often constructed around religious traditions (Flannelly & Inouye, 2001).

Researchers have found that adults who identify with religion are generally healthier than

their non-religious counterparts (Chiswick & Mirtcheva, 2013), and religious-affiliated

youth possess better psychosocial adjustment compared to their counterparts (Cotton,

Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006). Because of all these considerations, it is

important for research, including this dissertation study, to be conducted within this topic

area.

Religion is associated with another concept: spirituality. From a mental health perspective, both religion and spirituality develop across an individual's lifespan, are social-psychological phenomena, and contain cognitive, affective, and emotional components (Hill et al., 2000). Both religion and spirituality in an individual's life can be a negative predictor for the initiation of drug use (Gorsuch & Butler, 1976), alcohol abuse (Hill et al., 2000), and various forms of social deviance such as theft or violence (Bainbridge, 1992). This indicates positive mental health implications when this element is incorporated into an individual's life. Because of this seemingly overlapping nature of the two terms (Piedmont, Ciarrochi, Dy-Liacco, & Williams, 2009; Polanski, 2003), the terms religion and spirituality are used interchangeably by some authors (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). However, Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott (1999) elucidated that religion has come to be seen in an institutional fashion, whereas Spilka and McIntosh (1996) noted that spirituality is viewed in a more individual nature and related to concepts such as meaningfulness and transcendence. A. J. Wright and Stern (2016) noted that spirituality is more "intrapsychic, experiential, and noninstitutional" and can "exist in the absence of organized religion" (p. 71). With a clear distinction between these terms, this dissertation chose to specifically look at religion, particularly Christianity.

Christianity. Just as there is a large percentage of individuals who self-report that religion is important in their life, so, too, do a large percentage of Americans self-identify with a Christian identity. Approximately 71% of Americans who are 18 and older identify as Christian, of whom 46.5% identify as Protestant, 20.8% as Catholic, and the rest as Orthodox, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, or Other (Pew Research Center,

2015a). These significant statistics indicate a very large population within the United

States who identify as Christian, and, therefore, there is a need to examine this substantial

population through research in order to better develop counseling implications. Whereas

the United States has experienced a decline in the number of individuals who identify

with Christianity over the past years, it still remains dominant in this country with more

Christian-affiliated individuals than in any other country (Pew Research Center 2015a).

These demographics are changing in other ways as racial and ethnic statistics are

considered. The Pew Research Center (2015a) noted that racial and ethnic minorities

compose 41% of Catholics, 24% of evangelical Protestants, and 14% of other protestant

denominations. Other noteworthy demographics are that less than 60% of Millennials,

individuals who were born between 1980 and 1994—therefore approximately 23–37

years old—self-identify with some type of Christianity as compared to at least 70% of

those who are Baby Boomers and Gen-X—individuals born between 1946 and 1964 and

are therefore 53–71 years old, or born between 1965 and 1979 and so are 38–52 years

old, respectively (Pew Research, 2015a; Robinson, 2017).

There are numerous beliefs held by individuals who self-identify as Christian.

The main sacred text for Christians is the Bible, a book believed to be a description of

God's actions and plans for humanity, as well as a general guide for how one should live

life (Biblica, 2017). The Bible is utilized by Christians to increase their understanding of

God and related concepts, such as Christianity's view of human origins (Genesis 1:26 and

Romans 5:12), the role of prayer in one's life (Matthew 7:7–11), and the early history of

the church (Acts 1–28). The Bible begins by citing God as the creator of the universe and

the source of all life (Genesis 1:1; John 5:26). God is considered to be holy (Isaiah

57:15), all powerful (Genesis 18:4), and loving (1 John 3:16). Jesus Christ is considered

by Christians to be the son of God (Matthew 8:29) and the one who died on a cross for

the sins of humanity (1 Corinthians 15:1–3). Christians believe that spiritual salvation in

eternity comes only through Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:13). The Holy Spirit is also

involved in the salvation process (Ephesians 1:13). Woodhead (2014) noted that in all its

pages and passages, the Bible expresses the essence of Christianity as centering on the

life and teachings of Jesus Christ believed to be the son of God and savior of humanity.

Although much commonality exists within Christianity and its system of beliefs,

not all Christians adhere to the precisely same dogmas. For instance, Christians are

divided on whether the Bible should be interpreted literally or in a more figurative way

(Pew Research Center, 2008). This fact can be exemplified by the majority of

historically Black and evangelical Protestant churches that believe in a literal

interpretation of the Bible, whereas other Protestant denominations and Catholics more

often do not believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible (Pew Research Center, 2008).

According to the Pew Research Center (2008), only 84% of Protestant Christians believe

in heaven and 73% believe in hell. Diversity exists among individuals within groups of

belief systems as well, as the Pew Research Center (2008) cited that 82% and 60% of

Catholic Christians believe in heaven and hell, respectively. These differences in beliefs

translate into differences in religious action. The Pew Research Center (2008) reported

Christians differ in their time spent in prayer, incorporation of children into religious

practices, and in their action of sharing their religion with other individuals. These

marked differences similarly extend to beliefs in homosexuality as just over half (54%) of Christians report that this identity should be accepted rather than discouraged (C. Murphy, 2015). It is this last statistic regarding the rise in acceptance of homosexuality (C. Murphy, 2015) that is of particular interest for this dissertation study.

 Religious developmental models. Religious developmental models are important for counselors to know and understand for a variety of reasons. Religious developmental models can help counselors broadly conceptualize the psychological process of developing a religious identity in stages and suggested that this structure holds for many individuals. Understanding religious developmental models can assist a counselor not only in conceptualizing the process of how one develops a religious identity, but also in expanding abilities to more fully conceptualize clients. As counselors become familiar with these models, they can apply them to a wide variety of clients, better understand the way clients make meaning of particular life situations, more fully comprehend client values, and connect the clients' stage of religious development to other components of their identity development, such as sexual orientation (Bishop et al., 2003). In understanding religious developmental models, a counselor can more effectively relate to clients and work with them when they present a religious concern (Stanard & Painter, 2004). The use of religious developmental models can inform the overall counseling process in which a counselor engages, such as assessment measures and later therapeutic interventions (Stanard & Painter, 2004). Interventions based on religious developmental models in which counselors might engage can include providing psychoeducation on the development of religious identity, normalizing clients'

experiences within this area, or confronting certain thoughts clients may have regarding religion (Stanard & Painter, 2004).

Religious identity has now been studied for decades (Moulin, 2013) and many theories have been constructed to increase the understanding of religious identity development in individuals. These models differ in their labeling of the stages of development and how these stages are divided within the lifespan of individuals. Yet, all of them include the individual starting with no religious identity and having the option to achieve a well-developed religious schema. Three theorists who have completed work in the area of religious identity development are discussed: Goldman's (1965, 1968) religious development model, Oser's (1991) stages of religious judgment, and Elkind's (1978b) religious identity model.

Goldman's religious development model. Ronald Goldman is known by some as a pioneer for his work on a developmental perspective regarding religious identity (Hyde, 1990). Goldman (1965) thought that in early childhood there are no indications of religious thinking and labeled this phase of life as "pre-religious" (p. 80). As children grow into middle childhood, Goldman (1968) theorized that their thinking becomes more concrete as they conceptualize religious ideas, expressions, and behaviors. In late childhood and into a pre-adolescent stage of development, Goldman (1965) understood individuals as grasping larger and more abstract religious concepts. For instance, a child in this stage may try to grasp the belief that God is omnipresent, something more abstract and difficult to grasp with only concrete thinking (Goldman, 1965). Goldman (1965) believed that at approximately 13 years of age, individuals progress towards processing

religion cognitively as they can now better identify abstract thoughts and process religious ideas.

Oser's stages of religious judgment. Fritz Oser (1991) also conducted work in this area and identified seven stages based on chronological age that specify how religious development and judgment occur. Stage zero is considered a pre-religious stage in which young children are predominately self-focused and unable to identify religious forces (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). As children become heavily influenced by others, and adopt the religious orientation of some other individual, such as a parent, they are identified as being in stage one and continue in this stage until the ages eight or nine (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Stage two, occurring from the ages of nine to 11, is typified as children viewing God as an external being that can be influenced by their good actions or promises (Oser, 1991). During early adolescence, an individual enters stage three, denoted by the idea of separation (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Individuals in this stage cultivate a sense of independence from God, develop the idea that God is outside the realm of humanity, and display resulting autonomous feelings and actions (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Stage four is arrived at during late adolescence and young adulthood during which individuals take the autonomy developed during stage three and now decided whether they themselves would like to pursue a relationship with God (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Oser (1991) believed that individuals have freedom and a sense of self-responsibility in this stage, but these concepts are both tied to God. Stage four is also where religious social engagement becomes more important for individuals (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Social factors later increase in importance, as Oser and Gmunder

(1991) noted that individuals develop a sense of community in stage five of their model. The ideas of love and communication are seen as hallmarks of the relationship between human beings and God during this stage (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Finally, stage six was conceptualized by Oser (1991) as when individuals achieve their greatest level of religious consciousness. Although not all individuals achieve this level of religiosity, individuals at this level build upon the commonality in stage five, gravitate toward communicating in universal-style language, and seek unity with others (Oser, 1991).

Elkind's religious identity model. David Elkind is known for playing a significant role in this research area through his application of Piaget's developmental work to the area of religion (Hyde, 1990). In Elkind's work, *The Child's Reality* (1978a), he summarized his research findings into three stages of religious identity development for children. Elkind (1978) theorized that children are in the first stage of religious identity development until the age of seven. This initial stage is characterized as children possessing global thinking about religion, being able to appreciate religious symbols and rituals, while not fully grasping their meaning, and having an undifferentiated religious identity (Elkind, 1978a). Children make progress towards a developed religious identity in the second stage, between the ages of seven and nine, with the development of concrete religious references, actions, and characteristics (Elkind, 1978a). For example, specific Christian rituals such as communion or baptism assist in the development of a religious identity. In the final stage, usually developed between the ages of 10 to 12, Elkind (1978) noted that individuals develop more of a relationship and personal connection to their religion, as they are able to reflect internally on events and

understandings. Elkind (1978a) denoted that in this final stage individuals are not finished, but rather in continual development of their religious identity, and their beliefs and personal convictions are now a part in this developmental process.

Mental health counseling outcomes. Both advantages and disadvantages can be discerned when viewing religious identity through mental health counseling outcomes. Researchers found that adults who are affiliated with religion are largely healthier than counterparts who are non-religious (Chiswick & Mirtcheva, 2013), and religious-affiliated youth possess better psychosocial adjustment compared to their counterparts (Cotton et al., 2006). Koenig and Larson (2001) conducted a meta-analysis and found that a sense of religiosity produced lower rates of depression and anxiety in nearly two-thirds of the studies. Hackney and Sanders (2003) indicated through their meta-analysis that most researchers indicated an overall positive relationship between religion and mental health. Braam, Beekman, Deeg, Smit, and Van Tilburg (1997) conducted research and showed that religious activity in Protestant and Catholic groups is associated with the remission of depression. Specifically, Christian religious activity has even been found to be a protective factor against depression (Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne, & Weissman, 1997; Papazisis, Nicolaou, Tsiga, Christoforou, & Sapountzi-Krepia, 2014). Other researchers indicated an inverse correlation between religiosity and suicide (Neeleman & Lewis, 1999; Nisbet, Duberstein, Conwell, & Seidlitz, 2000). This relationship may be due to the fact that suicide is seen as less acceptable to many people who identify as Christian (Neeleman, Halpern, Leon, & Lewis, 1997).

Not all mental health counseling research outcomes regarding individuals with a religious identity are positive (Koenig, 2012). Higher intrinsic religious orientation has been associated with depression in some clients (Nelson, 1989), as well as general psychiatric disorders in others (Baetz, Bowen, Jones, & Koru-Sengul, 2006). Other researchers have highlighted a positive correlation between anxiety and religiosity (Baker & Gorsuch, 1982; Tapanya, Nicki, & Jarusawad, 1997). Related to anxiety, researchers have reported finding positive connections between religiosity and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Higgins, Pollard, & Merkel, 1992; Steketee, Quay, & White, 1991). Lee and Newberg (2005) noted that even "perceived religious transgressions can cause emotional and psychological anguish" requiring the need for one to seek counseling (p. 455). In considering the advantages and disadvantages in having a religious identity, and more specifically identifying as a Christian, this dissertation focused on the narratives of gay men who identify as a Christian.

Gay Male Identity

The topic of sexual identity is complex. Simplistically, sexual identity can be viewed as how individuals recognize and identify their sexual predispositions (Worthington et al., 2002). Some researchers, such as Shively and De Cecco (1977), have developed a more complex idea of sexual identity and believed it involved four components: biological sex, gender identity, social sex-role, and sexual orientation. An individual's sexual identity is not something that is static (Plummer, 1975), but is rather a perception of self that can be constructed by the individual throughout life (Troiden, 1989). The formation of sexual identity in gay males is a specific process that has been

studied and delineated by researchers (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989).

Although the term "gay" can be understood in a variety of ways, it is used here to refer to

"same-sex sexual contact, either (1) as a genital act or (2) as a long-term sexuoerotic

status" (Bullough & Bullough, 1994, p. 278). In response to the unique sexual identity of

gay male individuals, work has been completed to better understand this identity

formation and its implications specifically for the field of counseling (Beane, 1981). This

section illuminates specific gay identity development models and the implications for the

field of counseling in response to this sexual identity.

Gay identity development. Many theories have been developed that enhance our

understanding of the development of the sexual identity of gay male individuals. These

models, although different in their number and labeling of stages of development, all

include the individual coming to a realization about his sexual identity, learning about it,

and then coming to a certain degree of acceptance. Three theories related to the sexual

identity development of gay male individuals are discussed: Cass's (1979, 1984) model

of homosexual identity formation, Troiden's (1989) model of gay identity development,

and D'Augelli's (1994) LGB identity process model.

Cass's model of homosexual identity formation. Vivienne C. Cass (1979)

developed a theoretical model for identity development of gay and lesbian individuals.

Even though this model was developed more than 30 years ago, it continues to be often

cited in current literature (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). This identity development theory

marks the process of the formation of a homosexual self-image, the progression of this

self-image into a more fully developed identity, as well as the affective, behavioral, and

cognitive strategies utilized to develop and maintain this new identity (Cass, 1984). Cass

(1979) organized this process into six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison,

identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis.

In the first stage of Cass's (1979) model, identity confusion, individuals begin by

perceiving actions, certain feelings, or thoughts as more aligned with a homosexual rather

than heterosexual identity. This recognized perception initiates a state of confusion or

cognitive dissonance (Cass, 1984). Cass (1984) stated that an individual at this stage of

identity development can either choose to reject the possibility that he is a gay male, for

instance, or accept the possibility that he is gay and view this identity with either a

positive or a negative disposition. The individual moves into the second stage of

development, identity comparison, as he accepts the possibility of a gay identity (Cass,

1979). This stage involves the individual forming his sexual identity in terms of social

acceptance and attempting to make contact with other gay individuals to avoid feelings of

isolation (Cass, 1984). An increasing amount of contact is witnessed in stage three,

identity tolerance, as individuals seek out other gay men to achieve emotional, sexual, or

social needs (Cass, 1979). Despite an enhancement of the self-image as a gay male,

individuals in this stage may view connections with other men as something that is not

desirable, but rather necessary (Cass, 1984).

A continual development towards an even more positive view of homosexuality

and an increase in the number of contacts with other gay men advance individuals into

stage four, identity acceptance (Cass, 1979). This stage marks the "coming out" of many

gay men when a sense of safety has arisen as an enlarged social support group is formed

(Cass, 1984). Identity pride, otherwise known as stage five, is achieved as individuals feel pride and loyalty towards their emerged sexual identity, while also feeling anger towards heteronormative society and possible stigmatization or inequality (Cass, 1979). This stage of immense pride can eventually lead individuals to the final stage, stage six, identity synthesis. Here, previously held emotions of pride and anger are retained, yet not as intensely. The individual no longer dichotomizes the world into "good homosexuals and bad heterosexuals," and the person is able to integrate his gay identity with various other aspects of his identity (Cass, 1984, p. 152). Cass (1979, 1984) noted that with the successful achievement of this stage, the homosexual identity formation has reached completion.

Troiden's model of gay identity development. Although Cass's (1979) model of gay identity formation may be the most recognized of gay identity development models, it is not the only one. Robert Troiden (1989) developed a four-stage sociological model that operates around general characteristics displayed by individuals who identify as being gay. Although the four-stage model would appear to progress in a linear format, Troiden (1989) suggested that gay identity formation is not a step-by-step process. Rather, specific stages can be combined or individuals may circumvent some stages. This stipulation illustrates that Troiden's model is not an exact pattern of identity development for everyone, but instead is meant to provide a broad picture of identity development.

The first stage of Troiden's model (1989), sensitization, occurs before puberty. This initial stage involves individuals experiencing feelings related to marginalization,

having perceptions of self that are different from that of same-sex peers, and attaining

social experiences that will later form their sexual identity (Troiden, 1989). Stage two,

identity confusion, occurs when individuals experience uncertainty related to their sexual

identity, dissonance from their previously held self-image, social isolation, engagement

in reflection on feelings or behaviors that align with perceptions of being gay, and

same-sex arousal (Troiden, 1989). Troiden noted that individuals at this stage, often

occurring during adolescence, have not fully developed a perception of their gay identity,

but no longer hold a heterosexual identity as an absolute. Individuals often arrive at the

third stage of Troiden's model, identity assumption, during or after late adolescence.

This stage is marked by a tolerance or acceptance of one's gay identity, increased

socialization with gay men, sexual experimentation, and LGBTQ+ cultural exploration

(Troiden, 1989). This stage of Troiden's model is associated with the action of "coming

out." The fourth stage, commitment, is where individuals fully adopt a gay identity by

integrating their sexual identity in all areas of life, are often in a same-sex relationship,

disclose to heterosexual individuals their gay identity, can manage stigma, and find their

sexual identity both valid and satisfying (Troiden, 1989). Troiden noted that supportive

friends or family, or an understanding educational or workplace environment, can help

facilitate the overall identity formation process of gay male individuals.

D'Augelli's homosexual lifespan development model. While Troiden (1989)

extended Cass's (1979) model to include more of a social element, D'Augelli's (1994)

model took a developmental approach when considering the formation of a gay sexual

identity. D'Augelli proposed six processes involved in gay identity development. The

first process, exiting heterosexual identity, involves individuals recognizing feelings and sexual attractions that are not heterosexual in nature, as well as telling others that they are gay (D'Augelli, 1994). Process two, developing a personal LGB identity status, entails that men reflect on previously held ideas about what it means to be gay and develop a sexual identity in connection with other individuals who can support the forming identity (D'Augelli, 1994). Developing a LGB social identity, process three, has individuals creating a social support network of people who are accepting of their sexual identity (D'Augelli, 1994). In process four, D'Augelli (1994) noted that individuals choose to disclose their sexual identity to parents, redefine their parental relationship, and attempt to work through related familial concerns. Process five of D'Augelli's (1994) model, developing an LGB intimacy status, requires individuals to think through the complex process of being in a same-sex relationship, how this relationship might affect community norms, and what individuals' own personal feelings are towards a partnership. In the final process, entering a LGB community, individuals commit to social and political action, often at personal risk, and more fully engage in the broader LGB community (D'Augelli, 1994). Through these processes, gay males may experience one process more fully than another (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005), such as experiencing an established same-sex relationship, but not having ever come out to family members. This example illustrates the ideas that these are processes individuals encounter rather than stages through which gay males progress.

Mental health of gay males. The development of a sexual identity can be very difficult for some gay males (Fukuyama, Sevig, & Soet, 2008). Depression has been acknowledged by many as a predominant mental health concern for gay individuals (Cochran & Mays, 2009; Fergusson, Horwood, Ridder, & Beautrais, 2005; Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002; Morris, McLaren, McLachlan, & Jenkins, 2015). There is a growing body of evidence to support that gay males experience depression at a higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003; King et al., 2008; Mills et al., 2004; J. Wang, Hausermann, Ajdacic-Gross, Aggleton, & Weiss, 2007). Researchers have also indicated higher rates of anxiety and anxiety-related disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and agoraphobia (Sandfort, de Graaf, Bijl, & Schnabel, 2001) or panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder (Cochran & Mays, 2009; Cochran et al., 2003; King et al., 2008) in gay males than in their heterosexual counterparts. Pachankis and Bernstein (2012) noted that adolescent gay males particularly have anxiety linked with their parents' disapproval with their sexual orientation, and thus engage in self-conscious and covering behaviors to hide their sexual orientation. Gay males have been found to report higher rates of substance abuse and dependence (Flentje, Livingston, Roley, & Sorensen, 2015; King et al., 2008), in addition to an increased risk for suicidal ideation and behavior (Ferlatte, Dulai, Hottes, Trussler, & Marchand, 2015; King et al., 2003). Other researchers have illuminated that gay males present with elevated concerns over that of heterosexual males related to eating disorders (Feldman & Meyer, 2007; Herzog, Newman, & Warshaw, 1991; Russell & Keel, 2002; Shallcross, 2010; Siever, 1994), have concerns related to body development and image

(Bozard & Young, 2016; Fussner & Smith, 2015; Siever, 1994), have negative feelings towards one's sexual identity (Feinstein, Goldfried, & Davila, 2012), and exhibit signs of lower self-esteem (Lyons, Pitts, & Grierson, 2013).

Socially experienced inequality of gay males. Related to these specific mental health concerns are the topics of stigma, discrimination, marginalization, and internal homonegativity which can be a challenge to gay males as they seek to build a positive self-identity (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Stigma refers to when one feels judged or labeled due to being viewed negatively because he or she is different in some way (Overton & Medina, 2008). Stigma experienced by gay male individuals could be experienced through a personal lens, as a gay sexual identity could be perceived by some to reflect impaired mental health, or a social lens, as some may see a gay identity as a threat to societal values of morality, sexual behaviors, and religious views (Devine, Plant, & Harrison, 1999). Other illustrations that proliferate the spread of stigma experienced by gay males include the perspective of traditional gender roles being violated (Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006), living in rural locations (Herek, 2002; Levitt & Klassen, 1974; Wills & Crawford, 2000), the lack of knowing an individual who identifies as gay (Gentry, 1987; Wills & Crawford, 2000), or connecting the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) specifically to homosexuality (Marsiglio, 1993; Yoder, Preston, & Forti, 1997).

Related to the idea of stigma are the closely aligned concepts of marginalization and discrimination. Marginalization refers to the labeling of individuals who identify with the non-dominant culture as inferior or lesser in some way (Jackson, 2006).

Whereas this concept is considered to be more attitudinal in nature, discrimination is thought to be the action related to marginalizing an individual. Fredrickson and Knobel (1982) stated that discrimination is action, either subtle or overt, that serves to limit a particular group. Gay males may experience these concepts through inequality in housing opportunities, being fired or dismissed from one's employment, admission issues or exclusionary practices in educational facilities, services received in retail shops or restaurants, and in the provision of health care services in hospitals or counseling agencies (Discrimination, 2016). Perceived marginalization and discrimination are not only harmful through the direct action that was discriminatory, but they can also lead gay males to experience a variety of mental health concerns (Feinstein et al., 2012).

These ideas of stigma, marginalization, and discrimination have been brought together through the idea of minority stress theory (Pearlin, 1999). Minority stress theory is based upon social stress theory which posits that individuals experience conflict when they feel required to adapt to perceived dominant values (Meyer, 1995) and change intrapersonally, interpersonally, or within their surrounding environment (Pearlin, 1999). This can be experienced as individuals come out and potentially shift from being seen as part of the dominant culture to becoming a minority (Matthews & Bieschke, 2001). Examples of such stressors for gay males could be the felt need to conceal a stigmatized identity or experience feelings of discrimination. Outward, concrete examples of such stressors would include hate crimes, acts of homophobia, and other violent activities perpetrated towards gay males due to their sexual identity (Swank, Frost, & Fahs, 2012). These stressors can create daily strain on individuals' daily function, create overall lower

well-being, and create mental health concerns (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress is underpinned through the assumptions that stressors are uniquely experienced by someone of a stigmatized population, continue due to established cultural structures, and are socially-based (Meyer, 2003). Meyer (2003) noted that the experience of minority stress is a likely connection to inequality in presenting mental health concerns of gay male individuals compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Many professionals associate these mental health concerns with marginalization, stigma, and discriminatory experiences; yet, there is also a need to consider strong internalized homonegativity for gay men (Mayfield, 2001). Internalized homonegativity is the negative attitude gay men have toward their own sexual orientation, as well as toward the general idea and practice of homosexuality (Mayfield, 2001). Internalized homonegativity can have a variety of detrimental impacts on gay males' mental health (Rosser, Bockting, Ross, Miner, & Coleman, 2008), such as suicide ideation, symptoms of depression, and anxiety (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). This concept can also negatively affect gay males' attitudes toward same-sex sexual attractions, emotional attractions, behaviors, and intimate relationships (Mayfield, 2001). This information is particularly alarming when one considers that the majority of gay men experience internal homonegativity to some degree during the course of their life (Forstein, 1988). While it can stem from a variety of sources, internalized homonegativity can be fostered as individuals seek to avoid their gay sexual identity due to their Christian religious identity (Halkitis et al., 2009).

Religious and Sexual Identity Intersection

The concept of identity has largely been illuminated through the use of identity models focused on a single aspect of identity such as racial identity (Cross, 1995), ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992), gender identity (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002), or sexual identity (Cass, 1979). Although these models center on identity and its development through developmental phases of a person's life, the more realistic intersection of an individual's multiple identities is not addressed within these models. Other researchers have generated models concerning the integration of multiple forms of identity. S. R. Jones and McEwen (2000) described a conceptual model of multiple identities that showcased how one's identity is influenced by many elements: race, sexual orientation, culture, religion, and social class. The model portrays identity dimensions as intersecting rings around a core, thus illustrating that multiple dimensions of identity can be engaged simultaneously. The individual's environment can also affect which elements of identity may be more salient to an individual at that particular time (S. R. Jones & McEwen, 2000).

The intersection of religious and sexual identities can be illustrated through several aspects, but maybe most saliently for contemporary culture in the fact of marriage equality. Traditionally, the action of marrying another individual has been impacted by religion. This strong union of religion and marriage dates back to at least the eighth century when, due to the increasing power of the Catholic Church, the action of marriage was elevated to a religious sacrament and a priest was required to witness the ceremony

(Ridgwell, n.d.). Yet, this connection between the action of marriage and a religious context has not remained static over time.

The fundamental definition, actions, and person-subjects pertaining to the idea of marriage changed in the United States in June 2015 when marriage equality was granted through the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* by the Supreme Court (Haddad, 2016). The heart of this movement was the legal right for two individuals to marry because of a love for each other. Other peripheral factors, such as safety of children, hospital visitation, Social Security benefits, health insurance, home protection, nursing home care, and pension plans, all became parts of the marriage equality conversation (Human Rights Campaign, [HRC], 2016). Tension was felt over this legal movement as individuals from various religious heritages hold the conservative view that marriage should be reserved as a relationship between one man and one woman (HRC, 2016). While not all religious organizations recognize or perform a wedding for a same-sex couple, the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ allow their individual churches to set policy on this matter and the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Metropolitan Community Church openly allow same-sex weddings (HRC, 2016).

Despite recent legal changes, there is a paucity of research on the intersection of a gay sexual identity and a Christian religious identity (Halkitis et al., 2009). Halkitis and colleagues (2009) noted that this lack of research stems in part from the "legacy of silence" which has prevailed in Christianity for much of its history regarding sexuality in general, but especially regarding homosexuality (p. 251). Consequently, very little is known regarding religion, particularly Christianity, within the lives of gay males in the

counseling field. Only within the past 30 years have counselor researchers actively

recognized that men who identify as gay continue to participate in religious communities

(Barret & Barzan, 1996, 1998; Ritter & O'Neill, 1989). Despite the need for more

research regarding the intersection of these two forms of identity, individuals generally

receive either a negative or a positive response when disclosing their identities as both

gay and Christian.

Negative responses toward identity integration. Christianity has often been a

source of hostility and conflict for many gay men who have sought to integrate their

sexual identity with their identity as a Christian (Halkitis et al., 2009). Such conflict is

often seen as originating from a conservative interpretation of six biblical passages

(Genesis 19:1–28; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; I Corinthians 6:9; I Timothy

1:10) in which homosexuality is viewed as sinful (Rodriguez, 2009). Levy (2011)

revealed that participants reported the first response they often receive from others after

their disclosure as identifying as gay was, "you're going to hell" (p. 220). Other

responses included "hate the sin and love the sinner," a need to address the "cause" of

their sexual identity, suggestions for faith-based counseling or consultation with "ex-gay"

individuals, and silence (Levy, 2011). Still other researchers have reported gay male

Christians being labeled "unnatural," a "perversion," an "abomination in the eyes of

God" (Rodriguez, 2009, p. 9), or as "deviant" and "sinful" (Halkitis et al., 2009, p. 251).

Responses like those listed above only serve to bolster the dichotomy many gay Christian

males feel regarding their sexual and religious identities.

The term "religious/spiritual abuse" is used by Wood and Conley (2014) to identify a specific type of negative response received by some gay Christians (p. 96). Wood and Conley (2014) defined this term as the mistreatment of an individual in need of religious empowerment. The researchers recognized this abuse through actions or beliefs such as a religious leader's public denouncement of gay individuals, spiritual bullying, the need for gay individuals to "perform" their religion in a certain prescribed way, experiencing neglect from religious leaders or members due to being gay, and/or experiencing physical or psychological ramifications due to being incongruent with themselves (Wood & Conley, 2014). Similarly, Page et al. (2013) conducted research on gay-related stressors of 170 LGB individuals between the ages of 14–24 years old. Reported stressors of this sample population included negative reactions from family, visibility of one's own sexual orientation to family and friends, visibility of one's own sexual orientation while at school/public, and victimization (Page et al., 2013). Clearly, a substantial list of possible negative outcomes and implications is highlighted in the research in response to actively trying to integrate a gay and Christian identity.

Although there are too many specific Christian denominations that support these conservative Christian views on homosexuality to mention in this document, some are provided here as points of reference. Both the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches, two of the larger denominations within the umbrella of Baptist churches, have released statements that homosexuality is not a "valid alternative lifestyle" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2017, n.p.) or is "incompatible with Biblical teaching" (American Baptist Churches USA, 2017, n.p.), respectively. The Christian

Reformed Church in North America maintains that homosexuality is a "condition of disordered sexuality that reflects the brokenness of our sinful world" and only individuals who have this sexual identity who remain celibate and are repentant are allowed to participate in church functions (Christian Reformed Church, 2017, n.p.). The United Methodist Church, despite some variation in some congregations, maintains that "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" (United Methodist Church, 2017, n.p.). The Assemblies of God, like other Pentecostal denominations, have also adopted a conservative view of homosexuality, stating that "there is absolutely no affirmation of homosexual activity, same-sex marriage, or changes in sexual identity found anywhere in Scripture" (The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2014, p. 1). A final representation of this attitude can be seen in the formal position of the Catholic church which holds that, although having a gay sexual identity is not a sin, "homosexual acts" are ones of "grave depravity" and "are intrinsically disordered" (Catholic Answers, 2017, n.p.).

Positive responses towards identity integration. Despite the research literature referenced above, not all responses experienced by males when attempting to integrate their sexual and religious identities are negative. Halkitis and colleagues (2009) noted that instead of adjectives like "sinful" to describe the identity of a gay Christian male, some religious communities and individuals may describe these individuals as "normal" and choose to adopt an affirming and accepting position towards gay males (p. 251). These individuals might expound on or cite biblical references, such as the unconditional

love of God for all individuals, instead of using biblical scriptures in a punitive way towards gay male Christians (Rodriguez, 2009).

Specific Christian denominations have adopted an accepting and affirming stance toward gay Christian males. For instance, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America welcomes individuals who identify with various sexual identities as members and voted 559–451in 2009 to repeal a previously placed restriction on gay clergy remaining celibate (Strickler, 2009). The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) likewise welcomes LGBTQ+ individuals as members and during their General Assembly 2013 meeting resolved to allow them to be clergy (Potts, 2013). Similar denominational movements to welcome and affirm LGBT individuals as members and ordain them as clergy have taken place within the Episcopal Church of America, Unitarian Society, and the United Church of Christ (APA, 2009).

Other specific Christian organizations are making strides to help individuals integrate their sexual and religious identities. *Integrity* is an Episcopal organization that works with gay males, along with other sexual minorities, to promote education on religious and sexual issues, including debunking common misconceptions such as the fact that, although the Bible has been used to condemn homosexuality, Jesus himself is never reported in the Bible to address the topic (Integrity USA, 2011). Similarly, *Dignity* is a Catholic organization that advocates and educates through a social justice lens for individuals who are sexual minorities, encourages gay males to express their sexuality openly, insists they are created by God without need of change, and promotes their equality as members of the body of Christ (Dignity USA, n.d.). Members of this

organization report from a contextual perspective that the Bible does not address the situation of an adult, loving, same-sex relationship as is understood in a contemporary context (Helminiak, n.d.).

Potential outcomes of identity integration. The reactions that gay Christian males receive when striving to integrate their sexual identity and their religious identity can produce a variety of outcomes (Wood & Conley, 2014). Gay males who find themselves in a Christian community that is accepting and affirming of their sexual identity may experience very little to no conflict concerning the integration of their religious and sexual identities (Halkitis et al., 2009). If one is not currently in such a religious institution or organization, finding one or switching to a Christian community that is welcoming and affirming of gay men can be helpful in the integration process (Gross, 2008; Wood & Conley, 2014). To achieve integration of these two identities, individuals may have to redefine for themselves what it means to be a gay male or what it means to be a Christian from previously held definitions in order to achieve congruency (Wood & Conley, 2014). Wagner, Serafini, Rabkin, Remien, and Williams (1994) noted that this outcome of identity integration is the most favorable for an individual, as it is associated with an increased sense of psychological well-being and an increased acceptance towards one's sexual identity. Yet, not every gay male can be in a Christian community that is accepting and affirming of his sexual identity.

Some individuals who are in a religious setting where their sexual identity is not welcomed may choose to reject either their Christian religious identity or reject their gay sexual identity (Gross, 2008; Wagner et al., 1994; Wood & Conley, 2014). If individuals

choose to accept only their religious identity, they could be delaying the potential development of an authentic sexual identity, integrating this identity with their Christian identity, and may be seeking to merely "pass as heterosexual" (Wagner et al., 1994, p. 92).

Research regarding the abandonment of sexual identity often includes reparative therapy despite its danger to clients (Wood & Conley, 2014) and the practice being challenged by professional organizations, such as the ACA (Norton, 2014). Other individuals may choose to accept only their sexual identity and reject their Christian identity. Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, and Quick (2010) found that approximately 10% of individuals reported losing their religious identity when they sought to integrate it with their sexual identity. In a similar study, Wagner and colleagues (1994) found that 69% of gay men reported rejecting their religious identity when they tried to integrate this aspect of self with their sexual identity. Whether the identity of religion or identity of sexuality is abandoned for the sake of the other, either can lead individuals to experience negative mental health consequences (Wagner et al., 1994) and a sense of loss (Wood & Conley, 2014).

Other individuals may choose not to integrate or reject these forms of identity, but to compartmentalize either their Christianity or gay identity. Compartmentalization involves no reconciliation between an individual's sexual identity and religious identity, thus the individual chooses to live both identities separately (Halkitis et al., 2009; Wood & Conley, 2014). Individuals retain both their religious identity as a Christian and their sexual identity as a gay male through compartmentalization without the resolution of

either integration or rejection of sexual identity. As both identities are maintained separately, management of these dual identities can become difficult and lead to negative outcomes. Sherry and colleagues (2010) noted that compartmentalization of these identities can lead to increased emotional and psychological distress.

Individuals may experience cognitive dissonance as they seek to manage these two seemingly complex and conflicting identities. According to Festinger (1957), cognitive dissonance occurs when tension is experienced by an individual between two ostensibly inconsistent thoughts or beliefs. For example, a Christian male may experience a physical attraction to another male, yet hold the religious belief that this attraction is sinful. Dissonance occurs from this interaction between action and beliefs, prompting the individual to seek a decrease in this dissonance. A decrease in dissonance can be experienced as individuals either eliminate or change one of the two elements that caused the initial dissonance (Rodriguez, 2009). In this example, the individual might decrease the dissonance through integrating his two identities, rejecting one identity or the other, or seeking a temporary solution though compartmentalization. E. E. Jones (1985) stated that cognitive dissonance becomes more difficult and relevant for individuals if it is rooted in their self-concept. In one such study, Thumma (1991) found that men decreased dissonance between their sexual and religious identities through membership in an evangelical group called *Good News*. This group sought to help members by having them "renegotiate the boundaries and definition of their religious identity to include a positive valuation of their homosexuality" (Thumma, 1991, p. 333). Thus, finding a welcoming Christian community that accepts both one's sexual identity

and religious identity is a possible outcome to assist gay Christian males with identity integration.

Professional Features of Identity Intersection Within Counseling

The intersection of an individual's sexual identification as a gay male and religious identification as Christian can be an important point in the counseling profession. Specifically, this topic can be relevant in: counseling organizations, counselor education, counseling practice, counselor supervision, and ethical considerations.

Counseling organizational features. Just as individuals may view both religious and sexual elements as important to their overall sense of identity, so too are both elements of identity of importance within the overall counseling profession. ACA, founded in 1952, is the largest counseling organization in the world committed to growing and enhancing the profession (ACA, n.d.a.). ACA, an organization in itself, also acts as a large umbrella organization for 20 division organizations designed to enrich professional identity around specific areas of practice, to bolster the overall strength of the professional, and to meet the counseling community's diverse needs (ACA, n.d.b.). Part of the greater importance within the larger field of counseling regarding the topics of religion and sexuality can be seen through two of these division organizations: ASERVIC and ALGBTIC.

ASERVIC. ASERVIC was created in 1951 by the Archdiocese of New York to bolster the expansion and support for counseling within the parochial schools (Miranti, 2017). During this early period of its history it was known as the National Catholic

Guidance Conference (NCGC; G. Miller, 1999). As time passed, the strong Catholic emphasis of this division seemed restrictive to its growing diverse membership body, which led the organization to adopt the current ASERVIC name in 1993 and transition to encompass multiple beliefs and religions (Cashwell & Young, 2011; G. Miller, 1999; Miranti, 2017). Its current vision is to create "an environment that empowers and enables the expression, exploration, development, and research of evolving spiritual, ethical and religious values as they relate to the person, to society, and to the profession of counseling and human development" (ASERVIC, 2003, p. 1). Presently, ASERVIC as a whole is composed of the national division directly under ACA, 15 individual state divisions, and boasts over 4,000 members, including individuals from diverse religions and beliefs (Miranti, 2017).

ASERVIC moved beyond merely being a division of ACA in 1995 when 13 individuals connected to ASERVIC gathered at the Summit on Spirituality and developed 10 competencies to inform the way spirituality could be infused within counseling practice and counselor education (G. Miller, 1999). In 2008 and 2009, a select group of ASERVIC members held a series of meetings titled the Second Summit on Spirituality which ultimately amended these competences and generated 14 competencies as the revised Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). These competencies were introduced under six categories: Culture and Worldview, Counselor Self-Awareness, Human and Spiritual Development, Communication, Assessment, and Diagnosis and Treatment (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). Together, these competencies are endorsed by the ACA, are consistent with the ACA

Code of Ethics, and are meant to be complementary to those ethical standards for the profession of counseling (ASERVIC, n.d.).

ALGBTIC. The viability for creating an organization within ACA that was dedicated to the concerns of sexual minority individuals began in 1975 when over 60 interested individuals gathered to discuss this topic at an ACA convention (Rhode, 2010). Throughout the rest of the 1970s and 1980s, individuals who supported the work of this group spent time educating other counselors and sought to increase the awareness of counseling considerations for sexual minority individuals (Rhode, 2010). Rhode noted that eventually this group found the support it needed within ACA and became an official division in 1997. As this group has evolved, so too has its name. In 2007 the group changed from the Association of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling (AGLBIC) to what is currently known as ALGBTIC (ALGBTIC, 2014a). This organization has expanded to include not only the main divisional organization under ACA, but 16 individual state divisions (ALGBTIC, 2014c). The educational focus of this division has remained a constant, as the mission statement includes promoting awareness of LGBT concerns among professional counselors, developing counselor-related initiatives that further the LGBT community, publishing research and other material related to the LGBT community, improving services offered to the LGBT community, and advancing the sense of equality offered to all LGBT individuals (ALGBTIC, 2014b).

ALGBTIC, similarly to ASERVIC, also has a set of professional competencies. The aim of these competencies was to "provide a framework for creating safe, supportive, and caring relationships with LGBQIQA individuals, groups, and

communities that foster self-acceptance and personal, social, emotional, and relational development" (Harper et al., 2013). The 120 competencies are arranged in eight sections that mirror the 2009 CACREP core areas: Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Helping Relationships, Group Work, Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice, Career and Lifestyle Development, Assessment, and Research and Program Evaluation (Harper et al., 2013). Together, these competencies provide professional counselors with structure from which they can work effectively with this population of individuals.

The ASERVIC and ALGBTIC competencies were developed as two separate documents; yet one can see that there is overlap in these competencies. Some specific competencies recognize the union of an individual's religious identity and sexual identity. ALGBTIC competencies II.A.10., IIA.17., and II.B.8. specify that professional counselors should recognize and understand the importance of religion within the life of LGBTQ individuals (Harper et al., 2013). These competencies communicate the need for counselors to "recognize the influence of other contextual factors" and "understand the interesting identities of LGBTQQ individuals" (Harper et al., 2013, pp. 9-10). These competencies clearly indicate that counselors should seek to work with the complete identity of individuals, which includes both their sexual and religious identity.

Counselor education features. Religious and sexual identities are not only salient for organizations such as the ACA, ASERVIC, and ALGBTIC within the counseling profession, but also find importance when one considers counselor education. CACREP is the accrediting body for master's and doctoral counseling programs, sets

requirements for institutions that wish to become CACREP-accredited, and has

developed a set of minimal standards to which counselor education programs must

conform in order to maintain accreditation status (CACREP, n.d.). The emphasis

CACREP places on the areas of sexuality and religion are clear within their context of

multiculturalism. The CACREP glossary of terms defined the term *Multicultural* as a

"term denoting the diversity of racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage; socioeconomic status;

age; gender; sexual orientation; and religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as physical,

emotional, and mental abilities" (CACREP, 2016, p. 42). Therefore, as this term is

utilized within CACREP standards, attention can be given to the concepts of religion and

sexuality as they are part of this multicultural idea. CACREP standards direct entry-level

and doctoral-level programs to incorporate current knowledge about religion and

sexuality within the context of counseling practice (CACREP, 2016). These ideas are

reaffirmed through the core area labeled *Social and Cultural Diversity* and eight

individual multicultural components identified in this common core area (CACREP,

2016). This multicultural (i.e., religion and sexuality) component is also explicitly

mentioned through the roles of leadership and advocacy with the *Doctoral Professional*

Identity section (CACREP, 2016) where doctoral programs are required to address these

topics within their curriculum. Therefore, counselor educators are mandated to prepare

novice counselors to be multiculturally competent (Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, &

Bonham, 2011).

Despite these standards, Kelly (1994) reported that counselor educators gave

mixed treatment to the area of religion, as evidenced by only 25% of 341 accredited and

non-accredited counseling programs reported including the topic of religion in their program. In a study conducted by Pate and High (1995), 60% of CACREP-accredited programs reported some attention given to discussing a client's religious beliefs and practices. A possible rationale for this lack of inclusion of religious discussion could be that counselor educators may not be proficient in this topical area (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006), or have a hesitancy about incorporating religious matters in counseling (Crook-Lyon et al., 2012). J. S. Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, and Belaire (2002) stated that only 46% of CACREP-liaisons reported being prepared to teach religious material. Furthermore, they found that respondents rated other faculty members' competency to address the area of religion within teaching as less than their own, rating others 2.93 on a 5-point Likert scale compared to 3.3 for themselves (J. S. Young et al., 2002). In light of this data, Magaldi-Dopman (2014, p. 195) stated that the topic of religion is approached "in a hazy, haphazard, or post hoc fashion" within counselor training programs. Likewise, J. S. Young et al. (2002) pointed to a strong need for further training and direction to address this topic within counselor education.

Counselor educators have an opportunity to impact counselors-in-training through teaching about religious topics and sexuality through a professional counseling lens (Lenes, Swank, & Nash, 2015). Valuable education can take place through counseling students having a dedicated learning space and time to discuss topics such as counselor-client sexual boundaries, sexuality within the lifespan, issues or concerns regarding sexual orientation, and HIV/AIDS awareness (Gray, House, & Eicken, 1996). Counselor educators can facilitate the learning of this important information while

providing an atmosphere that is comfortable for students to be vulnerable about such sensitive material (Lenes, Swank, & Nash, 2015). Despite the considerable value that can be seen through the education of sexual topics to novice counselors, Kirkpatrick (1980) reviewed 40 randomly selected counseling graduate programs and found none of them offered a distinctive course in sexuality. Gray, Cummins, Johnson, and Mason (1988) found that the majority of counselor education programs neither required, nor provided, education within the area of sexuality to counselors-in-training. These same researchers posited that counselor educators can chose to either avoid, postpone, provide a light overview, or they "can face them head on addressing the depth and complexity of these issues as they relate to their students and clients" (Gray et al., 1988, p. 317). This latter option is most beneficial for counseling students, as several researchers noted the need to include sexual education into the counselor curriculum (Gray & House, 1991; Harding, Gray, & Neal, 1993; Vasquez, 1988).

Counseling practice features. These two areas of interest have a history not only in the organizational and educational aspects of the counseling profession, but also within professional counseling practice. Counseling services offered to gay males in the early part of the 1900s were often negatively influenced by the culture-wide oppression, harassment, and legal persecution experienced by these individuals (Ratts & Pedersen, 2014). It was not until the published work of Alfred Kinsey in the late 1940s that negative perceptions of gay individuals were critically challenged in mental health as Kinsey sought to frame the gay identity of an individual as a normal variant within culture (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Yet, the work of Kinsey and others did not

persuade some clinicians in their attempts to reorient, repair, and convert the sexual

identity of gay males through counseling practices. As a byproduct of the belief that

homosexuality was pathological, clinicians sought to treat individuals through social

embarrassment, electric shock therapy, chemical aversion, and other harmful techniques

(Haldeman, 1994; T. F. Murphy, 1992). These efforts to treat gay individuals were

bolstered through the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental*

Disorders (DSM) that included homosexuality as an abnormality and listed it as a

"sociopathic personality disturbance" (APA, 1952, p. 38).

Not all practicing mental health counselors throughout history have viewed a gay

identity as pathological or sought to treat it as a disorder. Homosexuality was removed

from an updated edition of the *DSM* in 1972 (Krajeski, 1996). After this, organizations

including the American Counseling Association, American Association for Marriage and

Family Therapy, American School Counselor Association, American Psychiatric

Association, American Psychoanalytic Association, American Psychological Association,

National Association of Social Workers, American College of Physicians, and American

Medical Association successively opposed the use of any type of conversion therapy

(HRC, 2017). Instead of this abusive form of treatment, many counselors now seek to

utilize gay affirmative therapy (Johnson, 2012). Bieschke, Perez, and DeBord (2007)

defined this form of care as

The integration of knowledge and awareness by the therapist of the unique

development and cultural aspect of LGBT individuals, the therapist's own

self-knowledge, and the translation of this knowledge and awareness into

effective and helpful therapy skills at all stages of the therapeutic process. (p. 408)

A less complicated view of affirmative therapy is offered by Harrison (2010) who

concluded that affirmative therapy involved adopting a non-pathological stance towards

homosexuality and having appropriate knowledge for working with gay individuals.

Other authors viewed this professional work as less of a treatment or theory, and more as

an affirming approach towards working with gay clients (Johnson, 2012). Despite these

advances, some professionals still lack knowledge in skill in working with gay male

clients (Bettinger, 2004).

Professional counseling practice features are also impacted by the area of religion.

Historically, Sigmund Freud hypothesized that religious beliefs might be negative forces

within human development (Fukuyama & Sevig, 2002). However, Freud also thought

religion "allays our fear of the dangers of life; the establishment of a moral world-order

ensures the fulfillment of the demands of justice. . . . and . . . provides the local and

temporal framework in which these wish-fulfillments shall take place" (Freud &

Strachey, 1961, p. 31). Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and other humanistic theorists believed

that there was a place for religious beliefs within the life of the client and within the work

conducted by counselors (Schmidt, 2006). Some authors (Hays, 1996; Schmidt, 2006)

noted the essential nature of these religious beliefs within the identity and life of clients.

Schmidt (2006) wrote that it is not a question whether a counselor should include these

religious beliefs within counseling, but rather how to include them in ways that are both

appropriate and beneficial for a client.

The inclusion of religion in the process of counseling can be witnessed in a variety of areas. Existential subjects such as life, death, and terminal illness are all topics that could arise in counseling that would have a very direct connection to religion (Fukuyama et al., 2008). Fukuyama and colleagues noted how understanding religious beliefs can better inform counselors working with some clients throughout the assessment and counseling process. Interventions specific to the area of religion, such as a family religion genogram, could be utilized by the counselor if appropriate and beneficial (Frame, 2000). As counselors offer these services, they should be continually self-aware when working in this area (Frame, 2003) and monitor their own work for concerns of transference or placing their own religious beliefs onto clients (Fukuyama et al., 2008).

Counselor supervision features. Supervision is another area of professional counseling practice where these topics should be approached. Many counselors are required to provide supervision to counselors-in-training or junior members of the profession (Arcuri, 2016; Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Some clients may present identity concerns to counselors (Eriksen et al., 2002; Schuck & Liddle, 2001) that may be addressed in supervision. Supervisors may also have to address a supervisee's own homophobia or religious intolerance (Balkin et al., 2009). For these reasons, among others, incorporating multicultural components within supervision is encouraged (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Bernard and Goodyear (2014) encouraged supervisors to attend to four dimensions of overlapping multicultural consideration: (a) social/political; (b) intrapersonal: identity; (c) interpersonal: biases or prejudice; and (d) interpersonal: cultural identity and behavior. Through this conceptualization of supervision, elements

such as sexual identity and religious identity from the standpoint of the supervisor, the supervisee, and the client can be professionally discussed (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014).

Counseling ethical features. The counseling profession's ethical codes have direct implications for working with individuals who identify as Christians and gay males. Professional counselors have an obligation to consider, critically and ethically, how counseling services are offered to clients. The *ACA Code of Ethics* nondiscrimination section makes clear that sexual orientation and religion are not points of judgment or reasons to deny services to clients, as standard C.5. stated:

> Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or
> current clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants based on
> age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, gender, gender
> identity, sexual orientation, marital/ partnership status, language preference,
> socioeconomic status, immigration status, or any basis proscribed by law. (ACA,
> 2014, p. 9)

According to standard E.5.c., counselors are expected to go beyond this ethical code of nondiscrimination and actively address biases that they or others may harbor that support the "historical and social prejudices in the misdiagnosis and pathologizing of certain individuals and groups" (ACA, 2014, p. 11). At the same time, counselors are expected to respect the diversity of the individuals they work with and not impose their own "values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" onto others according to standard A.4.b. (ACA, 2014, p. 5). Compliance towards these standards helps a counselor adhere to standard A.4.a, which states, "Counselors act to avoid harming their clients . . . and to minimize or

to remedy unavoidable or unanticipated harm" (ACA, 2014, p. 4). In light of the *ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014), there seems to be a clear ethical precedent in working with clients who are developing or have developed either a gay sexual identity or a Christian religious identity.

Although the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014) is quite clear about the duties and responsibilities of counselors, the reality is that some practicing professional counselors may hold certain beliefs that are not affirming of their clients' identity. For instance, through laws enacted in 2016, counselors in the states of Arkansas, Tennessee (DeMillo, 2016), and Mississippi (Green, 2016) can refer or refuse to see individuals who self-identify as gay based upon the counselors' own beliefs about gay individuals. These instances present the disturbing reality that there are professional counselors who hold not only beliefs that are not affirming of gay individuals, but choose to act upon them in a profession environment. Sherry and colleagues (2010) encouraged professional counselors to engage in self-reflection, educate themselves on multiple religious beliefs, and examine their own beliefs concerning sexual identity. These actions would best equip counselors to provide services to clients who identify as both religious and gay. If counselors do not pursue these actions they can risk acting in a professionally unethical manner (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000).

Summary of Chapter One

Chapter 1 outlined this dissertation study and the importance of the research addressed. An introduction to the dissertation study was provided that included an autobiographical account, presented the purpose and rationale of the study, and was

followed by implications for various areas of the counseling profession. The research problem was then introduced. Definitions of terms relevant to the research question were included. Subsequently, a review of noteworthy literature followed this introduction and discussed the significance of this dissertation topic. This section contained literature pertaining to the religious identity of Christianity, gay male identity, the intersection of both religious and sexual identities, and concluded with a discussion on professional counseling features related to this identity intersection. The following chapter of this dissertation contains the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 of this dissertation begins with a review of the purpose, rationale, and research question of the study. Next, the epistemological stance, that is, the orientation from which this dissertation is grounded, is discussed. The methodological approach of narrative analysis and the rationale for this specific approach comes next. After the discussion of the research approach, specific procedural methods that were developed and executed are reviewed. These procedures include participant sampling, inclusion criteria, data collection, and data analysis. Inclusion of a peer reviewer, trustworthiness, delimitations, and ethical considerations are discussed at the end of this chapter. A chapter summary is provided to conclude the chapter.

Purpose of the Study and Rationale

As the majority of Americans place at least some importance on religion, particularly Christianity (Pew Research, 2015b), counselors should be competent to address this topic with clients (Fukuyama et al., 2008). Christianity provides a belief system for some clients (Fellows, 1996), assists in the creation of some client values around important life considerations (Garcia et al., 2008), informs community and family events in which clients may be involved (Flannelly & Inouye, 2001), and helps increase overall physical health (Chiswick & Mirtcheva, 2013; Cotton et al., 2006). Religion is also something some clients may turn to in a time of crisis (Becker, 2009). Furthermore, the topic of religion can be discussed within the context of counselor education. Shaw, Bayne, and Lorelle (2012) mentioned that the exploration of religious identity should be a

component of any counselor education program. This view aligns with CACREP Standards (2016), such as 2.F.2.a.-h., 2.F.3.i., 2.F.5.d., 2.F.6.g., and 2.F.7.m. that require counseling programs to teach students to understand and respect clients' cultural diversity. These standards directly or indirectly mention multicultural components in counselor education. CACREP (2016) has included religious beliefs within their definition of "multicultural" (p. 42). Despite these convictions and standards, Dobmeier and Reiner (2012) stated that, overall, students in counselor education programs were not prepared to discuss a client's religious beliefs. These same researchers indicated that counselors-in-training were unaware of ASERVIC competencies that could help them engage clients in discussions related to religion and spirituality (Dobmeier & Reiner, 2012). Gingrich and Worthington (2007) found that counselor trainees had the perception that supervision was only for secular and clinical issues, not a forum in which to discuss a client's religion. As it is clear that religion has a place within the life of clients, there is room for improvement on the matter of discussing religion in counselor education programs.

Another aspect of identity is sexual identity, which can be viewed from a counseling perspective through various sexual identity development models (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). Counselors should take this aspect of a client's identity into consideration as gay males can present with a variety of concerns, such as mental health, stigma, discrimination, and marginalization (McGarrity, 2014). Moreover, the told storied-experiences from gay males might include concerns that derive from the intersection of their religious and sexual identities.

This dissertation study focused on the narratives of gay males who self-reported a religious identity as a Christian. Although some researchers have focused on conducting studies on religious topics (e.g., Bishop et al., 2003; Chiswick & Mirtcheva, 2013; Stanard & Painter, 2004) and others on various aspects of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., Beane, 1981; Fukuyama et al., 2008; Marsiglio, 1993), there remains a paucity of research that has examined the intersection of religious identity and sexual identity. Of the limited studies conducted on this topic, most are either conceptual in nature (e.g., Krondorfer, 2007; Rosik & Popper, 2014; Wood & Conley, 2014) or based in quantitative research approaches (e.g., Meladze & Brown, 2015; Page et al., 2013; Reese et al., 2014; N. Wright, 2014).

This dissertation study was first conceived during my doctoral program coursework and then explored in a smaller format through a pilot study as a class requirement. The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to understand the narratives of gay male individuals who identify as Christian. The increased understanding from this study assists in further research, education, supervision, practice, and service opportunities within the field of professional counseling related to gay Christian males. Therefore, this dissertation's research question was, "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?"

Epistemological Stance

Crotty (1998) described epistemology as the study of knowledge in terms of the nature, conditions, and possibilities of knowledge. The knowledge that was gained through this dissertation study was gained through a constructivist epistemological lens.

Merriam (2002) defined a constructivist epistemology as an interpretive stance on

research that assumes multiple realties. In support of this epistemological lens, Jonassen

(1991) viewed learning and knowledge as an "internally mediated reality" where one's

understanding is based on her or his own experiences and personal beliefs (p. 8). The

constructivist stance on the acquisition of knowledge is counter to objectivism in which

knowledge is viewed as being gained through external realities and the assumption that

any truth that exists does so independently of an individual's perception of it (Jonassen,

1991).

  While easily differentiated from objectivism, constructivism should also be

distinguished from social constructionism. Social constructionism is the way that people

or groups of people socially construct experiences and then make meaning of those

experiences (Walker, 2015). Knowledge is constructed collaboratively within a group

setting through social construction (Crotty, 1998). R. A. Young and Collin (2004)

distinguished the two concepts by explaining social constructionism as a "social process

and interaction" amongst people in the creation of knowledge, where constructivism

focuses on "the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes"

(p. 375). Attention to individuals' cognitions empowers people to construct their own

ways of understanding experiences (Schwandt, 2001). Part of this creation of

understanding can be through schemata that include the narratives individuals use to

constitute their understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

  A constructivist epistemology allowed for the examination of narratives as told by

the individual, rather than a narrative that was socially constructed between researcher

and participant, thus ensuring the gained narrative was solely from the participant. A constructivist epistemology was intentionally utilized throughout the course of this dissertation study in a variety of specific ways. Through this narrative analysis, salient stories were collected from participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I viewed these collected narratives through a constructivist epistemology as participants placed their own truth and significance in the narratives. From this epistemological perspective, the stories that were sought were not ones that might have occurred factually in exact detail, but rather ones that were true to the participants (Riessman, 1993). Riessman noted this "complicated relationship between narrative, time, and memory for we revise and edit the remembered past to square with our identities in the present" (p. 8). Through utilizing this epistemology, desired outcomes and implications of the study were derived from the participants' narratives rather than from other factors associated with different epistemological stances.

Methodology

I utilized narrative analysis, through a constructivist framework, as the methodology to answer the research question: "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?" The following section contains: (a) a discussion of narrative analysis contrasted to three other qualitative approaches; (b) data collection procedures; (c) data analysis procedures; (d) elements of trustworthiness; (e) delimitations; and (f) ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research

There is an increasing use and recognition of qualitative research within the body of counseling research literature (Duffy & Chenail, 2008). Qualitative research, although seen by some as somewhat difficult to define, is generally thought of as research where outcomes are not arrived at by mathematical or statistical measures (Yilmaz, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further clarified qualitative research as:

> A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. (p. 3)

Hull (1997) noted that the aim of qualitative researchers is to understand how people construct meaning and report on that meaning. Methodologies centered on meaning-making align with constructivist epistemology. Qualitative researchers are, therefore, interested in exploring individuals' sense of meaning, knowing research participants' ideas or experiences in a more in-depth way than quantitative methods allow, and representing the participants' world through a researcher's interpretation (Hull, 1997). For these reasons, Houser (2009) noted the general goal of qualitative researchers is to gain an in-depth view of a researched phenomenon through close interactions with people. There are some common elements within qualitative research approaches. For instance, Merriam (2002) noted qualitative researchers typically utilize a small number of individuals, situations, and/or locations within a study. This fact is due

to the richly descriptive detail qualitative researchers seek. Another commonality is qualitative researchers view themselves as instruments that observe, participate, and interview individuals (Hull, 1997).

Three qualitative approaches were considered before narrative analysis was decided upon for this study: grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study. A researcher using a grounded theory methodology would endeavor to discover or generate a theory related to a particular phenomenon by using collected data that were systematically obtained through social research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, as opposed to other qualitative approaches that may begin with a framework in mind, a grounded theorist would seek to use data to build a framework or an initial theory. Merriam (2002) noted that the data of a grounded theory study are collected through interviews and observations, but other data sources could include documentary material or works of literature. Other key elements of grounded theory include the collection of data guided by theoretical sampling and analysis through the constant comparative method. Finally, a culminating theory is built from the collected data through the identification of the core category (Merriam, 2002).

A different approach considered for this dissertation was phenomenology, where researchers are interested in individuals' subjective experiences and understandings of the essence or structure of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). The phenomenological researcher is not focused on individual participants or the phenomenon itself. Rather, the goal is for the researcher to gain the experience of the interaction between the two. Merriam (2002) noted that researchers seek to obtain this data primarily through

interviewing a small sample of individuals, but first through self-reflection of the phenomenon in order to gain awareness of their own possible biases on the subject. The researcher's experiences are bracketed, or offset from that of the participants, according to the method of phenomenology, in order to understand that those are the experiences or thoughts of the researcher (Creswell, 2005). Other important considerations within some delineations of phenomenology are phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation (Merriam, 2002).

The final qualitative approach considered for this dissertation study was case study. A case study is an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Stake (2000) noted that a case study is more of a choice of what is going to be researched or studied, as opposed to a qualitative research methodology. A case study involves a bounded system (Smith, 1978), meaning a researcher chooses a single element that has boundaries on which to conduct research. An example of such bounded systems that could be considered for case study research may be the study of a single person or a single program. A researcher seeking to conduct a case study would first purposefully select the case to be studied depending upon what is to be learned, decide who is to be interviewed through this study, proceed to collect and analyze data, write up results, and finally disseminate information (Merriam, 2002). Through this process, human behavior and social phenomena can be better understood and studied in a more in-depth fashion (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

None of the three aforementioned methodologies were appropriate for this dissertation study. Researchers utilizing grounded theory are limited to building a

substantive theory from the collected data obtained through research (Merriam, 2002).

The goal of this dissertation study was not to build a theory from collected data, but

rather to examine the narratives of individuals (Creswell, 2007). A phenomenological

approach would also limit this dissertation. Phenomenological researchers focus neither

on the individual participants nor their worlds, but rather meaning individuals derive

from their experience (Merriam, 2002). Meaning in this dissertation study was derived

not from the experiential essence, but rather through individuals' narratives (Creswell,

2007). Creswell emphasized that individuals' narratives are the true focus of narrative

research, rather than understanding the exact experiences in themselves. Finally,

choosing a case study approach would also have limited this study as it relies on a single,

bounded case for data (Yin, 1994; Zainal, 2007). This dissertation study sought to

closely examine the intersection of an individual's sexual identity and religious identity

through multiple participants, which goes beyond one bound system as a source of data.

In order to answer the research questions and achieve the purpose of this dissertation, the

researcher utilized narrative analysis.

Narrative Analysis

"Narrative" is derived from the verb meaning "to narrate" or "to tell (as a story) in

detail" (Ehrlich, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins, 1980, p. 442.) Czarniawska (2004)

defined narrative as text that is either spoken or written and gives a chronological account

of an action or a series of actions. Narratives or stories are the principal way individuals

relay their lived experiences to others (Duffy, 2012) and are generally a natural part of

life (Creswell, 2005). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) wrote that individuals' lives are

shaped by the narratives they experience and tell. Therefore, it seemed logical to study

the storied-experiences of gay males who identify as Christian through narrative analysis.

A narrative analysis is a type of qualitative methodology (Duffy, 2012) in which

the researcher collects and analyzes participants' narratives or detailed stories (Connelly

& Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Clandinin (2013) wrote that

narrative analysis is "an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of

honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p.

17). Due to this definition by a leading figure in this field of research, narrative analysis

and narrative approach are used interchangeably within this document. The collected

narratives are individuals' personal storied experiences (Duffy, 2012) and often

reorganized by the researcher chronologically with a beginning, a middle, and an end

(Merriam, 2002).

There is a set of common characteristics related to narrative analysis research.

First, narrative analysis researchers focus on the storied-experiences of one or more

individuals (Creswell, 2005). Although the story the participant may choose to disclose

occurred in the past, a second feature of this methodology is that narrative analysis

researchers seek to understand the chronology of events that appear relevant to the story

(Creswell, 2005). This understanding comes from clearly noting the past, present, and

future sequence of events (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). A third common element is that

stories are gained from first-person accounts where research participants directly tell their

stories to the researcher (Creswell, 2005). Fourth, the researcher seeks to take the told

narrative and, after transcription, re-story it so the final version of the story exists in a

coherent chronological order in which connections across important details are accurate (Creswell, 2005). This characteristic is important, for, as Creswell (2005) noted, many participants tell a story in a way that is not in chronological sequence, which would be important for later analysis. Fifth, the narrative analysis researcher highlights the narrative's complexity and depth through identifying themes within the narrative (Creswell, 2005). A sixth commonality is that narrative researchers strive to describe richly the setting, including environment and context, in which the narrative occurs (Creswell, 2005). Finally, Creswell (2005) noted that narrative researchers pursue a collaborative working relationship with participants, such as taking time to explain the research-participant relationship, describe the purpose of narrative analysis, and work closely with participants to gather an accurate version of the story.

Over and above these general narrative analysis practices, there are many delineations in narrative research and a variety of analytic practices (Creswell, 2007). The multiple forms of narrative analysis employed by researchers are exemplified in the many fields that use this approach, such as anthropology, education, history, and sociology. This has led to numerous discipline-specific ways of conducting narrative research (Creswell, 2005). Established narrative analysis researchers include: Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) who researched from a human development approach; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) from a psychological approach; and Cortazzi (1993) and Riessman (1993) from a sociological perspective. Different approaches in narrative analysis are also accounted for by the fact that this research approach is still evolving and

is only occasionally discussed in the research literature (Bruce, Beuthin, Sheilds, Molzahn, & Schick-Makaroff, 2016; Errante, 2000).

Examples of such evolution within narrative analysis can be seen as Polkinghorne (1995) distinguished between "analysis of narratives" where the researcher creates themes that hold true across the collected stories and "narrative analysis" where the researcher collects a series of events or occurrences from an individual and then arranges them into story-form using literary elements such as plot. Chase (2005) later suggested a similar narrative approach as Polkinghorne's (1995) analysis of narrative, but included a stronger emphasis on the individual's relationship with social resources and social situations. Other examples of the evolution of narrative analysis have been identified as the autobiographical approach in which the entire life history of an individual is summarized by the researcher (Denzin, 1989), and then later, as Ellis (2004) suggested, the participants themselves write their narrative summary.

I chose to focus the methodological approach of this dissertation specifically within the framework developed by researchers Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000). Each has over 30 years of experience conducting narrative analysis, specifically within the field of education. Together and separately, they have provided an overview of this research methodology, discussed the overall structure of a narrative analysis, and highlighted important features of the research design, such as utilizing the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and collecting field notes (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, a narrative framework from which researchers can unpack storied-experiences through temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin described these three elements as "dimensions of an inquiry" and "central" to a narrative approach (p. 38). Temporality refers to time, or the past, present, and future considerations of a story (Clandinin, 2013). It should be noted whether the individuals or events mentioned in a narrative are set before, during, or after that specific narrative event occurred. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also believed narrative researchers should seek the outward social conditions of a narrative, such as the general culture, social atmospheres, institutional practices, or systemic family conditions. They further encouraged seeking internal participant responses, such as the participant's emotions, reactions, hopes, and desires (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Finally, narrative researchers seek information about the geographical setting, which can provide detail and insight into the narrative (Clandinin, 2013).

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is useful throughout the research process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described that a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space provides a framework in which a researcher can ask questions during the initial interview in order to examine a narrative "inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place" (p. 49). Clandinin (2013) stated that the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space can be used between interviews if one is conducting multiple interviews with the same participant. Clandinin reflected that when researchers re-read an interview, they should note what the participant did not speak about within the

narrative or were not asked about within the interview. Missing elements can then be

inquired into during a follow-up interview. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry

space can also be used as a framework to inform the data analysis, as Clandinin stated

that narrative researchers should continue to be mindful of temporality, sociality, and

place as the final research report be being prepared.

I utilized this framework to accompany the constructivist epistemology in order to

focus on the "social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes"

(R. A. Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375). This focus on individuals' cognitions empowered

individuals to construct their own way of understanding their narrative experiences

(Schwandt, 2001), particularly regarding temporality, sociality, and place within the

narrative.

Field text. Data collected in a narrative analysis are referred to as field text.

Field texts are thought of as not being objective, but rather as data experienced by the

participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this light, field texts are not discovered in

the objective sense, but rather created in a constructivist sense. Field texts are based on

the life experiences of the research participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and provide

language data for the researcher (Polkinghorne, 2005). Clandinin and Connelly (2000)

noted that data collected through a field text needs to be as detailed as possible in order to

capture the narrative story. I utilized semi-structured research interviews as forms of

field text to collect data in this dissertation study.

Semi-structured research interviews. To address the research purpose and question of this dissertation, semi-structured, research interviews were conducted with eight participants as the main form of field texts. Semi-structured interviews contain questions that are somewhat structured and can be used in a flexible manner (Merriam, 2002). I utilized semi-structured interviews to understand participants' narratives that illustrate the intersection of their religious and sexual identity. To achieve this semi-structured design successfully, Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interview model was utilized. Examples of responsive questions included, "Can you elaborate more on that?" and "Any other thing besides scary?" Therefore, the goal of including responsive interviewing within this dissertation research was to develop a substantive understanding of this topic through participants' own narrative (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework was also utilized to guide these interviews. Examples of such responsive follow-up questions, derived from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work, included, "So you would say it affected your relationship?" to further inquire about sociality, and "Is there any other aspect of your future you see being impacted because of that conversation?" to inquire about a future temporality. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted it is important that researchers address such questions as these and consider how the field texts are impacted by temporality, sociality, and place.

Data Collection Procedures

I independently conducted data collection procedures through the following steps: (a) pre-interview procedures; (b) first interview; (c) first interview transcription; (d)

follow-up interview; and (e) follow-up interview transcription. A written description of this data collection process is provided, as well as a flowchart depicting the data collection process (see Table 1).

Pre-interview procedures. Before beginning this dissertation, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) as directed by Kent State University (KSU) in order to use human subjects within my research. Researchers are also held to standards set according to their local Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB application to participate in research was completed, submitted, and reviewed by the IRB committee members at my institution. Once IRB approval was obtained, research commenced. A copy of the IRB approval can be found in Appendix A.

Participant criterion. Participation in this dissertation study was voluntary. I utilized purposeful sampling to recruit participants who could "best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). The specific type of purposeful sampling utilized was criterion sampling. Merriam (2009) noted that criterion sampling is when research participants are chosen for a particular study because they possess a certain criterion the researcher seeks to explore. Creswell (2007) recommended this type of sampling because it adds quality assurance to the research being conducted. Criterion sampling was used through seeking participants who self-identified as (a) gay, (b) cis-gender male—born biologically male and identify as male, (c) Christian, and (d) at least 18 years of age or older, and who also (e) possessed and was willing to share a rich, salient story related to the intersection of their gay and Christian identities. It was important for participants to be at least 18 years old not only

Table 1

Data Collection Flowchart

Pre-Interview Procedures	• Submit and receive CITI approval • Submit and receive approval from IRB (Appendix A) • Meet with peer reviewer to share and review the literature review, strategies for data collection and analysis, and schedule regular meetings for the course of the study • Use criterion sampling to identify participants • Review recently published (within the last 10 years), peer-reviewed journals to calculate appropriate participant sample size • Send email regarding the dissertation study to the directors of LGBTQ+ organizations for recruitment of participants • Contact prospective participant via email (Appendix B) • Email informed consent form (Appendix C), demographic information form (Appendix D), and audio consent form (Appendix E) to participant • Collect all previously emailed forms to review prior to interview • Schedule first participant interview
First Interview	• Complete initial interview (field text) with participant (Appendix F) • Audio record interview • Reflexive journal (bridle) within one hour after initial interview • Meet with peer reviewer to share and review first interview
First Interview Transcription	• Transcribe first interview (field text) • Check transcription through reading the transcribed document while listening to the audio recorded interview • Remove identifying information and assign pseudonym to participant • Make notes of what could be further asked for narrative clarity in follow-up interview • Reflexive journal (bridle) within one hour after transcription of field text • Meet with peer reviewer to provide an update on the transcription process • Email participant within one month of first interview date to 1) supply them with the transcript to review as a method of member checking and 2) schedule follow-up interview
Follow-Up Interview	• Complete follow-up interview (field texts) (Appendix G) with participant one to two months after first interview • Audio record interview • Reflexive journal (bridle) within one hour after follow-up interview • Meet with peer reviewer to share and review follow-up interviews
Follow-Up Interview Transcription	• Transcribe follow-up interview (field text) • Check transcription through reading the transcribed document while listening to the audio recorded interview • Remove identifying information and assign pseudonym to participant • Reflexive journal (bridle) within one hour after transcription of field text • Email participant within one month of the follow-up interview date to supply them with the transcript to review as a method of member checking

in terms of consent, but also because of what researchers suggested regarding the development of religious and sexual identity development (Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Troiden, 1989).

After a participant had been identified for the study (Glen, 2014), other possible individuals for the study were recruited through snowball sampling (Clandinin, 2013). This sampling method is the process where one participant identifies to the researcher other potential participants who could be interviewed for the study (Hatch, 2002). Creswell (2007) stated that snowball sampling could produce participants who would provide rich and useful data for the research. I examined all participants' demographic information to ensure they met the inclusion criteria.

Sample size consideration. The research sample size is an important component of consideration. Merriam (2002) highlighted that this approach collects first-person accounts of narratives usually from a small number of participants. Creswell (2007) agreed, stating one or two participants are sufficient to compose a narrative study, but also wrote that more participants could be utilized. Hatch (2002) provided a general statement that the focus of a narrative study is not on the quantity of participants, but the quality of the individuals' stories. Given this lack of consistency regarding the appropriate number of research participants, I searched for "narrative inquiry," "narrative analysis," "narrative methodology," and "narrative method" through the search engine Ebsco Host in peer-reviewed counseling, nursing, and education journals within the last 10 years. A total of 25 articles were found. I calculated the mean average of participants in these studies and arrived at an estimate of eight participants. This number would

complete the data collection process and justify current methodology trends in published research within the relevant fields.

Participant recruitment. Participation in this dissertation research study was open to any individual who met the inclusion criteria. Participants were solicited through a LGBTQ+ organization of a large university in the Northeast Ohio area and from one LGBTQ+ organization in a large Midwestern city.

Once IRB approval was obtained (Appendix A), prospective participants were contacted via email (Appendix B) with an invitation to participate in this dissertation research. The initial email contact included a brief explanation of the dissertation research, a brief explanation of the data collection process, and an approximate time commitment that would be required (Appendix B). Individuals were then emailed a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix C), a demographic information form (Appendix D), a consent form to audio record interviews (Appendix E), and instructions to return the information after they agreed to participate. All interviewees were informed within the consent form that all interviews would be audio recorded for transcription purposes and measures to ensure confidentiality. Next, I reviewed demographic information to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria and scheduled the first interview with the participant.

Participants. The sampling procedures described above produced eight participants who were interviewed to gain their narrative that related to their sexual identity as a gay male and their religious identity as a Christian. All participants involved in the study met the inclusion criteria of self-identifying as: (a) gay, (b) cis-gender

male—born biologically male and identify as male, (c) Christian, (d) at least 18 years or older, and (e) possess and were willing to share a rich, salient story related to the intersection of their gay and Christian identities. Participants' salient demographic information is found in Table 2. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Religious Affiliation	Current Involvement	Highest Education Completed	Relationship Status
Brent	65	Caucasian/ White	Catholic	Active	Bachelor's Degree	Single
Burton	72	Caucasian/ White	Unitarian/ Universalists	Active	Doctorate Degree	Married
Dean	57	Caucasian/ White	Episcopalian	Active	Bachelor's Degree	Dating/ Committed Relationship
John	34	Caucasian/ White	United Church of Christ	Active	High School	Dating/ Committed Relationship
Kurt	51	Caucasian/ White	United Church of Christ	Active	Junior-Level College	Married
Michael	27	Caucasian/ White	Episcopalian	Active	Master's Degree	Married
Patrick	38	Caucasian/ White	United Church of Christ	Active	Associate's Degree	Dating/ Committed Relationship
Wes	32	Other-South Asian	Roman Catholic	Active	Master's Degree	Single

First interview. Eight semi-structured individual first interviews (Appendix F) were used to remind participants of the informed consent, build rapport, and gain the participants' salient story in detail through the primary interview question: "Tell me a story that is significant to you related both to your identity as a Christian and your identity as a gay male." Further questions in the first interview were derived from Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interview model and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensional narrative inquiry space framework. Such questions in the interview were used to gain further reflections from participants and to clarify any unclear responses. All eight first interviews were conducted in person, recorded with a hand-held digital recording device, conducted at a place and time that was mutually agreed upon and ensured confidentiality. The first interviews with eight participants ranged in time between 39 and 69 minutes in length, with a mean time of 52 minutes.

I wrote in the reflexive journal within one hour after each of the first interviews were completed to maintain fresh awareness how my worldview, including preconceived notions, assumptions, or biases, could impact the research being conducted. This task was completed in the researcher's office in order to provide a quiet space to reflect on the element of research that had just occurred. Reflexive journaling was conducted on a Microsoft Word document on a password-protected computer. Each entry was dated, titled with the participant's pseudonym, and marked as occurring after an interview for ease of reference. Reflexive journal entries were each approximately one double-spaced page. Entries were shared with the peer reviewer in order to help increase internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2002).

First interview transcription. After the first interview was completed, I transcribed the interview in a Microsoft Word document, then checked the transcription by listening to the audio file of the interview while reading the transcription in order to verify accuracy of the interview transcription document (Clandinin, 2013). Any identifying information in the transcript was removed and all participants were assigned a pseudonym. As Clandinin (2013) stated that a narrative researcher should strive for a field text to be "narratively coherent," or for a participant's narrative to be understandable and clear, I made notes of what could further be clarified and explored with participants in a follow-up interview based upon the areas of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (p. 108). All electronic transcriptions were kept on a password-protected computer and hard copies were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. This transcription process of the first interview was completed within one month of the interview. A copy of each participant's first interview transcript was sent to the participant within a month of the original interview date. Each participant was asked to review the transcript as a form of member checking (Creswell, 2005) and to return any comments or corrections to the transcript within one week. Only one participant replied with a needed correction that related to the spelling of his pastor's name. This correction was completed. Through this same email communication, a follow-up interview was scheduled.

After a first interview was transcribed, I engaged in reflexive journaling within one hour. This task was completed in the researcher's office in order to provide a quiet space to reflect on the element of research that had just occurred. Reflexive journaling

was conducted on a Microsoft Word document on a password-protected computer. Each

entry was dated, titled with the participant's pseudonym, and marked as occurring after

the first transcription for ease of reference. Reflexive journal entries were each

approximately one double-spaced page. I met with the peer reviewer bi-weekly for

approximately one hour to provide an update on the transcription process and share

reflexive journal entries in order to help enhance the internal validity of the study

(Merriam, 2002).

   Follow-up interview. After transcription, a semi-structured follow-up interview

(Appendix G) was completed between one to two months after the first interview. This

period allowed each participant time to reflect on their narrative experience. Follow-up

interview questions were based on the information gathered during the first interview and

notes made during transcription. During the follow-up interview, each participant was

asked to discuss any concerns or new ideas related to the first interview and transcription.

The purpose of the follow-up interview questions was to gain more in-depth data from

each participant related to the previously told narrative, clarify the narrative, and strive

for narrative coherency (Clandinin, 2013). This goal was accomplished through asking

participants to expand on or further clarify their narrative, particularly within the

three-dimensional inquiry space framework of temporality, sociality, and place

(Clandinin, 2013). A hand-held digital recording device was used to audio record all

conducted interviews. Two follow-up interviews were conducted in person at a place and

time that was mutually agreed upon and that ensured confidentiality, and six follow-up

interviews were conducted via telephone. Follow-up interviews with the eight

participants ranged in time between 17 and 33 minutes in length, with a mean time of 22 minutes.

I wrote in the reflexive journal within one hour after each follow-up interview was completed remaining aware how my worldview, including preconceived notions, assumptions, or biases, could impact the research being conducted. This task was completed in the office in order to provide a quiet space to reflect on the element of research that had just occurred. Reflexive journaling was conducted on a Microsoft Word document on a password-protected computer. Each entry was dated, titled with the participant's pseudonym, and marked as occurring after the follow-up interview for ease of reference. Reflexive journal entries were each approximately one double-spaced page. Entries were shared with the peer reviewer in order to help maintain internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2002).

Follow-up interview transcription. After the follow-up interview was completed, I transcribed the interview in a Microsoft Word document, and then checked the transcription by listening to the audio file of the interview while reading the transcription in order to verify the interview transcription document (Clandinin, 2013). As with previous transcriptions, any identifying information was removed and participants' pseudonyms were maintained. All electronic transcriptions were kept on a password-protected computer and hard copies were kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's office. The transcription process of the follow-up interview was completed within one month of the follow-up interview. A copy of the participant's follow-up interview transcript was sent to the participant within a month of the follow-up interview

date. Each participant was asked to review the transcript as a form of member checking

(Creswell, 2005) and return any comments or corrections to the transcript within one

week. No participants suggested corrections that needed to be made to the follow-up

interviews.

After a follow-up interview was transcribed, I engaged in reflexive journaling

within one hour. This task was completed in the office in order to provide a quiet space

to reflect on the element of research that had just occurred. Reflexive journaling was

conducted on a Microsoft Word document on a password-protected computer. Each

entry was dated, titled with the participant's pseudonym, and marked as occurring after

the follow-up interview transcription for ease of reference. Reflexive journal entries

were each approximately one double-spaced page. I met with the peer reviewer

bi-weekly for approximately one hour to provide an update on the transcription process

and share reflexive journal entries in order to help maintain internal validity of the study

(Merriam, 2002).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was independently completed through (a) restorying the field texts

into a chronological narrative, and then engaging in thematic analysis through (b)

recognizing codes; (c) categorizing codes into themes and a thematic structure; and (d)

disseminating this to participants. A written description of this data analysis process is

provided, as well as a flowchart depicting the data analysis process (see Table 3).

Table 3

Data Analysis Flowchart

Restory the Narrative		• Read and re-read field texts from participant • Identify storied elements within narrative through highlighting • Chronologically organize elements to produce a single coherent narrative • Repeat these steps for all participants • Engage in reflexive journaling throughout the restorying process • Consult peer reviewer to evaluate narrative throughout the restorying process
Thematic Analysis	Recognize	• Reread the restoryed narrative field text • Identify narrative elements and provide a code for each • Replicate code with reference and context on an index card • Repeat these steps for all restoryed narratives • Engage in reflexive journaling • Consult peer reviewer to evaluate coding process
	Categorize	• Examine code cards for commonalities • Combine similar code cards to group codes • Provide a name for this group of code cards to produce a preliminary theme • Copy preliminary theme with some description onto an index card to produce theme cards • Group theme cards together to produce higher order themes • Name higher order themes and copy each theme name on a card for organization • Engage in reflexive journaling • Consult peer reviewer to evaluate themes
	Disseminate	• Email participant restoryed narrative and the developed thematic structure, requesting him to review, ensure accuracy, and provide feedback • Repeat the step above for each participant • Review returned emails for participants' comments • Engage in reflexive journaling • Consult peer reviewer to evaluate themes

Restory the narrative. Restorying is the process where the researcher reviews the data that contains the participant's narrative to identify the storied elements, organize it in a chronological sequence (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2005), and thus provide order and structure to the narrative. I began by reading and re-reading the first interview and

the follow-up interview from a participant (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007; Riessman, 2008) in order to deepen my knowledge. Through this examination, I sought to identify elements within the narrative related to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, such as temporality, sociality, and place of the narrative. As I sought to restory the narratives without computer software, each element of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space was assigned a different highlighter color and these elements were then highlighted.

After this step, I organized these story elements in chronological order through separating different highlighted elements and reorganizing them into a temporal sequence. Narratives were restoried socially through organizing personal conditions the participant reported, such as experienced emotions or reactions, as well as external social conditions, such as other people within the narrative, important family dynamics, or salient cultural and social factors (Clandinin, 2013). Further, narratives were restoried through chronologically organizing elements of place and how reported geographic setting(s) may impact the narrative (Clandinin, 2013). These steps were repeated for each participant, allowed the participants' stories to be narratively coherent, and prepared the narrative for thematic analysis (Clandinin, 2013). As I concluded each participant's restoried narrative, I engaged in reflexive journaling to note preconceived notions, assumptions, and biases. During the process of restorying participants' narratives, I continued to meet with the peer reviewer on a bi-weekly basis for approximately one hour to add to the rigor of the study.

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was utilized to recognize, categorize, and disseminate patterns within collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My aim in using thematic analysis was to examine "narrative materials from life stories by breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment" (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 400). Thematic analysis provides a complex, detailed, and rich description of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that can identify common elements across an interview or a set of participants' interviews (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). Braun and Clarke (2006) provided clear steps on thematic analysis and noted that it is not tied to any one particular research methodology. Narrative researchers have noted that individuals can utilize thematic analysis when analyzing narratives (Creswell, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Polkinghorne (1995) wrote that narrative analysis is utilized to connect "diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed process" (p. 5).

Recognize. Thematic analysis began by reading and re-reading the restoryed narrative. After this step, coding the narrative was completed by identifying within participants' narratives segments of text and assigning them a code, such as a single word or a small phrase, so that relationships can be formed with various pieces of data (Creswell, 2007). This step was accomplished by recognizing the narrative elements in the restoryed narrative through using the framework of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

For instance, a participant discussed his feeling of relief in response to his parents' reaction to his coming out, so a code became "emotional relief." Another

participant discussed feeling angry due to a conversation with his pastor regarding his sexual identity, so another code became "anger." When possible, I generated codes using the participants' own words for continued emphasis within the constructivist epistemology. Although computer programs exist that can facilitate this coding function, my work was done without a computer using paper copies of the restoryed narratives in order to be more immersed in the data and have a "hands-on feel" for the data (Creswell, 2005).

I then replicated each identified code on an index card, accompanied it with a reference based on participant pseudonym and page number to relocate it, and included a quotation from the narrative to provide context. This narrative context was helpful as Braun and Clarke (2006) warned against creating codes and losing the context of the code. This technique was used on all restoryed narratives. I did not code from a list of predetermined theories or concepts, but code identification came from the narratives themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to help maintain the constructivist epistemology of the study. Throughout this recognition stage, reflexive journaling and consultation with the peer evaluator continued.

Categorize. After all restoryed narratives were coded as described above, I looked at code cards for common characters, plot (Creswell, 2007), ideas, or concerns (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I combined similar codes or ones that were redundant to produce a more manageable number of codes (Creswell, 2005). Again, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensional narrative inquiry space was used to inform this process. This step involved looking within the individual narrative and across narratives,

as Clandinin (2013) noted that this data analysis process spans all collected narrative accounts and refers to these as "resonant threads" (p. 132).

I categorized groups of code cards based on commonalities, and a name was assigned to groups of codes. Resulting code categories were utilized to generate preliminary themes (Creswell, 2005). For instance, the previous code examples of "emotional relief" and "anger" eventually became grouped together in the theme of, "An Emotional Mosaic." When possible, I generated themes using the participants' words for continued emphasis within the constructivist epistemology. These preliminary theme names, with some description of what codes they are composed of, were each written on a card (theme cards), and I then grouped them according to similarities, thus producing higher order themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I provided a name to the higher order theme and created a card for it as well for organization of cards. For example, the "Uncertainty of Sexual Identity," "Disconnect of Religious Identity," and "Integration of Sexual and Religious Identity" subthemes could be grouped together to produce a higher order theme of "A Development of Self-Understanding." This process produced an overall thematic structure that generated three themes. Throughout this categorization stage, it was important for me to engage in reflexive journaling for approximately 10–15 minutes after each opportunity I had to categorize data. I continued to meet bi-weekly with the peer reviewer for approximately one hour.

Dissemination. Data were initially disseminated through sharing with participants their individual restoryed narrative constructed through utilizing both the first and follow-up interviews (Clandinin, 2013). Participants also received the overall thematic

structure developed from examining across multiple narrative accounts (Riessman, 2008). I sent both of these pieces of information via email to participants requesting each to review all information, ensure accuracy, and supply any additional feedback (Clandinin, 2013). As participants replied, each returned email was read for comments to incorporate in to the study. I continued reflexive journaling and meeting with the peer reviewer as this step remained an important part of data analysis.

Trustworthiness

Within this study, it was important to ensure a high level of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is significant to evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness was gained throughout this dissertation by the addition of a peer reviewer and reflective journaling. These two research considerations contributed to four elements of trustworthiness outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985): (a) credibility, or the confidence in the finding's 'truth;' (b) transferability, or illustrating the applicability of the findings to other situations; (c) dependability, or illustrating consistency and reputability of the findings; and (d) confirmability, or the fact that the study's findings are formed by the participants rather than through possible biases of the researcher.

Peer reviewer. A peer reviewer was utilized throughout data collection and analysis to strengthen the trustworthiness of the dissertation study (Anney, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Guba (1981) defined a peer reviewer as one who "provides inquirers with the opportunity to test their growing insights and to expose themselves to searching questions" (p. 85). Before data collection began, I shared the background

literature information related to the study, data collection, and analysis procedures, and discussed the overall study with the peer reviewer. As the study progressed, I met with the peer reviewer via Skype for scheduled meetings bi-weekly for approximately one hour. We discussed data collection through the semi-structured interviews, reflexive journaling, and data analysis. Finally, we examined the research findings and conclusions for a total of seven meetings (Anney, 2014; Bitsch, 2005). The professional relationship between the researcher and peer reviewer concluded after the final written results were completed. I viewed the scheduled, ongoing meetings as important, as Creswell and Miller (2000) highlighted that a peer reviewer should be utilized over the course of the entire study. The incorporation of a peer reviewer in this study increased credibility, helped maintain a critical focus on participants' narratives, and provided feedback on the final research conclusions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The selected peer reviewer had completed CITI training, had her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision, and had experience conducting qualitative research. An outline of the peer reviewer's duties and guiding evaluative questions to be utilized as interviews and transcriptions were reviewed (Creswell, 2005) can be found in Appendix H.

Reflexive journaling. Trustworthiness was also bolstered through the engagement of reflexive journaling. The action of reflexive journaling is essentially the process where the researcher critically reflects on one self as a human instrument in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Riessman (1993) noted that reflexive journaling helps a researcher be mindful of research decisions, inferences that come from the data, and greater awareness of the methodology. Researchers can utilize reflexive journaling to

engage data immediately after collection to express personal assumptions, biases, values, hunches, insights, and broad ideas related to the narratives (Creswell, 2005). Reflexive journaling aligns with a constructivist epistemology as the researcher's own cognitive understanding of what was occurring was reflected upon (Schwandt, 2001).

Questions to aid in reflexive journaling for this dissertation were developed from a larger list of questions designed to assist individuals in reflective practices in an educational setting (Edutopia, 2011). These questions were initially developed by Edutopia in four categories: backward-looking, inward-looking, outward-looking, and forward-looking. I found a connection between these questions and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space focused on thinking "inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place" (p. 49). Questions from Edutopia (2011) that guided reflexive journaling can be found in Appendix I.

Bridling. The research concept of bridling assisted this continual exercise in reflexivity. Dahlberg (2006) described bridling as a concept of reflecting so that researchers "do not understand too quick, too careless, or slovenly, or in other words, that we do not make definite what is indefinite" (p. 16). This concept is taken from the world of horseback riding where just as riders cannot separate themselves from the horse when riding, neither can researchers separate themselves from their worldview (Ellett, 2011). This concept is different from the phenomenological form of bracketing as it offers more than a suspension of a researcher's pre-understandings. Bridling allowed for trustworthiness to be incorporated through reflexivity, as well as emphasized the constructivist epistemology of this study, as significance came from the participants'

narratives and not my own understanding of them. Bridling enabled me to restrain

pre-understandings about a topic and assisted in forming an incremental understanding so

that the indefinite is not made definite (Ellett, 2011). Therefore, I engaged in bridling

through reflexive journaling within one hour after interviews or completion of

transcriptions by utilizing questions found in Appendix I, as well as writing about my

own worldview, including preconceived notions, assumptions, or biases that could impact

the research being conducted. This action was conducted on a Microsoft Word document

on a password-protected computer. Each entry was dated, titled with the participant's

pseudonym, and marked as occurring after an interview or transcription for ease of

reference. Entries were each approximately one double-spaced page and shared with the

peer reviewer in order to help increase the internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2002).

Credibility. Credibility was argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as one of the

most important factors in establishing the trustworthiness of a study. Merriam (2009)

believed that credibility of a study seeks to answer the question, "How congruent are the

findings with reality?" (p. 242). In essence, credibility seeks to address how believable

or true are the findings of a study. According to Shenton (2004), the credibility of

research is enhanced by utilizing an established qualitative research method, developing

familiarity early on with participants' culture, honesty from participants, and scrutiny of

the research project by a peer. All these strategies were employed throughout the design

and implementation of this dissertation study.

I conducted an extensive literature review in order to increase my familiarity with

the general culture and potential salient elements related to potential research

participants. Honesty was sought from participants during semi-structured research interviews by giving them the opportunity to participate or not, encouraging them to speak freely in interviews, providing them with the opportunity to check a transcribed interview and emerging themes, and establishing an overall professional rapport between the researcher and participants. These semi-structured interviews, literature review, and the reflexive journaling were all used in data triangulation to increase the credibility of the research. Finally, a peer evaluator was utilized in this study to act as an auditor who reviewed work, offered feedback, and provided a broader perspective when needed.

Connected to credibility, Riessman (1993) wrote about persuasion, or the idea that narrative researchers should seek to show the genuineness of the data collected and that analytic results were reasonably derived. I audio recorded conversations with participants to increase persuasiveness as greater accuracy in transcripts and restoryed narratives could be ensured (Riessman, 1993). These audio-recorded field texts were then used to generate direct quotes from participants to develop codes and themes. The use of participants' own words increased persuasiveness as readers could see that the results were not derived from my own thoughts, but from the participants' narratives (Riessman, 1993).

Transferability. Transferability is related to the term "external validity" and refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (2002) described transferability as being able to apply the research findings to similar settings, populations, or cases. Shenton (2004) highlighted the main criticism of transferability as the impossibility of applying the views

of such a small number of participants, which is the case in qualitative methods, to other

populations. Yet, Denscombe (1998) suggested that, since the small number of

participants are from a larger group, individuals should not immediately discount the

possibility of transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that the qualitative

researcher "can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested

in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as

a possibility" (p. 316). Therefore, ample description was provided in this study to assist

with transferability.

Dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) connected the idea of dependability

with that of reliability in quantitative methodologies. These same authors noted a

relationship between credibility and dependability by stating present credibility within a

study can establish dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yet, the replication of results

can be problematic in qualitative methods (Fidel, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) such

as narrative analysis. Shenton (2004) wrote that researchers address this concern through

describing in detail their research design, the implementation of their research design,

how they gathered data, as well as providing a reflection on the effectiveness of the

research project. Dependability was addressed in this dissertation through providing

credibility, but also through providing a detailed description of the methodological

considerations and implementation.

Confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) related confirmability to objectivity.

Shenton (2004) expounded that confirmability consists of the researcher ensuring that the

research results are produced through the participants' experiences and not through the

researcher's own preferences. Riessman (1993) noted that individuals who conduct narrative analysis research need to make their work explicit by showing clearly how they move logically from one step of the research to another. Confirmability can be achieved through an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). An audit trail shows the step-by-step process of the researcher that allows other individuals to trace the course of the research (Shenton, 2004). This audit trail was shared with the peer reviewer to confirm the research data collection and analysis procedures. Shenton noted that this can be represented diagrammatically. An illustration of this data collection (Table 1) and data analysis (Table 2) process was thus provided.

Delimitations

Due to the intention of this study and the research question, there were admitted delimitations within this study. This study was limited to adult, cis-gender males who self-identified as gay and as Christian with a salient story related to their identities which they were willing to share. These participant delimitations were included to add to the depth of descriptive data sought by the researcher. Another delimitation of this study was the small geographic area of participant sampling as participants were limited to those individuals from two LGBTQ+ organizations in the Midwest. This small geographic area could have related to similar views within participants' narratives concerning sexual identity, religious identity, and the intersection of these two identities. Further, social desirability could be viewed as a delimitation. Social desirability is the propensity for participants to respond in an interview, particularly to personal or sensitive topics, in an

acceptable manner (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). This tendency could have limited or skewed details some participants might have shared in their narratives.

Ethical Considerations

Mindfulness towards ethical considerations within this research was displayed through the completion of CITI training in order to be educated and more mindful about ethical deliberations within research. The ethical standing of the research was bolstered through completion and approval of an IRB application from KSU. Specific safeguards were implemented to ensure adherence to ethical considerations. Within this study no participant was harmed in any way that I was aware of, all were made aware of any potential harm through participation, all were informed their participation was voluntary, and each was told that they could discontinue participation at any time. Due to recording interviews, each participant was informed of confidentiality, that each would be assigned a pseudonym, that all identifying information would be removed from transcriptions, and that all information would be kept on a password-protected computer. These actions conformed to *ACA Code of Ethics* sections G.1. *Research Responsibilities*, G.2. *Rights of the Research Participants*, and G.4. *Reporting Result* (ACA, 2014). Further, as this research required participants to speak about potentially sensitive information, I provided all participants with a list of community resources with a variety of mental health professionals should the participant need or desire to continue talking about his narrative or concerns it brought forth for him. A specific list of community resources was constructed prior to and after gaining participants' demographic information.

Summary of Chapter Two

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to understand the narratives of gay male individuals who identify as Christian. In addition to the purpose of this dissertation, the epistemological and methodological considerations were explained. Additionally, procedures for sampling, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis were presented. This chapter concluded with an explanation of the study's delimitations and ethical considerations. Chapter 3 addresses the results from the narrative analysis.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Chapter 3 of this dissertation study includes the results related to the narratives of gay males who self-reported their religious identity as Christian. All participants shared a narrative through semi-structured and follow-up interviews that were analyzed to formulate these results. The narrative data that resulted from these interviews helped to answer this dissertation research question: What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity? In this chapter, the researcher provides the narratives of each participant. After these narratives, the researcher explains each of the themes and subthemes in greater depth using participants' quotes. Through analyzing the narratives, one can see that the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity are: (a) a development of self-understanding, (b) an emotional mosaic, and (c) recognition of identity worth. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary.

Participants' Narratives

Synopses of participants' narratives are provided to help introduce readers to the participants and enhance an understanding of themes and subthemes discussed later in this dissertation. The narratives included here are not exhaustive of all that participants said, but merely give an overview of what each discussed. Participants' own words were used in these summaries to maintain their "voice" in their narrative.

Brent's Narrative: The Gay Bar and God

Brent grew up attending a Christian Science Church due to the influence of his mother. He recalled his mother fondly as the "voice of comfort" for him and that "she

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was not strict [in her religion] in the way that we did go to the doctors, we did go to the dentist." His father had less of an influence on his religious identity, as his dad "never really went to church." He remembered that the Christian Science Church "was nice to go to" and he "respected the religion very much." He told of going to Bible study classes as a child and attending services upstairs with the adults.

Brent said he stopped going to church when he went to college and decided "God would not play a major part in my life." Brent indicated that his ties to the church and his religious identity gradually faded. As Brent grew up, his gay sexual identity began to develop as he made friendships with other gay men. At the age of 26, he recollected going to a gay bar one night with a friend. He commented,

This was just kind of a little out of the way place, small crowd, a few people sitting around, kind of a dive. We'd go out to meet people, potential partners, potential trick, or whatever. That's why I went. I was on the prowl, cruising, out, having a good time.

As he was sitting at the bar talking with his friend and the bartender, he remembered "this guy came into the bar and I turned and his face had been bloodied and he was just sort of semi-coherent." He said he was "disgusted" by the man's condition as he was "obviously drunk, sloppy, disheveled, beaten up" and the bartender made the man leave.

After the man left, Brent said "a sense of guilt came over me, almost like God put his hand on my shoulder saying, 'Really, you're just going to sit there?'" Brent then felt like he had a "job to do" and the "power to do something." He looked outside to see the man was "sitting on the stoop outside of the bar," so he "went out, bent down, and asked

if he was alright." He remembered going back inside the bar, asking for a towel, and telling the bartender to call 911 to get the man help. Brent then went back outside to attend to the man.

> It was just such a moving moment for me of actually taking something and doing something for somebody in great need at that time. I would reassure the guy that the ambulance is coming. When the police came I told them what had happened with me sitting there and he came in. Then my duty was done.

Brent recalled that it was "an emotional" drive home that night as a "wave of emotion" came over him because he believed he had been "given a chance to do something for a fellow human being." As he said this, his voice started to shake a little and he seemed to be feeling part of that emotion again. He said,

> I just broke down afterwards, because I had helped. I had decided to step in and help somebody that needed help and that was a major step for me. It was a happy kind of cry, you know, you get when something wonderful happens. It wasn't a sad thing at all. It was a very good feeling. I was glad I did it.

He also recalled that he felt "relief" and was "honored" to be touched by God. This event was a "major movement" in his life "religious-wise" as it prompted him to soon start attending a local Catholic Church. First, he just attended with a friend, but then he became a regular attendee and went on his own. Finally, the priest asked him if he was going to become a member of the church and Brent disclosed to him that he was gay. Brent remembered a conversation between him and the priest that "ended basically with, 'Do not turn away from the Catholic Church just because you're gay. God will love you

if you do his teachings and do his great work. That is what's important.'" He was then baptized into the Catholic Church and said he currently has a "very close, personal relationship with God."

Thinking broadly about his life, Brent expressed that his experience has provided him with "a sense of duty and I think that was shown to me that night. You can do something to make the world a better place or help an individual be in a better place." This calling has prompted him to be involved in the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and help with gay education and programing in local schools. Through these events, he uses his story frequently. He said, "I wear it with pride. Not everybody feels as if they have been touched by God."

Burton's Narrative: The Confession Heard 'Round the Church

Burton grew up in a large east coast city. He was born into an Irish-Catholic family, lived in an Irish-Catholic neighborhood, and remembered that "everyone was Catholic who lived there." His family attended the local Irish-Catholic Church and he recalled a strong connection with this organization as he expressed that "in the whole family there was this idea of Irish-Catholicism that 'this is our religion,' and 'this is our society.'" Burton's attendance at a Catholic school for eight years added to his religious identity.

He communicated that he began to recognize he was gay by sixth or seventh grade when he found himself being physically attracted to other males at school. He recollected that he "didn't give a damn about females in terms of sexual relationships." Further, he realized early on that "there was some conflict" in being Irish-Catholic and

having his feelings for other males. As he reflected on the nuns who taught at his school

and their view of being gay, Burton noted,

> It was quite clear that [being gay] was all deviant behavior and deviant behavior
>
> was not to be accepted. There was a right way to do things and that is what they
>
> focused on. They were pretty rigid on it. One thing I remember is that they
>
> wanted you to toe the line. Believe what you read in the catechism.

Burton divulged the development of his sexual identity most notably in the memory of

his first sexual encounter in eighth grade with a male peer who was one year older. He

stated, "That was way early and I never really thought about myself being anything at

that stage." Afterwards he remembered feeling shocked that it had happened, but stated

that he was not trying to do something "devilish or evil," merely expressing his feelings.

> In keeping with his Irish-Catholic upbringing and education, Burton soon

thereafter went to confession. He said,

> I was taught it was a sin. I had done other sins in my life, so it wasn't the only
>
> one. I thought [the priest] would just tell me it was bad, don't do it again, and say
>
> five 'Our Fathers' or something.

However, after confessing what he had done, he remembered the priest "had a fit," "got

all up in arms about it," and "raised his voice" to the point "you could probably hear him

down at the other end of the church." The priest said things like, "You're going to hell,"

and "That's evil." Burton remembered feeling annoyed, embarrassed, and recalled,

> I was like, "Oh my God. What are you doing?" I didn't want it announced to the
>
> entire world out there. I don't know how many people are out there, but I just

opened the door, left, didn't look around. I just thought it was totally

inappropriate. Confession is between you and the priest and you and God and

they're not supposed to be scolding you to the entire church.

This experience "was the final straw" and the last time he had confession. During

this part of his narrative, Burton's voice grew a little louder and firmer. He remembered

thinking that he could not stay in that church any longer and realized that "they were just

pushing that one agenda and it wasn't the only agenda" to God. This experience

prompted him to stop identifying as Irish-Catholic despite his strong heritage. He

summarized the experience when he stated, "I decided I was a gay male and that attitude

of the priest . . . separated me from the church and I was going to be the gay male that I

was."

Following this experience, Burton was "a-religious" and "didn't go to any

particular church" until later in college. He discovered the Unitarian Church and

appreciated that they were "open and accepting." He articulated that he did not feel

condemned for being gay at this church. Burton continued to attend services at this

church, eventually started teaching Sunday school, and now serves on various boards. He

verbalized that for at "least 20 or 25 years I've been involved with the church in one way

or another," and this church is "where I feel comfortable being who I am and also having

that religious structure."

Dean's Narrative: The Liberal-Left Comeback

Dean used the label "cradle Episcopalian" to describe his religious upbringing,

early involvement with the church, and dedication to his religious identity. Dean

remembered that his family "would go to church regularly every Sunday," his mother taught Sunday school, and his father was a deacon. This modeled church involvement led to Dean's own church activity. He reported that, "I would go to Sunday school. I sang in the church choir. I was baptized in the Episcopal Church and confirmed." Furthermore, he described that he was actively involved in the church when he was in college.

As Dean was in college and began to explore his sexual identity as a gay male, he found his particular church to be "very accepting" of him and reminisced that "it was easy to be gay in the parish I was in." However, Dean revealed, "it was more my issues about the institution of the church not accepting gay people" that caused him to leave his parish. He said the church "just wouldn't recognize my life as a gay man and as a Christian. I was angry at the church for not recognizing my life as equal to what anybody else's was." As Dean graduated from college, he made a "clean break of it" and did not return to church for 20 years.

Dean communicated that he "kept a private prayer life and a private devotional life" away from organized religion during these 20 years. He stated,

> I think we can all have a personal relationship with God in whatever way that
> means for us and it doesn't need to be through an organized body for me to feel
> like I have religion. I had a daily prayer life as I had my whole life, so that never
> stopped.

During this time of developing a private religious life, Dean learned about and engaged in walking labyrinths. These are complex paths created for one to walk and participate in

mindfulness. He found these would help him with his devotional life and were a practice

that he could do individually. He enjoyed labyrinths so much that he even attended a

workshop that taught him how to more fully absorb this activity.

Dean slowly began to reconsider organized Christian religious practice. "I

realized that the issue for me was during the intervening 20 years that the 'religious right'

had really claimed religion as their mantle." He described this "huge shift" that had

occurred between religion and politics and articulated his views:

> I thought, "Wow, there's really only one way to counter that and that's to support
>
> liberal institutions." I thought I can make a small difference in my own
>
> community by going back to a church, supporting it financially, supporting it with
>
> my time, my efforts, and my attendance.

He described that it was this thinking that he needed to support a church that partly got

him involved with organized Christian religion again. The other aspect that led Dean to

pursue church was his desire to connect with people. He remembered, "I've had a fairly

lonely religious life for 20 years and so the desire to do that in a community was a really

nice thing for me."

Dean recollected when he put his "toe in the water" by going back to church at

Christmas. He reflected, "I wasn't nervous about going back, as I knew the services and

music well. What I wasn't expecting was how gay-friendly this congregation was, and

how welcome I felt." He expressed this latter sentence with emphasis to verbalize his

strong surprise at the level of acceptance he felt. This level of acceptance was

exemplified by the church being led by an openly lesbian priest who stressed in her

message that all, no matter who you are, are welcomed at the church. He said, "When I met the lesbian priest, that seemed to do it for me." As he talked about personally meeting the priest and how she was different from any other religious leader that he had personally seen, he stated, "That's when I became a member again."

Dean verbalized that, since he has been regularly attending church again, "having a community is really grounding. It's nice to have a community of like-minded people." He currently attends church and has become very involved. He said,

> I'm able to use my particular work skills with the church in that I chair the church endowment committee and so I feel like I'm being useful there. So I get to use lots of my skills in service to this institution and feel like it's a place I can volunteer more time to at some point when I have more time. That's a nice feeling.

He went on to discuss his future retirement and how this will give him more time to become involved in his church. Overall, he stated that the anger that he once felt towards the church is "long gone" and he revealed, "I feel very lucky that I can be both gay and Christian."

John's Narrative: The Six Months of Hell

John communicated that he "grew up going to church." Along with the involvement of his family, he revealed, "I went to youth group every Wednesday. I went to church camp four years in my youth, and one of those years I found God and I accepted him in my heart." As he got older and his religious identity grew, so too did his sexual identity. John remembered by 10 years of age feeling "different than the other

guys" who were in Scouts with him. By the time John was 17 and in high school "those feelings started to bubble" and he started to develop romantic feelings for another man. The two had the same part-time job, shared similar hobbies, and spent a lot of time together. Their relationship grew to the point that John's mother approached him one day at work and said, "You like this person, don't you?" John remembered,

When she asked that I just kind of blew it off like, "Oh, yeah, I do. He's kind of cool." I didn't really understand where she was going with that question, because I didn't even know who I was or how I felt about him. So, I think she knew before I did. She saw something that I didn't see.

Yet, as John looked back on this time in his life, he said,

I didn't really know who I was until I met him and started getting those feelings . . . I think he was a beacon and him being who he was was a light bulb in me and made me more comfortable to finally say, "This is who I am."

John's relationship with this other man developed and on Sweetest Day John had flowers sent to him. When his family found out about this, his father, mother, and brother came to his work to pick him up and take him home. He stated, "They basically kicked me out of the job I was working." John said there was nothing spoken in the car on the way home, and recalled, "I was scared. I was scared to go home with not knowing what's going to happen next." After they got home, John was ordered to his room. He was later joined by his parents and the following encounter ensued: "[My dad] comes up and slaps me right across the face and I fly right into the closet in my room. My mom's over there bawling her eyes out telling him to stop."

This "lockdown" punishment continued for six months. He remembered how his dad took his bedroom door off the hinges, took away all his electronics, and would not allow him to leave the house other than to go to school. John also told of other actions his dad took during this time:

> My father would pray to the Holy Spirit, put his hands on my body, put holy water on me, and wish for me to repent every single night. I would tell him no. And from time to time he would get mad. I would get lippy and I would get a hand across the face from time to time.

John's family took him to see a church counselor during this time. He remembered, "I was told that I was an abomination to the family, a disgrace, and that I needed to repent." He remembered feeling disgraced and degraded, and that he was not comfortable at all. After this meeting John said he "couldn't take it anymore" and soon after tried cutting his wrist in the shower with a razor. His brother found him, stopped him, and afterwards he was put on suicide watch for 30 days. Instead of the church counselor, John tried to find help from his school's guidance counselor. He remembered that she was "warm" and "willing to help" when he confessed to her that his dad was hitting him. He stated that his father was brought into a meeting with his guidance counselor and his father stated that he was "disciplining" his son. Nothing was ever done to help John's situation. John slowly stated, "Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. It was hell for six months." He recalled feeling hurt, angry, sad, and "like I had nobody in my life." As John turned 18, he was forced out of his parents' home. It was during this time that he also left the church and lost his faith. He stated, "I didn't want to

be associated with the church. The church never had my back. Why should I have theirs?"

John eventually reconnected with organized religious activity through friends who consistently invited him to church. John said, "To sit in the pews now, to just be fully accepted and welcomed with open arms, no matter who you are, there are no words for it. I feel like I've finally found a place where I belong." Also, after eight years, John reconnected with his family at a Thanksgiving dinner that was hosted by his aunt. Yet, John is still estranged from his father and believes that he "will never fully understand or accept why I'm gay." In thinking about his father and his own future as a parent, John stated

> He did a lot of damage to me and I don't want to pass those traits on to my kids.
> We always tell ourselves that we're going to be better than our parents, but you
> always see a little bit of your parents in you and I'm fearful that I will have that in
> me.

John optimistically said, "I want to be that father that gives my children the decision on what they want to do. Who they want to love." To conclude, John reflected, "My story is my story. We all have our stories. It's how we take our stories and grow from them that makes our lives stronger and better."

Kurt's Narrative: The Shame-Filled Son

Kurt was raised in a large family consisting of his parents and nine siblings. He recalled his parents "met when they were teenagers and spent their entire life together."

This example of a relationship from his parents, combined with his Catholic upbringing, instilled in Kurt an importance to have one relationship for his entire life. He remarked,

Growing up in the Catholic Church was "don't do this, don't do that." It's all about the bad. You're always told about what is bad, not what was good. You didn't know how to necessarily be good. I was good. I was raised good by my parents, but it just seemed like everything was centered around negativity growing up in the Catholic Church. From a religious standpoint, I grew up thinking about the things that I shouldn't do and that holds a person back, I think.

When Kurt was 27 years old he began what would be an 11-year relationship with another man. At first, he recalled he was happy and seemed to have what his parents had, as he found the man that he wanted to be with his entire life. He remembered thinking about this relationship from the lens of his religious identity and his sexual identity:

As a gay male, it wasn't just the Catholic Church that wanted me to have that one relationship. I think as a gay man I wanted to show society, family, friends, and the church that I could have a long-term relationship for my entire life with one man. I wanted to prove to others that this is a justifiable relationship and that this is good and this is healthy and this is right and this is who I am.

Yet, the relationship grew into a bad situation due to Kurt's partner developing a drug and alcohol addiction. The strain in this relationship led to Kurt experiencing anxiety attacks, feeling like he was not important, and hitting "bottom emotionally," and "as a Catholic." Kurt recalled that he felt he could not talk to a religious leader about this situation, so he turned to a friend who he said was a "faith leader" in his life at that time.

Kurt noted that this friend provided him with support and a new perspective on the divide

that he felt between his relationship and his religious identity.

> I definitely had to come to peace with my whole Catholic upbringing and some of
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> the beliefs I had there in terms of wanting to stay in that relationship because of
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> my upbringing and [my friend] just shined a different light on it and shined the
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> light of love, and being able to love yourself, and think about yourself, too. She
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> just gave me a whole fresh perspective on my belief system.

> Kurt eventually reached out to a co-worker who helped him realize he was being

emotionally abused. After this realization, he went to his parents to tell them what was

occurring in his life. He stated, "A couple of my siblings did divorce and I know how

disappointed [my parents] were, especially my mom. I can even remember now thinking

about it; she was embarrassed." Therefore, he "struggled" to tell them that he could no

longer be in his relationship, that he felt "disgraced," and was "very disappointed" that he

could not be in a lifetime relationship like the one his parents had modeled and his

religion taught. He told his parents about the situation of his relationship, that he was

"ashamed" he could not have their type of relationship, and that he wanted to be "the

good little Catholic boy and grow up and meet that one person and spend the rest of my

life with them."

> Kurt realized after this conversation that he had his parents' support and felt more

open to talk to them about what was going on. This support gave him the strength to

leave the relationship. He recalled that he had to process a lot of emotions at this time:

I was sad about the relationship that wasn't going to be for life. I was angry at my partner for doing what he did to our relationship. I was angry, because I felt like I had wasted 11 years of my life.

He also had to wrestle with his religious views on this matter. He remembered, "I had to accept the fact that I didn't need to be good to the church, but to be good to myself and have faith in Jesus Christ, my Savior, that he wouldn't be disappointed." This religious belief related to the relationship his parents modeled for him, and he emphasized, "I had to reconcile the fact of my upbringing, how I felt about the relationship, and where I thought it should go. I had to put that aside and behind me before I could move on."

Kurt said this turbulent relationship experience "definitely impacted me in terms of being the type of person I am as far as being open" and that it is still "painful." This fact was evident as Kurt was tearful as he told parts of his narrative. He said that in his current relationship he recognized that he tries "to be too strong emotionally" because he does not want to be hurt again. Yet, he stated that he is glad that he finally was able to reach out to people, take the steps to move on, and that he does not have any regrets now.

Michael's Narrative: The Welcome Speech

Michael grew up in "a small town in Pennsylvania" that was a "backwoods town with a very conservative set of values." He reminisced, "When I was younger through high school, I would say it was really normal to be a Christian. Everybody was and that was sort of the default state of being in the community I grew up in." He was raised attending the local Presbyterian Church and identified as a Christian. Michael "always

went to church growing up" and at the time would have said he was a "devoted" Christian. However, looking back on it, Michael said,

> So much of it was going to church and getting involved in church things, because that was part of family and that was an expectation. My parents were always going to church, so parents go and they sign their kids up for things—acolytes or whatever.

It was also during this period in his life when Michael first began to recognize feelings of attraction towards other males.

As Michael left high school and went to college a shift occurred in his religious and sexual identities. It was during this time in college when Michael noted, "I was finally able to admit my own sexuality to myself in addition to sharing it with other people." After he admitted his own sexual identity, he stated that "life just got easier once I realized that I can just be the way that I was and not worry so much about meeting everyone's expectations." Michael noted that in college the friends that he was around were supportive of his gay sexual identity, but not as supportive with his established Christian religious identity. He testified that while his gay sexual identity became more present during college, his Christian religious identity "quieted down." As his Christian identity "took a backseat," he stopped going to church and did not engage in organized religious activities as he once had when he was younger.

After Michael graduated from college and "was free from any kind of guidance" as to the person he should be, he knew he wanted to go to church again. Finding a church was now seen as important, as Michael emphasized, "I knew I wanted to get married and

I knew I wanted to raise my kids going to church." He and his partner found a website where you can search for open and affirming congregations in a particular area and found a local Episcopal Church. "We went together and just dropped in on a service." He noted that "everyone was just warm" and people were "open and accepting." The minister even gave them a personal welcome. To have her "come and personally introduce herself and talk to us about the church on our very first day, we definitely, immediately felt like it was the right place for us."

As Michael and his partner got more involved in the church, they were asked by the minister to represent the church for a LGBTQ welcome event at a nearby college campus. He felt that it was "a big honor to have our minister come to us and specifically ask for us to be representatives of church and thereby representatives of Christianity." Michael recounted that day, specifically noting that he had two minutes to provide information about his church to a room full of new college students and there were "some nerves associated with that," as he hates public speaking. Michael recounted his speech:

> I pointed out that we had been members of the church for about a year and a half, how I sang in the choir, participated as a lector, and how my husband serves on the vestry or the parish counsel board and then made sure to get in there that the pastor was doing our wedding in two weeks.

> He recalled that the student audience gave him a standing ovation and "to have such a positive response being there representing a church was a really big thing for me. I felt like I could be each part of myself and not have anything stamped out." He told someone about the event afterwards and that "it felt good that we got a big standing

ovation and [my minster] touched me on the arm and said, 'No, *you* got a big standing

ovation.'" Michael stated that this event made him "realize that I can be a good example

for others, and that when I go somewhere or just be myself through life, I'm

automatically a representative of the groups I'm known to be a part of." He further

reflected,

> I previously alternated back-and-forth between having church be a big part of my
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> life and then through college having sexuality be a big part of my life . . . and now
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> I think this was one of the first times where those were being presented together
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> and that was seen as a normal, empowering thing as opposed to just, "Yeah, I
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> have these two parts and today I wear this hat and tomorrow I wear that hat." I
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> think this was one of the first times that I was able to showcase the combination
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> of those, which I think is something still seen as unique. So I think that's what
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> made it a big thing for me.

Patrick's Narrative: The Conversation With the Deacon

Patrick remembered that from an early age he felt drawn to church. Part of the

appeal for Patrick was that his church had a lot of missionaries that would come and

speak about their experiences. Another part of his early draw to church was the

involvement of his family in various church activities. Whereas Patrick found support for

being involved in church events and his religious identity as a Christian, he found less

support for his sexual identity as a gay male. He recalled being raised in a rural farm

town and being gay "wasn't something that was discussed and it definitely wasn't

something that would be accepted if you were completely open about yourself." Patrick specifically recalled one incident with his family related to a local news program:

> There was a teacher on TV that was ousted by the school district because she was a lesbian. So my grandfather, not necessarily a subtle, quiet man about the situation, started going on. And I said, "Well would it really matter if my science teacher was a lesbian?" And he goes, "Well you don't understand what you're talking about," went in the other room, grabbed a *700 Club* VHS, threw it in the TV, and in the first five minutes I learned what yellow hankies were about, scat clubs, and all of this horrible crazy information. I said, "This is really gross." I knew who I was and that wasn't it.

Patrick stated that the conversation ended with him becoming very emotional and walking out of his grandparents' home. Because of this interaction impacting Patrick's level of comfort, he said, "After you've had that conversation with your grandfather . . . I already knew I could handle pretty much anything anyone could say to me at that point." Patrick used this story to foreshadow an even more poignant conversation later in his life.

Patrick reflected that he had been out as a gay man for approximately six months. He was at a work event one day and a deacon from his church happened to be at the same event. He recalled that he had "shared so much time with him at the church, because he was one of our deacons and friends of the family." The deacon proceeded to tell Patrick about his son's best friend who had grown up in the church, was involved in helping with the music for worship services, and who had come out as gay. The deacon continued his story as he told Patrick,

He felt it was his duty to go to him one Sunday after he was leading the music part of the worship service and basically ask him not to come back, because him being out was making the lifestyle ok and that wasn't part of their church.

Even though the deacon told Patrick he still loved his son's friend like he was a part of his own family, he could not serve God if he was going to choose to be gay. Patrick made a grimaced face during his interview as he said, "How can you say we love you, you can be part of our family, but you can't lead us in service? That was the part that really confused me." Although he remembered feeling "embarrassed" at the time and "probably three shades of red," he said he responded by being "overly polite" and tried to show the deacon "respect even though the story was disrespectful."

Patrick reflected that it was a "jarring experience" to have this conversation. At the time, he was "happy to be out and it saddened me" to have him share his "oppressive views." He said, "It was like he was telling me not to be a part of the church after that, because I don't know how he knew, but he knew." Patrick remembered thinking that it would "be so easy to cut and run" from the church, because he was "genuinely hurt" by this conversation. Patrick expressed that he knew who he wanted to be as a gay male and as a Christian, but those ideas would not "mesh." Therefore, after that conversation Patrick did not attend church anywhere regularly and he found that it had lost its draw for him. Instead, Patrick found himself more drawn to his gay sexual identity and would leave his small hometown regularly to travel to a larger local city that had a strong gay culture. He stated, "It became an exodus starting Thursday that I would be in [a larger city] until Sunday just to get away from town." He described this time in his life as an

"exciting time" where he could really discover that side of him "that had been under wraps."

Yet, Patrick found that he did not want to turn his back on the church completely. He remembered that he put himself "back in the position of learning" and "delved" into learning. He said, "I actually started reading more books on people being gay and out and then I would swap one out for somebody who fought to come out of the closet and still be in church." Eventually, Patrick found a church where he feels he can be himself. He expressed that at his new church, "You don't have to do the whole, 'this is my work-life, this is my after-work life with my partner, and this is my Sunday-life with church.' You don't have to separate all of those things." Overall, he said his narrative, "taught me what kind of Christian, what kind of gay Christian, and what kind of man I wanted to be."

Wes's Narrative: The Confirmation Coming Out

Wes grew up in India in the town of Bombay, now Mumbai. He reported that he "lived in an area that was mostly Roman Catholic." Wes remembered that his family "always went to church on Sundays," and each member was "actively involved in church" in various ways. He recalled that his father was on the organizing committee, his mother would go to prayer meetings, and he sang in the church choir. Additionally, Wes attended a Catholic parochial school through high school. This involvement and religious identity instilled in him values like "forgiveness and loving your neighbor as yourself," which Wes said were both important to him.

Wes began to develop his sexual identity when he was between 14 and 15 years old, as he remembered having romantic thoughts about guys he went to school with at this time. Yet, Wes remembered, "There was no [sexual identity] terminology in my head, because I did not understand the meaning of being a homosexual, but I definitely was more inclined towards liking or being more fond of men in comparison to women." Wes turned to his family's computer and the Internet for assistance as he surmised, "Let me just go and try and compose a sentence where I can try and figure out what my feelings would be." As he pursued his search, he discovered his attraction towards men was called "homosexual" or "gay." He remembered that through this process he did not feel "conflicted," but more a desire to understand his identity and be open about it. Wes proceeded to tell a couple of friends about his sexual identity "just to see how they would react" before telling his parents. Each of his friends responded in a way that showed Wes it was "no big deal." However, before he had the opportunity to tell his parents, the date of his confirmation was scheduled to occur.

Wes provided the information that "Roman Catholics like for their children to celebrate the sacraments . . . and so I guess it was really important for my parents to have me get confirmed as Catholic." He remembered that the priest conducting his confirmation ceremony was a visiting missionary who "specifically told us that now that we are going to be young adults, we should be true to ourselves as a Roman Catholic who follows the Lord." This was an impactful statement to Wes, and one that propelled him to consider even more the need to be truthful to his parents about his sexual identity.

Therefore, he decided to disclose to his parents his gay sexual identity during his celebratory dinner.

He recalled his confirmation dinner being just his parents and himself. He said, "I was feeling a little confident, so I thought I can use that confidence to try to gain a little truth . . . I knew I would feel a little better. I thought it would be nicer to share." He told his parents, "You know, I've been thinking about this and I don't really like girls that much." He proceeded to tell his parents he was gay. Wes said that his father merely responded with, "Ok," but his mother was "a little bit shocked." His mother thought since he had been attending an all-boys Catholic school that maybe he just needed to go to college and "experience women." He remembered that within a week his mother sought help from the same priest who confirmed him. Wes said the priest told his mother, "You know, this is the way God has made your son. So you should be happy, right? This is perfect." Wes recalled the priest said this statement in a very "matter-of-fact" way that helped him feel a sense of "relief." As for his mother, he remembered that she cried, "had a whole emotional meltdown," and then "it was never a problem."

Wes summarized by reflecting on his story and said, "I'm happy it happened. It happened really nicely. It gives my memories a really nice message when I think about it." He stated that it might be "very rare" for individuals to be able to maintain these two identities, but that, "It's always nice for people to try and balance religion and sexuality if they can." Because he reported that he has found this balance between his gay sexual identity and his Christian religious identity, he considered himself "very privileged."

Themes and Subthemes

Participants' narratives were provided to help answer the research question and to provide readers with a context into the themes and subthemes. Before these themes and related subthemes are discussed, a few noteworthy points should be expressed. The following themes and subthemes maintain the constructivist epistemological underpinning of this dissertation. Jonassen (1991) viewed constructivist epistemology as understanding based on one's own experiences and personal beliefs. R. A. Young and Collin (2004) further distinguished constructivism as the focus on "the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes" (p. 375). This epistemology allowed for the examination of narrative as told by individuals, rather than narratives that were socially constructed between researcher and participant. Through asking for participants' own narratives and using participants' own words throughout this section to maintain their "voice," the researcher was able to generate themes and subthemes congruent with the participants' narratives and the epistemological stance of this dissertation.

The themes and subthemes that were generated were shaped by the narratives of the participants through the lens of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. This is a framework "central" to a narrative approach from which researchers can unpack storied-experiences through the narrative features of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013, p. 38). As this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space was part of the framework of this dissertation, participants discussed these elements within their narrative. For instance, as place or environment is part of this framework, participants discussed their hometown, their early family life, or

the church environment in which they were raised. As this information was a part of the narrative, this information naturally impacted themes. Therefore, participants' narratives and related themes and subthemes were viewed through this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

Finally, it should be noted the three themes and associated subthemes that resulted from this dissertation study are not found in isolation from one another. These themes and subthemes are interwoven throughout each of the participants' narratives. Through analyzing the narratives, one can see that the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity show: (a) a development of self-understanding, (b) an emotional mosaic, and (c) recognition of identity worth. Table 4 illustrates these themes and related subthemes. These themes and subthemes answer the research question: "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?" To gain a richer depth of knowledge about each of these themes (a development of self-understanding, an emotional mosaic, and a recognition of identity worth), they are examined individually with more detail through participants' quotations.

Table 4

Research Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: A Development of Self-Understanding
Uncertainty of Sexual Identity
Disconnect of Religious Identity
Integration of Sexual and Religious Identity
Theme 2: An Emotional Mosaic
Narrative-sharing Emotional Component
Theme 3: A Recognition of Identity Worth

Theme 1: A Development of Self-Understanding

The narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity reflected a development of self-understanding. It became evident in data analysis when looking at the narratives in chronological order that all eight participants broadly told how their self-understanding continually developed over the course of time. This continual development is evident as participants described their childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and potential future within their narrative. The continual development of self-understanding within narratives particularly relates to participants' understanding of their own sexual identity as gay males and religious identity as Christians. No participant disclosed that their sexual identity as a gay male and their religious identity as a Christian stayed the same from the beginning of their narrative to the end. All eight participants mentioned within their narrative this development of self-understanding.

Participants' self-understanding is exemplified in Michael's statement about how he grew up with a Christian religious identity and recognized his gay sexual identity:

It was a big relief, really, because it was something that had been there as an internal struggle that I wasn't recognizing for so long, probably at least seven or eight years, trying to push it down or I would tell myself it was just a phase. Then when the environmental pressures changed and I was in an environment that was really welcoming to that [sexual] identity, I just kind of naturally was able to say, "Ok, this is who I am and that's ok." From there I came out to my parents, because I thought it was important to tell them before anybody else, and then life

just got easier once I realized that I can just be the way that I was and not worry

so much about meeting everyone's expectations.

Michael displayed throughout his narrative the development of his self-understanding

that involved recognizing his gay sexual identity and finding a Christian denomination

that would allow him to exercise his religious identity. In his case, this

self-understanding took years to work through. This facet of time in self-understanding

was also recognized by Brent who said individuals, regarding sexual and religious

identities, need to come to the realization "that these different identities make up who you

are. That can take a lifetime." All of these narratives illustrated that self-understanding

is something that develops over time.

The development of self-understanding regarding sexual and religious identities

was described as not always a simple or easy process, but was one that can be complex.

Burton said, in seeking to understand his sense of self, "It's more than just sexual

behavior. There's other issues that appear that need to be discussed. Just recognize with

any belief system the power of that belief system. It's something that's been taught is the

correct way." He went on to specifically talk about a Christian belief system and stated,

"To be gay is sinning. You're not supposed to be gay. It's against God's way and it

raises conflict, and one can either say they are misinterpreting it or I'm just going to

ignore it." Wes iterated that this development of self-understanding can "feel very

shameful through society, peers, and family." These quotes from Burton and Wes

exemplified the hardships, dichotomy, and social factors that some experienced as they

sought to understand themselves. This development of self-understanding can be both timely and complex.

Three subthemes emerged from the overarching "A Development of Self-Understanding" theme and reflected aspects of participants' narratives related to (a) uncertainty of sexual identity, (b) disconnect of religious identity, and (c) integration of sexual and religious identity. These subthemes were included within this theme because participants distinctively verbalized their self-understanding through these different subthemes at points within their narratives. While "A Development of Self-Understanding" is the larger theme and made distinct from these subthemes through its own context and participants' quotes, each of these subthemes are equally distinct. Although they might be of lesser value than the overarching theme, if they were to be absorbed by the larger theme, their distinctiveness would be lost.

Uncertainty of sexual identity. Uncertainty of sexual identity can be described as a unique aspect of the development of self-understanding within the narratives of these gay male participants who have a Christian religious identity. Seven individuals reported uncertainty in the gay sexual identity through their narratives. Evidence of participants' uncertainty of sexual identity was self-reported and particularly notable during adolescence.

John shared how this uncertainty of sexual identity within his self-understanding affected him during adolescence. He stated, "Growing up I didn't know who I was," and explained that "when high school came around, those feelings started to bubble—and growing up in a home where that wasn't recognized or even talked about if you were

straight or gay—I didn't even know what these feelings were." John later recalled a conversation with his mother where she asked him if he had feelings for another man. John said, "I just kind of blew it off . . . because I didn't even know who I was or how I felt about him. So, I think she knew before I did and saw something that I didn't see." Burton also talked about this uncertainty of sexual identity in an early adolescent period of his narrative when he mentioned a romantic situation with another teenage boy. Instead of thinking he was gay, he said, "I never really thought about myself being anything at that stage." Both John and Burton showcased in their narratives uncertainty of their sexual identities during an early stage of their development.

One participant who seemed to exemplify this subtheme was Wes, as he described growing up in India and not knowing terminology to describe his potential sexual identity. He stated, "There was no terminology in my head yet, because I did not understand the meaning of being a homosexual, but I definitely was more inclined towards being more fond of men in comparison to women." He explained that what helped him in his self-understanding was the family computer and the use of the Internet. He recalled thinking, "Let me just go and try and compose a sentence where I can try and figure out what my feelings would be." Through this exploration, he explored the uncertainty of his developing sexual identity.

Disconnect of religious identity. Within the theme of development of self-understanding, uncertainty seemed to progress for participants of this study into a disconnect between participants and their Christian religious identity. This disconnect was seen in this study as a departure or suspension of one's religious identity due, at least

in part, to one's sexual identity. Seven participants in this study specifically discussed

how they became disconnected from their religious identity at some point in their life,

often during adolescence or early adulthood.

Burton recollected a confession with his priest where the priest told him that he

was going to hell and that he was evil because of a gay sexual interaction. Burton

recalled the priest "got all up in arms about it. He raised his voice. A couple of times he

was screaming and you could probably hear him down at the other end of the church."

Due to this event, he said, "I stopped identifying as Catholic. I grew up in an

Irish-Catholic neighborhood. Everyone was Catholic, it was part of my heritage, and my

parents were Catholic, but I knew I wasn't." Burton recalled, "At that point I said,

'Screw it. I just can't stay in this church any longer,'" and he left the church. He

reported, "It separated me from the church and I was going to be the gay male that I

was." As he continued talking about this topic within his narrative, he stated, "I

disconnected. I wouldn't and I didn't stay in a religious tradition that condemned me to

hell." Burton "didn't go to any particular church" for a while and described himself as

"a-religious" for a period of his life after this experience.

Similarly, John talked about the development of his gay sexual identity while

being raised in a religious home. He recalled, "I went to youth group every Wednesday.

I went to church camp four years in my youth and one of those years I found God, and I

accepted him in my heart when I was at church camp." Yet, after John's parents found

out about his sexual identity, he recalled that "for six months I was in lockdown" at

home. He reported in his narrative negative experiences with his religious father who

regularly prayed over him to not be gay and put holy water on him. He also told of a church-based counseling experience where he was informed he was "an abomination to the family, a disgrace," and that he needed to repent. These incidents led to a disconnect between John and his religious identity. He reported that he left the church of which he had been an active part and subsequently lost his faith. He stated, "I didn't want to be associated with the church. The church never had my back. Why should I have theirs?" John disclosed that after these events, "I didn't have a church for many years."

Brent revealed several statements that exemplified his disconnect with his religious identity. He stated,

When your church tells you you're wrong, when your parents tell you you're wrong, when your friends say you're wrong, to be able to say, "I am me and this is who I am, I'm going to accept this and state it and be out," . . . there is this deep-down feeling inside people that this still must be wrong because the Bible has said this and people say the Bible says this.

He went on to say that he considers, "every gay [Christian] person believes in their gut what they're doing is wrong. It's guilt within all of us gay people that what we're doing is wrong until we get that final confirmation at the pearly gates." Brent revealed in this latter statement that the disconnect between a gay sexual identity and a Christian religious identity can span the entire course of an individual's life. It is this disconnect that he personally felt and spoke of during his narrative.

Another participant, Patrick, talked extensively about this subtheme and how his Christian religious identity "wouldn't mesh" with his sexual gay identity. He

remembered when he started to engage his gay sexual identity: "You can act up with your friends, be ridiculous, be loud, effeminate, and be whatever you want to be. It was such an exciting time that you got to discover that side of yourself that had been under wraps." He remarked that, although it was exciting for him to explore the gay sexual side of his identity, "You weren't free to have that side of your life [at home]. It became an exodus starting Thursday that I would go to a larger, different city until Sunday just to get away from town." After starting to explore his gay sexual identity, he recalled having a "jarring" conversation with a deacon from his church where the deacon said that someone with a gay "lifestyle" should not have a part in the church. Patrick verbalized that his once strong Christian religious identity did not "mesh" with who he was anymore and he found himself disconnecting from church.

Integration of sexual identity and religious identity. Participants narratively reported through their development of self-understanding eventually being able to integrate their gay sexual identity and their Christian religious identity. Whereas in the former subtheme participants discussed keeping these two identities separate or experiencing one to a significantly lesser extent, in this subtheme participants recalled being able to exercise both identities. All eight participants directly discussed in their narratives an integration of their sexual and religious identities. Although all eight participants spoke to this subtheme, it is seen as an element within the larger theme, "A Development of Self-Understanding." Yet, it is made distinct here, as it was seen as a notable element, something not to be lost within the larger theme, and participants, even if just fleetingly, spoke to this subtheme specifically within their narratives.

Six participants reflected on this idea of integration within self-understanding specifically within a church context. Burton remarked how he has found a church where he could be himself and not "worry about being condemned to some hell." He said that his current church is "where I feel comfortable being who I am and having that religious structure." Similarly, John stated that he also found a church that welcomes him as a gay male. John stated,

> I'm thankful that I have a church that I can call home. To sit in the pews now, to just be fully accepted and welcomed with open arms no matter who you are, there are no words for it. I feel like I've finally found a place that I belong.

Patrick talked about this idea of integration through the context of his current church environment, remarking, "You don't have to do the whole, 'this is my work-life, this is my after-work life with my partner, and this is my Sunday life with church.' You don't have to separate all of those things." He emphasized that instead of a disconnection or compartmentalization of these two identities, his development of self-understanding reflected an eventual full integration of his sexual and religious identities. Similarly, Dean remarked,

> I feel very lucky that I can be both gay and Christian. I think being gay is really a magical part of the human condition and to be able to share that with the church, I think, is a really lovely gift I can give. We're a creative spark and have kind of a magic energy in our communities that I'm really glad we can give to the institution of the church.

This latter quote illustrated this subtheme of how Dean integrated both his Christian religious identity and his gay sexual identity.

Three individuals reflected on specific people with whom they had contact who helped them integrate their religious and sexual identities. Kurt reported that he turned to a friend because, "I certainly couldn't go to a priest to talk about my relationship." He remembered,

> I definitely had to come to peace with my whole Catholic upbringing and some of the beliefs I had there in terms of wanting to stay in that relationship because of my upbringing. She just shined a different light on it and shined the light of love, being able to love yourself, and think about yourself. She just gave me a whole fresh perspective on my belief system.

He described this friendship as important, for she was continually there for him through his identity development. Wes and Dean talked about the positive impact a faith leader had on them. Wes spoke extensively about this integration and the priest who talked to his mother about his gay sexual identity and his Christian religious identity in a very "matter-of-fact" way that made the integration of these two identities "seem very possible" to him. Towards the end of his narrative he remarked, "I would consider myself very privileged that I have no confliction in my heart between the religion I follow and the kind of human being that I am, my sexuality." As he talked specifically about this idea of integration within his coming out process, he mentioned,

> Coming out is a very bold thing to do and being able to maintain your religious ethos in your values as a Christian I think is very important. And if you can

combine the two, then why not? As long as everyone's happy and the furniture is

well arranged.

Dean similarly talked about his first service at church after 20 years and the lesbian

priest's message that allowed him to feel welcomed. These quotes exemplified other

participants' general sense of integration of their sexual identity and religious identity

within their development of self-understanding.

Theme 2: An Emotional Mosaic

The narratives of these gay male participants who have a Christian religious

identity could be described as an emotional mosaic. As evidence of this second theme,

all eight participants in their initial and follow-up interviews included emotional

responses connected to events or people included in their narrative account. The

inclusion of these emotional responses was valuable, as they allowed the participants to

create a more full narrative for the researcher, rather than the researcher making

assumptions about the mood of participants within a certain narrative scene. The

emotions that were specifically mentioned in the narratives were assorted across

narratives and within narratives, therefore, leading to the "mosaic" aspect of this theme.

The emotional responses highlighted here are ones that were mentioned by more than one

participant.

Four participants specifically mentioned the feeling of anger during the telling of

their narrative, as they reflected on other individuals' actions or inactions. When

speaking about the members of his church, Dean remembered,

They just wouldn't recognize my life as a gay man and as a Christian. I was

angry at the church for not recognizing my life as equal to what anybody else's

was. My anger kept me away for a long time.

Patrick mentioned the same emotion when he recalled a conversation he had with his

grandfather about what it meant to be gay. Patrick recalled his grandfather made

assumptions and generalizations about what it meant to be gay based upon a *700 Club*

VHS recording. As his grandfather tried to get him to watch part of this tape, Patrick

recalled, "I got up and said, 'I definitely don't agree with you and I really don't care what

you think.' I was overly emotional and angry at that point and I walked out of the house

and slammed the door."

The emotion of guilt was also specifically mentioned within three participants'

narratives. Kurt recalled his childhood and being raised with a Catholic religious

community. As he talked about his early beliefs he said, "The set of beliefs that I had

growing up Catholic, it honestly was more guilt-driven." Other participants mentioned

this idea of Catholic guilt as well. Wes mentioned that both "guilt and shame" are "very

Catholic values" that individuals who identify as both gay and Christian may feel.

Furthermore, Brent mentioned in his narrative how he felt he was called by God one

night to help a man who was in need. He recalled that the man "was obviously drunk,

sloppy, disheveled, and beaten up." Brent did not take any action to help at first, but he

said, "Then that sense of guilt came over me. Almost like God put his hand on my

shoulder saying, 'Really? You're just going to sit there?'" Although he was not Catholic

at the time of this event, he later converted to Catholicism and self-identified as a

Catholic Christian during the telling of this narrative.

Embarrassment was yet another emotion within this mosaic that occurred in three

participants' narratives. Burton, who was raised Catholic, told in his narrative about

going to confession because of a sexual encounter he had with another male. Although

he was trying to be a "good Catholic" by going to confession, the priest "had a fit" and

started screaming at him in confession. He said he felt "it was embarrassing" and

described his emotional response:

> I was like, "Oh my God. What are you doing?" I didn't want it announced to the
>
> entire world out there. I didn't know how many people are out there, but I just
>
> opened the door and left and didn't look around. I just thought it was totally
>
> inappropriate. Confession is between you and the priest and you and God, and
>
> they're not supposed to be scolding you to the entire church.

Similarly, Patrick verbalized in his narrative an encounter he had with a deacon of

his church. The deacon had a conversation with Patrick, who was at the time at a work

event, about how people who identify as gay should not be in church leadership roles.

Patrick recalled, "I'm sure I was probably three shades of red. Maybe a little

embarrassed." This embarrassment was due to the setting Patrick was in at the time, as

well as the subject matter of the conversation.

The feeling of isolation was also mentioned throughout two participants'

narratives. John referenced being alone as he recalled the event of his parents taking him

to see a religious-based counselor. He said, "It was all about me. Nobody else was in the

wrong. I'm the problem. I'm the one that's an abomination. I'm the one that's going to

hell. The finger was pointed at one person." These thoughts of being alone culminated

when John's family told him they wanted him to move out of the family home due to his

gay sexual identity. He remembered thinking, "I didn't think I had anybody. When I

was shunned from my family and church I just thought I was the only one. I had

nobody." Similarly, when Kurt was going through relationship difficulties with his

partner, he reported feeling alone. He said he "struggled in terms of who to talk to, who

to tell," as he felt like he could not approach his Catholic family with this topic and

mentioned he "certainly couldn't go to a priest to talk about my relationship."

Participants within this emotional mosaic also reported a tentative emotional

response. After John's parents pulled him away from his job, made him come home, and

ordered him to his room while they talked about what to do, John remembered, "I heard

talking downstairs, and I didn't know what's going on, and I'm just up there. As a

teenager pacing back and forth, I didn't know what was going to happen." This tentative

response was also seen in Patrick's narrative as he tried to reconcile the fact that a deacon

in his church was saying he liked a young church member that was openly gay, yet the

deacon did not want this openly gay man to be involved in leading church worship.

Patrick openly questioned during his narrative, "How can you say we love you, you can

be part of our family, but you can't lead us in service? That was the part that really

confused me." This tentative response was recalled by six of the participants due to some

aspect of their narrative.

All participants recalled feeling happy or having general positive emotions at some point within their narrative. Michael, for instance, narratively told about the event where he represented his church at an LGBT welcome event at a college campus. As he concluded his narrative, he said,

> It makes me happy just to have that big room of people hear a few points about me, and to have such an emotional response and be so excited to hear what little I came to say is a really positive thing to reflect on. It brings up good emotions. That just made me feel good and helped me feel like I'd done the right thing and hopefully presented the church in a positive way by being a good personal example.

Wes specifically mentioned similar emotions as he concluded his story of coming out to his religious parents. He remarked, "I'm happy it happened. It happened really nicely." A quote from John as he talked about his feelings related to finding a church towards the end of his narrative exemplified the general positive emotions felt by participants: "To sit in the pews now, to just be fully accepted and welcomed with open arms no matter who you are, there are no words for it. I feel like I've finally found a place that I belong." The positive emotions in these narratives are important to mention. Some may assume that the previously mentioned emotions of anger, guilt, embarrassment, isolation, and tentativeness and other such negative emotions are the only ones potentially mentioned within the narratives of gay male Christians. Yet, there is notable evidence of positive emotions as well.

Another emotion mentioned by three participants was relief. After Wes realized

his parents were not going to react negatively to his coming out, as he had read about in

online examples, he reported that he felt "relief." In a different coming out story,

Michael said that after he admitted to himself that he was gay,

> It was a big relief, really, because it was something that had been there as an
>
> internal struggle that I wasn't recognizing for so long, probably at least seven or
>
> eight years, trying to push it down, or I would tell myself it was just a phase.

Kurt, who grew up in a very Catholic home where divorce was not seen as something that

was permissible, told in his narrative how he finally had to have a conversation with his

Catholic parents that he no longer was going to be with his long-term partner. He

emphasized that his parents were both supportive of him and his decision, as he said, "It

was relieving for me to hear that and to know that I had my mom's support. To know

that she wasn't disappointed in me."

Four of the participants mentioned within their narrative a feeling of being

overwhelmed or having a mixture of emotions. As such, these participants exemplified

most distinctly the emotional mosaic thematic category. John recalled when his parents

wanted him to leave the family home after they found out he was gay. "I was feeling

hurt, sad, angry." During his narrative about the ending of his long-term relationship,

Kurt said, "I was sad about the relationship that wasn't going to be for life. I was angry

at my partner for doing what he did. I was angry because I felt like I had wasted eleven

years of my life." This mixture of emotions expressed by John and Kurt is similar to

Brent's emotions when he talked about feeling touched by God to help another

individual. After he helped the man on the street and connected him with further resources he said,

> I remember it being an emotional drive back home. This wave of emotion came, because I do believe I was given a chance to do something for a fellow human being. I just broke down afterwards because I had helped. I had decided to step in and help somebody that needed help and that was a major step for me. It was a happy kind of cry, you know, you get when something wonderful happens.

It is interesting to note in looking at these participants' quotes that facets of these gay, Christian males' narratives are so emotional-filled that some individuals think that listing multiple emotions is necessary to describe the totality of what they are feeling. This aspect underscored the theme of an emotional mosaic, as these participants created small emotional mosaics within pericopes of their narrative.

Narrative-sharing emotional mosaic. All eight participants experienced a mosaic of emotions within their narrative as seen above. The theme, "An Emotional Mosaic" showcases the emotions that participants remembered having at the time their narrative originally occurred. Interestingly, seven participants also discussed during the semi-structured and follow-up interviews present, current emotions related to the action of sharing aloud and processing their narrative. Therefore, "Narrative-Sharing Emotional Responses" was a subtheme of emotional responses. Brent said, "I was surprised at the things I remembered," that "it was refreshing to be able to tell the story to somebody," and "it was wonderful to be able to think back and revisit those moments that were really, really important when they happened." Similarly, Wes responded, "It gives my

memories a really nice message when I think about it." Dean also reflected favorably about being able to share his story, as he reported, "No one in my family is religious in the way I am, and the ability to speak openly about my faith was wonderful." John said that he was "glad" to get his story "out there." Kurt reflected, "Telling my story was difficult, but I think anytime I have told it, it's releasing. It's good to speak about it. I don't feel embarrassed by it anymore." Two participants responded that they were surprised at how easy it was for them to tell their narrative. Michael said telling his narrative "was just kind of easy and conversational, like recounting a good memory," and Patrick elaborated extensively,

> I didn't expect it to be easy. I thought it would be more emotional, and I really expected to be more hurt still by it. The story made a few things lock into place that I thought was a little different. Coming from a place of telling the story now where I'm proud of my religion and I'm proud of my sexuality and I'm proud of my life, it just reaffirmed the happiness I have in my life now.

Participants' narratives not only included a mosaic of emotional responses, but the very telling of the narrative also produced a mosaic of emotional responses. Participants reported feeling more positive emotions, like refreshed, wonderful, releasing, and surprised. One participant noted how "difficult" it was to share his narrative. Thus, the very process of sharing narratives such as these was an emotional one for most individuals.

Theme 3: A Recognition of Identity Worth

The narratives told by these participants also were a recognition of identity worth. This recognition came through self-reflection or through talking with another individual as told in the narratives. Through these encounters with others or with self, all participants spoke to the worth they felt they had and should be shown from others. Participants verbalized how they recognized they should not be treated as less than anyone else just because they, as individuals with a Christian religious identity, also possess a gay sexual identity. Instead, all participants acknowledged they had value and should thus be treated as worthy.

Dean remembered growing up in the church, being very involved, and finally in college coming to the realization that the church was not going to accept the issue of gay marriage. He commented that the church in general "just wouldn't recognize my life as a gay man and as a Christian. I was angry at the church for not recognizing my life as equal to what anybody else's was." He recognized this inequality and said, "I've always believed I was equal to everybody else. I've never bought into the stuff that I was less than." Therefore, because the church did not recognize his worth, he left the church when he graduated from college and did not participate in organized religious activity for 20 years.

In a similar fashion, Burton recognized his worth through his act of confessing to a priest about his same-sex encounter. Although he expected the priest to think his actions were bad and that he would need to do some type of repentance, he reported the priest loudly said, "That's evil" and "You're going to go to hell." Burton commented

that the priest was "crossing the line" with these comments, and he felt it was "totally inappropriate." As Burton continued to talk about this experience, he remembered, "I was going to be the gay male that I was" despite what the priest said. Burton ultimately left the Catholic Church altogether and reflected, "I wouldn't and I didn't stay in a religious tradition that condemned me to hell." This participant recognized his worth through these immediate and long-term actions.

Kurt reflected on his sense of worth through disclosing a conversation with his parents about ending his long-term relationship. He experienced a very "rough" time when he was wrestling with leaving his partner of 11 years and how the church, and subsequently his Catholic parents, would view this action. He revealed that his mom said, "I know you're a good person. I know you. We want you to be happy, and you're obviously not happy and we've seen that you haven't been happy for a long time. I think you're doing the right thing." This experienced support was a "huge relief" for Kurt and helped him take steps to end his relationship. After this conversation he said, "I drew the line and realized . . . I was never going to be the most important person in [my partner's] life and that was of utmost importance to me." Through this conversation with his parents, Kurt focused on his sense of worth in his narrative.

Instead of recognizing his worth based upon the beliefs of an organization or the actions of other individuals, Brent recognized his worth through his encounter of being touched by God. Brent spoke at length about gay men in general:

I firmly believe every gay [Christian] person believes in their gut that what

they're doing is wrong. It's guilt within all of us gay people that what we're

doing is wrong until we get that final confirmation at the pearly gates.

Brent reflected feeling this way until his experience in the gay bar where he felt tasked by

God to help another individual. Through this event, Brent commented that he came to a

place of "reconciliation" and said, "It reassured me with being gay. It reassured me that I

was loved." Therefore, Brent's encounter with God helped him recognize his worth.

Unlike the participants above, Wes spoke in general terms about his view of his

worth. Towards the end of his narrative about his confirmation and coming out to his

parents, he reflected on how he viewed his worth. He stated, "I just expect people to be

cool with [my sexual identity]. For me it's so normal, because I feel like I've always

been like this." These reflective thoughts emphasized Wes's general understanding of

himself and his recognition of his worth.

Identification of Narrative Uniqueness

There were obvious similarities in the narratives of these participants that were

utilized to create the themes mentioned above. Yet, there were some unique elements

within the narratives that should be highlighted. One prominent inclusion displayed by a

participant was a responsiveness to the political atmosphere of the church. When Dean

disengaged from his church due to his gay sexual identity, he reflected, "I didn't hear

much from the religious-left about anything. There was this huge shift going on that I

believe was primarily politically-based." He then said, "I realized that the issue for me

was during the intervening 20 years the religious-right had really claimed religion as their

mantel." This claim, he thought, led to the church not accepting issues like marriage equality. He reflected,

> Wow, there's really only one way to counter that and that's to support liberal institutions. I thought I can make a small difference in my own community by going back to a church, supporting it financially, supporting it with my time, and my efforts, and my attendance.

Dean's thoughts here are important, because (a) they were a large component of his narrative that were not mentioned by the other participants and (b) they illustrated how significantly politics can influence the subject of sexual and religious identities. Furthermore, this unique element of his narrative highlighted another aspect of his identity, political identity, and how it was not only essential to his narrative, but integrated fundamentally with his other identities (i.e., sexual and religious identities).

Another unique element within these narratives was the fact that only one participant specifically mentioned suicidal thoughts and actions. John reported that after he had his session with the church-based counselor where he felt "degraded," he attempted suicide. He remembered being in the shower, that his mom "had her razors there and I just looked at them and I tried cutting my wrist. My brother didn't know I was in the shower, walked in, he saw me, and stopped me." John recalled that he was put on suicide watch for 30 days to ensure his safety. Given that the mental health of gay males has been researched and found to include a variety of concerns, including that of suicidality, it is interesting to note that only one of eight participants expressed this important mental health concern.

It was important in the examination of these narratives to not only highlight themes and any unique elements from across the narratives, as done above, but also to illuminate what was expected but not said in the narratives. For instance, all participants included parents within their narratives, but most participants did not include siblings. Wes mentioned that he was an only child and John referenced his younger brother in a very fleeting way. This leaves one to wonder what role siblings play within the family system for individuals who identify as gay and Christian. Furthermore, although participants talked about the development of their identities, how both of these identities hold importance for them currently, and how they were able to bring both their Christian and gay identities together, none specifically referenced working with or interpreting biblical passages that some would say condemn homosexuality. One participant, Patrick, mentioned consulting books about the experiences of gay Christian individuals, but he did not specifically state to what degree these books referenced biblical passages. As these passages seem to be at the heart of identity conflict for many individuals, it is notable that no participant referenced them in their narrative. Finally, no participant made reference to major historical events related to the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, in June 2015, marriage equality was granted through the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (Haddad, 2016) and more recently the states of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas passed religious exemption legislation (ACA, 2017; DeMillo, 2016; Green, 2016). All of these are recent landmark events in the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement, yet other historical events, such as the Stonewall Riots, could have been noted but were not. No participant included these prominent historical events within their narrative,

despite the fact that such events directly impacted certain participants, such as the three participants who were either married or engaged at the time of this study. Instead, participants selected events that happened specifically to them or to their family, and/or occurred within their own church community. This leaves one to wonder what impact these larger historical LGBTQ+ events have within the narratives of these participants.

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter addressed the results from the narrative analysis. First, a summary of each participant's narrative was provided to help readers gain a good sense of participant's narratives. A brief overview of the thematic structure within this chapter was then provided. Through this structure, one can see that the developed themes from data analysis show: (a) a development of self-understanding, (b) an emotional mosaic, and (c) a recognition of worth. These themes helped to answer the research question: "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?" An in-depth examination of the themes and subthemes illustrated through the utilization of salient quotes was arranged to add resolution to the research question. After these themes, unique elements of the narratives were highlighted.

The next chapter of this dissertation explores these results in relationship to published research within the areas of religious identity, the identity of gay male individuals, and the intersection of these two. Chapter 4 also discusses and addresses implications for this research within the areas of counselor practice, supervision, education, service, and future research considerations within the counseling profession. Furthermore, limitations of this study are discussed.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation study was to understand the narratives of gay males who identify as Christian. Although some researchers have focused on religious topics (e.g., Bishop et al., 2003; Chiswick & Mirtcheva, 2013; Stanard & Painter, 2004) and others on various aspects of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., Beane, 1981; Fukuyama et al., 2008; Marsiglio, 1993), limited qualitative research has examined the intersection of religious identity, sexual identity, and its relationship to the field of counseling. Most of these studies are conceptual in nature (e.g., Krondorfer, 2007; Rosik & Popper, 2014; Wood & Conley, 2014) or use quantitative approaches (e.g., Meladze & Brown, 2015; Page et al., 2013; Reese et al., 2014; N. Wright, 2014). Through this narrative analysis, I showcased the complex storied-experiences of gay Christians.

Chapter 4 opens with a discussion of the results in relationship to previously conducted research in the areas of sexual identity, religious identity, and the intersection of these two identities. Implications for counseling practice, supervision, education, and service are then discussed. Recommendations for future research and this study's limitations are included. A chapter summary is presented to conclude the chapter.

Current Findings and Previous Literature

The research question for this study was: "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?" The answer to this research question encompassed the following themes: (a) a development of self-understanding, (b) an

emotional mosaic, and (c) a recognition of identity worth. Each theme is examined

below in relationship to previous research.

A Development of Self-Understanding

All eight narratives reflected a development of participants' self-understanding in

regards to their gay sexual identity, Christian religious identity, and the integration of

these two across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This development of

self-understanding is similar to stages in religious identity developmental models (Elkind,

1978; Goldman, 1965, 1968; Oser, 1991) and sexual identity developmental models

(Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). The aforementioned developmental

theorists suggested identity is fluid and develops over time. The participants' developed

religious and sexual self-understanding as shown in their narratives is discussed below.

Development of self-understanding of sexual identity. The participants'

narratives exemplified the stages of Cass's (1979, 1984) sexual identity developmental

model. Seven narratives illustrated the first stage (identity confusion), six contained

elements related to the fourth stage (identity acceptance), and all narratives described

events related to Cass's (1979, 1984) last stage (identity synthesis). Stages two, three,

and five of Cass's (1979, 1984) model were not as clearly discussed in the narratives.

Similarly, all narratives represented the last stage of both Troiden's (1989) and

D'Augelli's (1994) models (commitment to gay identity and entering into the gay

community, respectively), but not all stages of these models were evident in the

narratives. It is likely that some stages did not emerge within the narratives because there

was evidence of identity integration between participants' gay sexual identity and Christian religious identity.

It is important that counselors continue to utilize these models (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989) as a way to more fully conceptualize clients. Noting that a client is in stage five of Cass's (1979) model provides far more description and context than simply stating that the client identifies as gay. Counselors can also share these models with clients as a way to talk about sexual identity development and normalize this process. For instance, if a client is in a rural community and not around other gay men to compare his developing sexual identity, counselors could bring these models into the counseling session to provide the client with a point of reference and normalization.

The development of self-understanding of sexual identity supports research literature. The development of one's gay sexual identity is an ongoing process (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Plummer, 1975). Bilodeau and Renn (2005) stated that gay males may experience a variety of significant moments during this process (e.g., resolving internal conflict with identifying as gay and coming out). These narratives illustrated an array of similar events related to self-understanding in sexual identity: recognizing a non-heterosexual identity, coming out to family and friends, engaging in community with other gay individuals, and expressing pride in their own sexual identity. Participants' inclusion of these events allows counselors to recognize noteworthy elements that could occur in the narratives of gay males.

Counselors should be aware that self-understanding of sexual identity is an ongoing process, know key events related to this process (e.g., resolution of internal identity conflict, coming out, and having identity pride), and inquire about such events when working with clients. This knowledge allows counselors to delineate the process of a client's sexual identity development, instead of merely viewing the adoption of a gay sexual identity as one summative event. Such knowledge gives counselors information about clients' sexual identity development, which can be useful as rapport continues to be built and goals established. The sharing of these significant moments also allows counselors to see the development of self-understanding in sexual identity from the client's perspective.

This theme is supported by additional research literature. Researchers highlighted how gay males need support as they understand their sexual identity (Beane, 1981; Fukuyama et al., 2008). The narratives showcased hardships in coming out and emphasized the need to work through their gay sexual identity with family, employers, doctors, and religious leaders. Participants' narratives also illustrated support from friends, family members, and religious leaders. Although counseling and treatment providers have historically not supported gay sexual identity formation, as shown by the use of electric shock therapy, chemical aversions (Haldeman, 1994), and reparative therapy techniques (HRC, 2017; Wood & Conley, 2014), Farmer and colleagues (2013) noted the more current affirmative attitude and support of counselors towards gay identity development. It is important that counselors demonstrate support through encouraging gay sexual identity, empowering strengths, supporting self-determination, helping

determine homophobic forces in life to challenge these influences, and considering problems in the context of homophobia and discrimination (Crisp & McCave, 2007). Workshops and webinars could be conducted to help counselors know how to best implement these supportive actions and assist clients in developing their self-understanding of sexual identity.

Distinct differences can also be seen when comparing these narratives with published research. Mental health concerns are evident among gay individuals, such as depression (Cochran & Mays, 2009), obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic disorder (Sandfort et al., 2001). Yet, only one participant mentioned any mental health concern related to his sexual identity. Beane (1981) reported that negative images, such as a child molester or an effeminate hairstylist, may negatively affect gay males' self-understanding as they develop their sexual identity. No participant in this study self-reported any such negative image. This lack of negative imagery could be because these narratives focused on the integration of identity and not just participants' developing sexual identity. Counselors need to consider that although mental health concerns and negative images may be prevalent among gay males, these characteristics do not typify all gay males. Although mental health concerns and negative imagery information is useful for a variety of reasons (e.g., informing care, advocacy efforts, and increasing professional knowledge), counselors need to consider the individual distinctiveness of each gay male they work with without prior assumptions.

Development of self-understanding of religious identity. This theme of

development of self-understanding also reflected religious identity development. All

narratives included the final stages of Goldman's (1965) and Elkind's (1978) models,

characterized by an individual's ability to think abstractly and reflect internally about

religious concepts, respectively. Oser's (1991) model has more distinct stages, spanning

across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Three narratives reflected Oser's fourth

stage (Burton, Kurt, and Wes displayed autonomy of choosing a religious identity), three

narratives reflected stage five (John, Michael, and Patrick identified an increase in

importance of sociality in religious communities), and two narratives reflected stage six

(Brent and Dean illustrated the use of universal-style language within religion). This

division of stages underscored that not all narratives revealed the exact same level of

development of religious identity.

Religious identity developmental models (Elkind, 1978; Goldman, 1965; Oser,

1991) can be beneficial resources for counselors. These models (Elkind, 1978; Goldman,

1965; Oser, 1991) remind counselors that self-understanding of religious identity is a

process, as illustrated through these narratives. These participants provided a unique

narrative view of the diverse paths and outcomes that clients may experience during their

process of self-understanding in religious identity. Counselors should, therefore, be

prepared to work with individuals at different levels of religious identity

self-understanding. Religious identity developmental models (Elkind, 1978; Goldman,

1965; Oser, 1991) can help provide more in-depth conceptualization of clients, as clients

provided with these models can inform counselors of their own religious identity

development. This knowledge gives counselors more specific information about the client's religious identity self-understanding, which can inform treatment.

This study supports other research on self-understanding of religious identity. Griffith and Griggs (2001) discussed how religious identity is not static, but changes across an individual's life. These narratives illustrated how all participants described the continuous development of their self-understanding of religious identity. Moulin (2013) stated that adolescence is a particularly critical time in the development of one's religious identity. This finding was apparent in this study, as participants' adolescent years were when many chose to de-emphasize their Christian religious identity. Counselors should recognize that religious identity is not something a client merely has or does not have, but is an evolving, dynamic process for individuals. Counselors should be particularly mindful of adolescent clients, as these narratives and previous research (Moulin, 2013) highlighted that much change can occur for individuals' religious self-understanding during this time.

Other supportive research can be seen through Oppong's (2013) assertion that an individual's self-understanding of religious identity can be an influential factor in multiple areas of an individual's life. These narratives reflected how participants' self-understanding of their religious identity impacted relationships with partners, family, and friends, as well as their routine activities and view of self. Some narratives revealed how the participants' developing religious identity positively impacted these areas (e.g., building friendship with other religious individuals), whereas other narratives reflected a negative impact (e.g., having family arguments related to religious identity). Counselors

should be mindful that clients' developing religious identity can positively or negatively impact other aspects of life and not view clients' religious identity as an isolated element. This knowledge could inform counselors' understanding of clients' presenting concern, conceptualization of clients, treatment goals, and desired outcomes. Such awareness can help counselors work with clients on issues related to their developing religious identity (i.e., how this fits with their sexual identity).

Development of self-understanding of identity integration. The theme of self-understanding also includes how the narratives reflected an integration of religious and sexual identity. Michael's narrative is used here to illustrate this integration of gay sexual and Christian religious identities. Michael reported being raised in a family that expected him to be a Christian. This epitomizes Oser's (1991) first stage of religious development where one's religious identity is heavily influenced by others. He recalled first perceiving feelings associated with a gay identity while he was still living at home and accepting the possibility of being gay. These actions (i.e., initial perception of a gay identity) align with Cass's (1979, 1984) first and second stages. Michael described moving to college during his early adulthood, distancing himself from Christianity, and coming out to family and friends. Coming out as gay exemplifies stage four of Cass's (1979, 1984) model, identity acceptance. Distancing himself from Christianity personifies stage four of Oser's (1991) model in which an individual decides what level of autonomy he would like in his relationship with God. He reported the heavy influence of friends on his religious identity during this time, thus aligning with stage five of Oser's (1991) model. After college, Michael sought out, attended, and became a member of a

Unitarian/Universalist church, a denomination with beliefs that are congruent with the universal love and religious commonality mentioned by Oser (1991) in the final stages of his religious developmental model. Michael then discussed pride in being gay and reported finally being able to integrate his gay sexual identity with other aspects of his life, such as his Christian religious identity, stages five and six of Cass's (1979, 1984) model, respectively.

Results of this study support prior research conducted on the integration of religious and sexual identity development. Wood and Conley (2014) noted that identity integration is most favorable for individuals if they are already in an affirming religious community or if they change churches to one that is affirming of their sexual identity. Seven narratives illustrated how participants sought to integrate their developing identities through attending a new religious organization that affirmed their identities. Levy (2011) stated that individuals may encounter others who will negatively label them (e.g., "sinner") or suggest religious-based counseling as they seek to develop this integrated identity. Five narratives revealed such negative labeling. One individual, John, reported his parents taking him to see a faith-based counselor in hopes of deterring the development of his gay identity. In light of these potential negative responses, counselors should be prepared to offer a supportive environment through affirmative means (e.g., encouraging gay sexual identity and empowering the client's strengths; Crisp & McCave, 2007). Counselors should also be equipped to talk about the loss of a client's religious community. Furthermore, counselors could have a list of open and affirming

religious communities ready to give to clients if they are seeking a religious community to join.

Differences can also be seen when comparing these narratives with other research. A. J. Wright and Stern (2016) found that the presence of religion in the life of adult gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals actually predicted a greater negative sexual identity. The same conclusion cannot be drawn from this study, as these narratives identified how participants integrated their sexual and religious identities, were actively involved in religious communities, reported positive emotions about religious involvement, and had pride in their gay identity. Dean, for example, reported pride in his gay identity and excitement to share this aspect of himself through his involvement in his church. This difference in findings may be due to this study's unique participants and their ability to positively integrate their religious and sexual identities. If participants negatively experienced this integration of religious and sexual identities they may not volunteer to participate in research. Counselors should be prepared to meet with clients who have developed a negative self-understanding of their religious or sexual identity. Counselors can build a professional relationship, identify the elements that affirm a negative self-view, and set goals to develop a more positive self-understanding of sexual identity or religious identity.

Uncertainty of Sexual Identity

This theme of self-understanding development also contained the subtheme of uncertainty of sexual identity. Seven narratives identified this uncertainty of sexual identity, as participants reported confusion due to perceiving actions, feelings, and/or

thoughts that were more consistent with a homosexual, rather than heterosexual, identity. John reported how he did not know his sexual identity when he was growing up and dismissed suggestions that he might have feelings for other boys. Burton recalled early sexual experimentation with other boys his age, but did not consider himself gay until later in life. These examples illustrate that this subtheme of uncertainty of sexual identity within the larger theme of developing self-understanding was prevalent for most participants.

Uncertainty related to sexual identity development. Sexual development theorists (Cass, 1979, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989) incorporated the idea of sexual identity uncertainty. Uncertainty is recognized as individuals experience cognitive dissonance related to sexuality (Cass, 1979), note sexual identity differences between themselves and their heterosexual peers (Troiden, 1989), recognize sexual attractions that are not heterosexual in nature (D'Augelli, 1994), and choose to either reject or accept the possibility of being gay (Cass, 1979, 1984). Seven of the narratives in this study displayed this uncertainty.

Sexual identity developmental models (Cass, 1979, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989) can be a point of reference for counselors when clients desire to explore their gay sexual identity, have a concern of possibly being gay, or state that they do not know who they are sexually. These models (Cass, 1979, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989) can inform both counselors' and clients' understanding of how uncertainty is included in gay sexual identity development, thus normalizing what a client may be experiencing. Prompts to help facilitate this conversation could include: "When did you

first experience feelings of sexual identity confusion?," "What action or inaction have you taken to discover your sexual identity?," and potentially "What type of sexual identity would you like after this uncertainty is cleared up?"

Other researchers have studied uncertainty in sexual identity. Pachankis and Bernstein (2012) stated that some adolescent gay males begin to discover their gay sexual identity and make efforts to present as more masculine, closely monitor their speech content, and avoid being seen around other gay men. These actions are done to avert negative evaluations, evade adverse responses from family, and typical of some gay males as they progress through this uncertainty period (Pachankis & Bernstein, 2012). Contrary to research conducted by Pachankis and Bernstein (2012), no participant's narrative displayed actions to avoid the recognition of his sexual identity by others. This could be because these narratives focused on the intersection of participants' religious and sexual identities, not just their sexual identity alone. Cass (1979, 1984), Troiden (1989), and D'Augelli (1994) also noted that uncertainty of sexual identity occurs predominantly during adolescence. These participants did not report protective actions, such as those listed above. Yet, five participants recalled adverse responses from parents and family members (e.g., taking the participant to see a priest, spraying holy water on a participant to change his sexuality, and highlighting negative stereotypes of gay individuals). Swank and colleagues (2012) indicated that other adverse societal components, such as experiencing stigma, prejudice, and discrimination related to sexual identity, can impact one's uncertainty in adopting a gay sexual identity. Four participants

discussed being treated differently than heterosexual counterparts or in a stigmatizing way, such as Dean who reported on marriage inequality.

Professional counselors should be aware of the adversity clients encounter as they seek to process the uncertainty of a gay sexual identity. Inquiring how other people (e.g., family, friends, and employers) have or may respond to the client exploring a gay sexual identity or potentially coming out as gay could be beneficial for the client to process. Counselors should be particularly mindful of the proclivity of adolescents to present with uncertainty related to sexual identity development, protective factors they may be implementing, adverse reactions from family members, and negative societal experiences. Counselors should also be aware that experiences during this stage of uncertainty will be different for each individual.

Uncertainty of sexual identity related to the integration of religious identity. Influencing this sexual uncertainty is the fact that all participants self-identified as Christian. Religion can be an influence in various life areas, including one's sexuality (Garcia et al., 2008). Yet, consulting Christian friends or religious leaders on one's gay sexual identity may be problematic, as approximately 46% of Christians (C. Murphy, 2015) and some denominations (United Methodist Church, 2017) believe in the incompatibility of being gay and Christian. This was personified in Burton's narrative when he reported being yelled at by his priest during confession and in Patrick's narrative as he recalled a deacon explaining that gay men should not be in church leadership positions. Therefore, these participants' narratives indicated the effect a Christian religious identity can have on an individual's gay sexual identity.

Counselors should be aware of clients' various identities. Although identities can be conceptually separated in discussion, they are integrated to make up one person. Counselors should explore with clients how these identities complement or conflict with one another, as well as discuss how clients have attempted to integrate the two identities. Counselors should also not assume that a client's religious identity or experiences are in opposition to his sexual identity, as not all religious traditions have the same beliefs towards a gay sexual identity (Rodriguez, 2009). A particular client reporting a gay sexual identity may have been raised in a church that affirmed his gay identity. This was exemplified in Wes' narrative when he reported that his priest said God made him gay.

Disconnection of Religious Identity

The theme of development of self-understanding also houses the subtheme of disconnection of religious identity. This disconnection was seen as a departure from or suspension of one's Christian identity and was seen in seven narratives. Participants reported how they stopped identifying with their religion, no longer wished to be associated with the church they attended, and how a once strong religious identity was not displayed as prominently. Burton reported that after his confession experience with his priest, he disconnected from his religious identity. Patrick reported leaving the church he had known all his life and having a feeling of dread for a period of time whenever he attended any church events. These examples support this subtheme of disconnection of religious identity.

Disconnection related to religious development. Disconnecting from a closely held religious identity is addressed in Oser's (1991) religious developmental model. Oser and Gmunder (1991) noted that individuals in stage four build autonomy and decide whether they would like to pursue a relationship with God. This stage generally occurs during late adolescence and early adulthood (Oser & Gmunder, 1999). Seven narratives showed evidence of disconnection when participants were in their late adolescent or early adult years. Oser's (1991) model can help counselors understand clients' disconnection from their religious identity, serve as a reference to normalize clients' feelings, and can be a psychoeducation tool that counselors share with clients. Discussion could be prompted by counselors saying, "Tell me what religion used to look like in your life" and "I'm curious what meaning religion used to have for you." Counselors should allow individuals to respond in a narrative fashion, as much meaning can be found through these prompts.

Disconnecting from one's religious identity has been shown to lead to mental health consequences (Wagner et al., 1994) such as depression (L. Miller et al., 1997) and suicide (Neeleman & Lewis, 1999). Although seven of the participants reported a religious disconnection, only one narrative mentioned suicide. Wood and Conley (2014) asserted that an individual can experience a sense of loss due to his religious identity disconnection. All narratives depicted the participants growing up in religious communities and experiencing loss when they were no longer active within these communities. Dean exemplified this loss as he reported how he missed worshiping with other people for 20 years when he was not attending a church. Loss was also evident in

the narratives through a separation from family members, as John reported not seeing his family for eight years after he disconnected from his religious identity. Counselors should be knowledgeable of the potential mental health concerns when working with individuals who are or have disconnected from a previously held religious identity. It would be important for counselors to have assessment skills in order to identify conditions like depression or suicidality. Counselors should also be prepared to evaluate these mental health concerns along with the potential sense of loss clients may experience as they disconnect from their religious identity.

Disconnect of religious identity related to the integration of sexual identity. These narratives illustrated the influence of sexual identity on religious identity development by directly linking participants' disconnection from Christianity to their gay sexual identity. Brent reported how biblical passages purported as being against homosexuality produced incongruent feelings within him. As a result, he reported his religious identity to be less important. Patrick stated that he could not find a way for his religious and sexual identities to fit together and thus abandoned his religious identity. All narratives with evidence of a disconnection of religious identity, even if temporary, were due to participants' choice to focus on their gay sexual identity over their Christian religious identity.

These narratives support and expand our current understanding of individuals disconnecting from their religious identity as they seek to integrate their sexual identity. Although researchers have found that some gay men choose to disconnect from their religious identity due to their sexual identity (Wagner et al., 1994), this dissertation

research examined this topic through a unique narrative lens. Through these participants' narratives, counselors have the ability to hear, study, and gain a more in-depth understanding of this religious identity disconnection. Wagner and colleagues (1994) noted that 69% of gay men reported a rejection of their religious identity when they tried to integrate it with their sexual identity. Rejection of religious identity in this study was higher, as seven out of eight narratives indicated participants disconnecting from their religious identity due to their sexual identity. Although Oser (1991) accounted for external influencing factors in his religious developmental model (e.g., one's level of autonomy, morality, and sense of judgment), he did not account for one's sexual identity. Sexual identity was very prominent for these participants as they decided to disconnect from their religious identity.

Counselors' current understanding of the balance, or sometimes imbalance, that exist in gay males regarding their sexual and religious identities continues to develop with this research. These narratives highlighted how an individual's sexual identity can impact their religious identity, thus adding another consideration into counselors' understanding of religious development. Counselors should talk with clients about their disconnected religious identity, its connection to their sexual identity, and the influence these have for other areas of their life. This knowledge can help counselors more fully conceptualize clients, their presenting concerns, and the development of treatment goals and objectives in a more holistic manner.

Integration of Sexual and Religious Identities

All eight narratives illustrated participants' integration of their sexual and

religious identities through their development of self-understanding. John's narrative

showed how he was able to integrate his sexual and religious identities through finding a

Christian community that welcomed and accepted him as a gay Christian male. Dean

stated his ability to integrate these two identities came from hearing a lesbian priest give

a sermon on the need to welcome all individuals. All narratives revealed how

participants were able to integrate both of these identities in a meaningful way.

Prior research has examined singular aspects of identity, such as racial identity

(Cross, 1995), ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992), and gender identity (Martin et al., 2002).

Other researchers have examined multiple factors of identity simultaneously (S. R. Jones

& McEwen, 2000). Examining the integration of a Christian religious identity and a gay

sexual identity adds to the counseling literature, as Halkitis and colleagues (2009) noted

the paucity of research that combines these two areas. This dissertation research allows

counselors to see how these identities can come together in the life of a client and can

strengthen counselors' ability to work with this client population. For instance,

counselors could implement similar narrative considerations (e.g., thinking about how the

individual's identity came into being, inquiring about the narrative, and asking follow-up

questions about unclear portions of the narrative) in their practice to help clients explain,

clarify, and work through the integration of their identities. This work would benefit

clients, as integrating these identities could help clients decrease cognitive dissonance

(Rodriguez, 2009), emotional pain, and psychological distress (Sherry et al., 2010).

Sexual identity integration. Integrating these identities requires counselors to consider clients' sexual identity development. Findings from these narratives are supported in other research. Wood and Conley (2014) noted that gay individuals may be better able to achieve identity integration by attending welcoming and affirming churches. Five participants reported leaving churches in order to attend a church that affirms LGBTQ+ individuals. Counselors should be prepared to talk with clients about this possibility, what it might mean for them to leave a church that is not supportive of their sexual identity, and how it might impact other areas of their life (e.g., family, community support, religious beliefs). Counselors should also be ready to give a list of churches in the client's area that are open and affirming for gay individuals to potentially help with this process.

Results from these narratives are also supported through research conducted by Levy (2011) who noted the negative responses (e.g., telling them they are going to hell for being gay, suggesting faith-based counseling) that gay men may experience from others. Burton reported how his priest told him he was going to hell after he confessed his sexual activity with another man. John reported his parents taking him to see a faith-based counselor after he was outed as gay. As clients present with similar events, counselors can help them process these problems through the lens of homophobia and discrimination (Crisp & McCave, 2007). Counselors can further assist clients by helping them determine other areas in their life that may cause similar distress, assisting them as they challenge homophobic influences, and encouraging a positive sexual identity development (Crisp & McCave, 2007).

Wagner and colleagues (1994) offered other supportive research, as they noted identity integration between individuals' sexual and religious identities is associated with increased psychological well-being and acceptance of one's sexual identity. These aspects of well-being and acceptance were seen through these narratives. Wes stated that he can be himself without having conflict between his sexuality and religion. Dean reported that he is happy he can share his sexual identity with the church. Counselors should be mindful of clients' psychological well-being, communicate how acceptance of a gay sexual identity could be one component of a client's overall welfare, and incorporate this into a treatment plan and counseling goals. Counselors can then assist clients in achieving an affirmative stance towards their sexual identity through the affirmative methods described above (Crisp & McCave, 2007).

Religious identity integration. Integrating these identities also requires counselors to consider clients' religious identity development. Halkitis and colleagues (2009) noted that the lack of research conducted on the integration of sexual and religious identities could be due to Christians historically not talking about homosexuality. Yet, these participants remarked that the process of sharing their narrative was a positive and enjoyable experience. Brent reported how wonderful it was to think through some of the events of his narrative. Dean remarked that it gave him a wonderful opportunity to speak openly about his Christian religious and gay sexual identities. Therefore, counselors should allow their Christian clients that are gay the opportunity to tell their story. Telling their narrative in counseling can be a positive experience for clients and may be the first opportunity they have had to talk about both of their identities simultaneously (Halkitis et

al., 2009). Counselors can implement narrative elements (e.g., thinking about the setting, what occurred before the events the client is telling, what occurred after, who was involved; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in their practice to help the client explain, clarify, and process their narrative as these participants did. This gives clients an opportunity to tell their story, as well as provides counselors information to build a counselor-client relationship, potential courses of action in counseling, and overall treatment goals.

Other researchers noted that some clients may choose to reject their Christian religious identity when seeking to integrate it with their gay sexual identity (Gross, 2008; Wagner et al., 1994; Wood & Conley, 2014). This was supported by the seven narratives in which participants reported disconnecting or rejecting their Christian religious identity for some period of time. Yet, researchers noted the benefits from having a religious identity, such as better psychosocial adjustment (Cotton et al., 2006) and lower rates of depression and anxiety compared to non-religious counterparts (Koenig & Larson, 2001). Counselors should be prepared to talk with clients about their religious identity, look at all options clients have regarding their religious identity, (e.g., maintaining it, disregarding it, compartmentalizing it), and help them make an informed decision (Wood & Conley, 2014). Counselors could choose to provide psychoeducation about the benefits of a religious identity (Cotton et al., 2006; Koenig & Larson, 2001). Counselors could also help clients examine what it means for them to be Christian and possibly redefine this idea from previously held ideas or beliefs about Christianity in order to integrate it with their gay sexual identity (Wood & Conley, 2014).

An Emotional Mosaic

All eight narratives shared by participants contained a mosaic of emotions (e.g., anger, guilt, embarrassment, isolation, tentativeness, happiness, relief, and a sense of being overwhelmed). Participants also expressed additional emotions, such as surprise, refreshment, and feeling wonderful, as they reflected on the process of sharing their narrative. Thus, participants experienced a mosaic of emotions, both as the principal individual within the narrative, and through the recollection and retelling of that narrative.

An emotional mosaic due to sexual identity. Participants in this study directly connected emotions to events that occurred because of their sexual identity. Patrick reported growing angry and eventually walking out of the house over being lectured by his grandfather about what being gay meant for his life. John recalled feeling tentative after his parents found out he was gay. The range and prominence of the emotionality within these narratives aligned with previous literature on sexual identity. Researchers noted how depression (Cochran & Mays, 2009; Fergusson et al., 2005; Jorm et al., 2002), obsessive-compulsive disorder (Sandfort et al., 2001), and generalized anxiety disorder (Cochran et al., 2003) are predominant mental health concerns for gay males. Gay males have been found to report higher rates of substance abuse and dependence contrasted with their heterosexual counterparts (King et al., 2008). All of these mental health concerns are associated with a variety of emotions (Cochran & Mays, 2009). Feinstein and colleagues (2012) discussed the negative feelings that many gay men may have towards their own sexual identity. This internalized homonegativity can prompt gay

males to have negative emotions about themselves and effect their emotional attractions towards other individuals (Mayfield, 2001). Vaughan and colleagues (2014) reported more positive emotions experienced by gay males, such as happiness, relief, contentment, and pride. Participants of this study reported similar emotions (e.g., happiness and relief).

These narratives broaden our current understanding of the range of emotions experienced by gay men. As opposed to previous quantitative studies (Cochran et al., 2003; Cochran & Mays, 2009; Fergusson et al., 2005; Jorm et al., 2002), this study was conducted with a narrative analysis that allowed participants' emotions to be examined in the context of their own lives. From this context, counselors can have a better understanding of the emotions experienced by gay men, how these emotions can relate to other experiences, and how these participants respond to their emotions. Counselors should be prepared to discuss a wide variety of emotions when working with gay men, help them recognize the emotions within their stories, and help them reflect on their emotions as they tell their stories. Coping mechanisms, such as deep breathing or anger management skills, may need to be introduced to help clients manage their emotions.

An emotional mosaic due to religious identity. Participants in this study also directly connected emotions to narrative events that occurred due to their Christian religious identity, engagement in a religious community, and involvement in activities related to these beliefs. Kurt reported how his early religious identity as a Catholic involved a substantial amount of guilt. Brent recalled this same emotion when he thought back to the time he felt God calling him to help an injured man. This theme of an

emotional mosaic is also supported by other literature that specifically examined religious identity. Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) noted the emotional turmoil and distress that individuals may feel as they begin to develop their Christian religious identity. Hill and colleagues (2000) stated that emotional responses can accompany conversion to a religious identity and the engagement in religious activities. Miller-Perrin and Mancuso (2015) studied the complex relationship between religion and emotions, but emphasized the positive emotions (e.g., joy, tranquility, compassion) that someone with a religious identity can experience. This prior research illustrated the range of emotions clients can experience across a spectrum of religious identity development.

The mixture of emotions seen in prior research mirrors the positive and negative emotions in these narratives. Counselors should be mindful of this emotional mosaic which individuals with a Christian religious identity can experience, listen for the range of emotions that clients may reveal, and help clients be aware of these emotions. Professional counselors can also highlight specific religious events clients mention which may prompt stronger emotions. Participants reported specific events (e.g., talking with religious leaders, engaging in the act of confession, being confirmed), which led to strong emotions. Counselors can process positive emotions with clients and help develop coping skills to manage their negative emotions.

An emotional mosaic due to the integration of religious and sexual identities. These narratives revealed a mosaic of emotions that occurred due to participants' integration of their religious and sexual identities. Patrick reported feeling embarrassed when a deacon of his church talked to him at a work event about why gay men should not

have church leadership positions. Kurt recalled feeling alone as he felt he could not talk

to his Catholic family or priest when he was experiencing relationship difficulties with

his partner. These narratives support the findings of other researchers that examined

emotions through the lens of individuals with both a Christian religious identity and a gay

sexual identity. In their conceptual work on this topic, Lee and Newberg (2005)

highlighted the emotional anguish that gay men can experience from committing

religious transgressions (e.g., having an attraction towards or having a sexual relationship

with someone of the same gender). Sherry and colleagues (2010) found that

compartmentalization can lead to increased emotional distress, exemplified through

emotions like shame or guilt. Such emotions were reported through the narratives of this

study. Yet, Sherry and colleagues noted that even after firmly establishing both

identities, 12.4% of participants reported still feeling guilt and/or shame. Although six

participants reported similar emotions as they were developing their integrated identities,

no participant at the time of this study reported feelings of guilt or shame.

The mosaic of emotions reported by these participants is different than just the

shame and guilt reported by other researchers (Sherry et al., 2010). Counselors can gain

a sense from these narratives of how this emotional mosaic fits into the context of the

overall lives of gay Christians. Professional counselors should be aware that working

with gay Christian males can be an emotionally-laden task, as evidenced from the many

emotions included in these narratives. Counselors should also be mindful when working

with a gay Christian male of any notable lack of expressed emotions as he talks about his

sexual identity, religious identity, and their integration. Inquiry about these emotions can

be accomplished through statements like, "I'm curious what it was like for you emotionally as you brought these two identities together," or "Tell me more about how you were feeling during this time in your life." Through such statements, counselors can forthrightly address the various emotions of gay Christian males.

A Recognition of Identity Worth

All eight participants of this study expressed a belief in their own self-worth, thus illustrating their recognition that they should not be mistreated or victimized simply because they identified as both gay and Christian. Dean reported that he was angry at the disagreement in the church over marriage equality and stated that he should be treated in the same way, with the same worth, as others. Burton reported leaving the Catholic Church after being yelled at by his priest because he recognized that the actions of his priest did not align with his feelings of self-worth. Kurt recalled this acknowledgement of self-worth when he remembered finally being able to tell his parents about his abusive relationship, ask for help, and leave his long-term partner. These examples in the narratives showcased the participants' recognition of identity self-worth.

Recognition of self-worth through sexual identity. Participants' sexual identity contributed to their recognition of identity self-worth. Dean reported this sexual identity self-worth and pride as he said that being gay is a special characteristic that he has and likes sharing with other individuals. This worth was also evident in Wes's narrative, as he reported his expectation that people would view his gay identity as a normal and acceptable attribute of his personhood. This identity self-worth was highlighted by Cass (1979), who included in her sexual identity developmental model a fifth stage, identity

pride, where gay males feel pride emerge on account of their sexual identity. This feeling of individual pride related to sexual identity, as opposed to feelings of marginalization or internal homonegativity, can help generate a feeling of worth in clients (Mohr & Kendra, 2011).

Counselors should listen for this recognition of self-worth, take note when it is broached or emphasized, and inquire how this self-worth was formed or first recognized by clients in order to understand them better. This self-worth can be affirmed by counselors through encouraging the client's gay sexual identity, as well as identifying and empowering his strengths (Crisp & McCave, 2007). Counselors should also inquire about self-worth if it is not mentioned and ask the client how he would like to see his self-worth as a gay man increase in the future. These latter two suggestions encourage a professional discussion, build the counselor-client rapport, and inform possible treatment strategies for future sessions.

Recognition of self-worth through religious identity. Recognizing identity self-worth can also be connected to participants' religious identity. Brent's narrative highlighted this when he reported being in a gay bar and felt as if God was tasking him with the duty of taking care of a man who had been injured. Brent reported how he felt honored that God would call him to do such a task, felt pride that he actually took action, and declared that this was a major religious event in his life. This is one participant's narrative example of the connection between an individual's self-worth and their religious identity.

Other researchers support this recognition of self-worth through religious identity. Researchers have noted that individuals who placed importance on religious identity show improvement in depressive symptoms and, therefore, religion can be a protective factor for depression (Braam et al., 1997; L. Miller et al., 1997). Others have found a negative association between individuals' religious involvement and suicidality (Neeleman & Lewis, 1999; Nisbet et al., 2000). These reduced mental health concerns due to a client's religious identity could lead to an increase in one's self-worth (Papazisis, et al., 2014). However, Krause (1995) noted conflicting research in this area, as some researchers indicate that greater religious involvement tends to reinforce individuals' self-worth and others associate religious involvement with less self-worth. This dissertation research supports previous research through its exemplification of individuals with increased self-worth due in part to their religious identity.

It is important for counselors to be aware of the research regarding the connection between religious identity and self-worth. Counselors should pay attention as clients mention their self-worth and report elements that can decrease their religious self-worth (e.g., depression, suicidality), as these statements can offer key insights on the client and inform later treatment (Braam et al., 1997; L. Miller et al., 1997; Neeleman & Lewis, 1999; Nisbet et al., 2000). Counselors should also note if clients do not reference their self-worth, as this lack of reference could be equally important for treatment considerations. When inquiring about religious identity, counselors can easily provide clients opportunities to talk about their self-worth through the following prompts: "Tell

me what importance this religion has for you specifically" or "How does having this religious identity increase your own worth?"

Recognition of self-worth through the integration of sexual and religious identities. The recognition of self-worth was especially prominent in the narratives when participants spoke about the integration of their sexual and religious identities. Dean discussed his self-worth when he remembered leaving the church over a disagreement in marriage equality. He felt that he had the same worth as others and should be treated equally. Burton recalled being yelled at by his priest during confession for revealing a sexual relationship with another man. He reported how he left the Catholic Church after this incident because he knew, through his sense of self-worth, that he should not be treated in such a manner. This theme highlights participants' recognition of their self-worth through the integration of their sexual and religious identities, as they believed one identity does not devalue the other.

The counseling profession needs to continue to recognize the importance of building a relationship with individuals that affirm self-worth. Historical approaches utilized with gay clients (e.g., electric shock therapy, chemical aversions, reparative therapy) can lower their perception of their self-worth and view of counseling (Haldeman, 1994; Wood & Conley, 2014). More recent trends in counseling, such as gay affirmative therapy (Crisp & McCave, 2007), propel counselors to utilize affirmative approaches that allow them to empower clients, support all aspects of clients' identities, and help challenge forces that may seek to negatively impact identity (Farmer et al., 2013). This aligns with research by Halkitis and colleagues (2009) who noted the

importance for some gay Christians to attend churches that view their identity as "normal" instead of as "sinful." Furthermore, this affirmative approach in counseling adheres to the *ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014), as the nondiscrimination section clearly states that sexual orientation and religion are not points of judgment, discrimination, or reasons to deny services to clients (standard C.5).

Counselors need to recognize the important connection between client's self-worth and their religious and sexual identities. Awareness of this relationship will allow counselors to be more critical in their work as they seek to understand a client's view on his integration of sexual and religious identities and how these identities together impact self-worth. Part of this work may involve counselors asking clients to tell a story about a period in their lives that highlights these identities. Sharing these narratives would allow counselors to explore how clients' identities have affected their self-worth. From this increased awareness, future counseling sessions can involve identifying how these identities contribute to clients' self-worth, pinpointing elements that detract from their self-worth, and creating ways to bolster self-worth through their sexual and religious identities. Further work could involve counselors assisting clients in locating a church that is accepting of both identities and supportive community resources, such as LGBTQ community groups that are inclusive of the clients' religious beliefs (Halkitis et al., 2009). Through all of this work, counselors should continue to be supportive and encouraging of both identities (ACA, 2014; Crisp & McCave, 2007; Farmer et al., 2013).

Implications and Recommendations

The themes from the narratives of these gay males with a Christian religious identity were: (a) a development of self-understanding, (b) an emotional mosaic, and (c) a recognition of identity worth. One can see implications through these results for the profession of counseling. A discussion of these implications includes the areas of counseling practice, counselor education, supervision of counseling, service in counseling, and future counseling research.

Counseling Practice

There are numerous implications and recommendations for the field of counseling practice attributable to the results of this dissertation study. Professional counselors should offer their gay Christian clients a professional relationship that is both caring and supportive (Harper et al., 2013). Such a professional relationship requires counselors to affirm their gay clients sexual identity development (Harper et al., 2013; Johnson, 2012), recognize hardships experienced due to stigma, internalized homophobia, and discrimination (Swank et al., 2012), and seek to understand other factors, such as family relationships, which can affect clients (Bettinger, 2004). Taking steps to ensure this supportive relationship can be as simple as making sure clinical forms used by the counselor ask for a "partner's name" so they are more inclusive. This type of professional counseling relationship is contrary to the historical way gay individuals were pathologically treated by some in the mental health field (Haldeman, 1994; T. F. Murphy, 1992).

Counselors can further demonstrate care and support through recognizing the importance of religion in clients' lives, not merely disregarding it, and addressing religion in a therapeutically relevant way (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). Fostering such a professional relationship would allow counselors to inquire about clients' religious and sexual identities, discuss with clients these identities, and explore how those identities and the intersection of these identities play a role in clients' lives, as well as a potential part of treatment. Crafting this type of professional relationship would also allow clients to share emotions and bolster their self-worth as their identities are supported.

As professional counselors work with gay Christian clients, inquire about their identities, and explore their narratives, it is recommended that counselors be aware how potentially sensitive it is for some clients to discuss their religious and sexual identities. As clients explore their narratives, mental health concerns such as depression (Cochran & Mays, 2009), anxiety-related disorders (Sandfort et al., 2001) or panic disorders could arise (King et al., 2008). Gay Christian males could also present with concerns of suicidality (Ferlatte et al., 2015) or substance abuse and dependence (King et al., 2008). One participant in this study revealed the concern of suicidality in his past. The act of telling their narrative can produce an emotional response for gay Christian males, as expressed by the participants of this study. A professional counselor should be prepared for some type of emotional reaction when work begins with this population. It is recommended that counselors have resources (e.g., national and local suicide hotline phone numbers, drug and alcohol treatment resources, crisis management information)

available for clients who may experience emotional or psychological concerns within counseling due to discussion a potentially sensitive topic.

Continuing education for counselors. It is important that counselors pursue education on how to best work with gay males, as they are statistically more likely to seek counseling compared to their heterosexual counterparts due to a variety of mental health concerns common within the LGBTQ+ community (Burckell & Goldfried, 2006; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004). Bishop et al. (2003) also noted the importance of counseling practitioners' understanding of the significance of religious identity within the lives of their clients. Specifically, counselors should learn how to utilize appropriate language and terminology when working with clients who identify as gay (Harper et al., 2013) and as Christian (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). Such terminology could mean knowing the difference between "gay" and "queer," or what a client means when he says that he has "committed a sin" by being with another man sexually. Counselors also need to know the cultural traditions and rituals that exist in both the LGBTQ+ and Christian communities. For instance, it would aid counselors to be familiar with the history and meaning of Pride festivals, as this event is likely one to be mentioned by many gay clients, and to understand important Christian traditions (e.g., communion, baptism, confirmation, and confession). Counselors can also educate themselves on developmental models that directly relate to this client population, such as sexual development models (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989) and religious identity models (Elkind, 1978; Goldman, 1965; Oser, 1991). An understanding of terminology, significant traditions and rituals, and developmental models would allow the counselor to

be more knowledgeable about the client's religious and sexual identities, to better work with these clients through their increased understanding, and to more fully grasp nuances experienced by clients who have such intersecting identities. Education in these areas could occur at conferences, workshops, webinars, or through the counselor's own independent study.

Inquiring about the narratives of gay Christian clients is just one way to better understand clients. Other educational implications for counselors include being prepared to work with this clientele through counseling assessments. Counselors should be prepared to use assessments to gain a deeper understanding into a client's gay identity (Harper et al., 2013) or religious identity (Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Fukuyama et al., 2008). For instance, counselors could administer the Sexual Orientation Enculturation Assessment (SOEA) as a way to gain further understanding into the life of the gay client and the extent to which he has incorporated his sexual identity into other parts of his life, such as his religion (Matthews & Bieschke, 2001). Practicing counselors could also use the Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) to closely examine the religiosity of a client, as it examines elements such as one's prayer life, connectedness to others, and involvement in religious activities (Piedmont et al., 2009). Griffith and Griggs (2001) suggested informally assessing clients through questions like, "Do you have a religious preference?," "Do you find yourself getting into religious discussions?," and "What are your reasons for attending the services?" (p. 22). Through educating themselves on assessments such as these, counselors can better understand both the gay

sexual identity and the Christian religious identities of their clients and provide better care.

Counselor self-reflection. It would also be beneficial for counselors to engage their own process of self-reflection. Hays (1996) noted the importance of a counselor being able to be reflective of his or her own biases and areas of inexperience when working with someone from a different culture. This reflection on biases and inexperience could relate to professionally working with members of a sexual minority or with a particular religion. Harper and colleagues (2013) encouraged counselors to engage in reflection and consider how their own sexual orientation and gender identity can impact their counseling work with clients. Furthermore, Cashwell and Watts (2010) suggested counselors explore their own attitudes, beliefs, and values about religion and how the counselors' religion may impact their professional work. Frame (2003) similarly suggested counselors be self-aware when working with other individuals within the area of religion. The self-awareness gained from this reflection can be used to promote a discussion with clients about such topics. This engagement in self-reflection is important, as it allows a counselor to make sure his or her own beliefs are in-check and that counter-transference is not occurring (Fukuyama et al., 2008). This can help counselors focus on the emotions being presented by the client, rather than having to focus and deal with their own emotional concerns during a client's session.

Counselor Education

Implications and recommendations in response to this dissertation can also be developed for counselor education. It is recommended that counselor educators address

the topics of religious identity (Henriksen et al., 2013) and sexual identity (Millner &

Upton, 2016) in the classroom with novice counselors-in-training due to the importance

of clinically addressing these identities. This education can involve examining and

discussing the topics of sexuality and religion separately, as well as exploring with

students how these topics can intersect.

Counseling competencies. Both ASERVIC and ALGBTIC competencies

(ASERVIC, n.d.; Harper et al., 2013) can aide counselor educators in creating

discussions around religion and sexuality, respectively. ASERVIC competencies state

that professional counselors should be able to distinguish between religion and

spirituality, discuss the basic beliefs of various systems, and describe models of religious

development (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). ALGBTIC competencies indicate that

professional counselors will be able to distinguish various components (e.g., biological,

cultural, psychological) that can affect one's sexual orientation and expression, identify

factors that may alter the natural development of LGBTQ+ individuals (e.g., mental

health concerns, abuse, homelessness), be aware of development models related to sexual

orientation, and understand how multiple identities can intersect with one another (Harper

et al., 2013). These are just some examples from the ALGBTIC and ASERVIC

competencies that counselor educators can infuse into their courses through teaching and

discussion, which can lead to students' increased awareness of these topics and overall

preparedness for their future profession as counselors. This connection to these

competencies is bolstered by the mandate from CACREP, the accrediting organization

for counselor education programs, which states that counselor educators teach students

how to interact professionally with a wide variety of diverse clients (CACREP, 2016), including those who identify as gay or as Christian.

Introduction of skills into courses. Counselor educators should not only bring these topics into the classroom through introducing competency-related content, but train students how to more fully conceptualize clients (Hays, 1996) and implement skills that will assist them as they navigate clinical conversations focused on one's religious identity (Henriksen et al., 2013) and sexual identity (Millner & Upton, 2016). Conceptualizing clients can be demonstrated by counselor educators through applying religious (Elkind, 1978; Goldman, 1965; Oser, 1991) and sexual (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989) identity models to case studies, having students work through these, and then processing with them afterwards what this was like. Other useful skills could involve how to communicate with clients about their religious beliefs in a manner that is both sensitive and accepting, how to discern if a client's religious beliefs are contributing to or exacerbating the presenting concern, or how to set goals with the client's religious beliefs in mind (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). Counselor educators could also demonstrate how to communicate with clients about coming out as a gay male, how to utilize appropriate language with gay clients, how to empower and engage in advocacy, and how to more fully understand the cultural and traditions of the gay community (Harper et al., 2013). The integration of such skills into the coursework of novice counselors will help the students be mindful of the salient themes found in this study. Students will be more equipped through this integration of skills in coursework to work with clients in their

practicum, internship, and after their graduate program as they begin their counseling career.

Integration into a multicultural counseling course. Specific examples of the introduction of knowledge and skills related to the areas of sexual identity and religious identity could be produced for a variety of counseling courses. As one example, all master-level counseling students in CACREP-accredited programs are required to take and pass a multicultural counseling course. Through this course, a counselor educator could introduce content to students through a lesson on religion that differentiates the concepts of religion and spirituality, distinguishes the beliefs and constructs that are associated with major world religions (e.g., Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism), and shares religious developmental models (e.g., Elkind, 1978; Goldman, 1965; Oser, 1991). Educators can also introduce content on sexual identity through a lesson that provides students with LGBTQ+ terminology (e.g., gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual, and ally), offers an historical overview of the gay rights movement (e.g., the Stonewall riots, the first Pride march in Washington D.C., and the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*) and delivers developmental models of sexual identity (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1989). Furthermore, within each lesson, the educator can introduce the students to ASERVIC and ALGBTIC competencies to highlight the importance the counseling profession places on working with individuals who possess a religious and sexual identity. Such content information delivered to students could be assessed through a midterm or final evaluation in the course.

Content delivered in a multicultural counseling course could be accompanied by more dynamic educational components. A demonstration by the counselor educator of how to conduct an intake interview with a client that addresses one's sexual and religious identity could be added to the class experience. Instead of just asking a mock client, "Are you religious?" or "Do you have any concerns with your sexual identity?" as might be prompts on a typical intake sheet, the educator can demonstrate for students how to use statements such as "I'm curious to know more about your previous experiences with religion," and "Tell me about your experience as a gay male" to gain more knowledge from a client. The educator can highlight for students how these statements prompt a client to provide more than a "yes" or "no" response and gives the counselors more information to work from as he or she continues to develop a counselor-client relationship, works toward treatment planning, and assesses how to meet goals. In this course, the counselor educator could also introduce the students to individuals who have various religious beliefs or sexual orientations through developing an in-class panel discussion. Through inviting special guests into the classroom, the professor allows students to actually come face-to-face with individuals possessing identities they might have never interacted with before, hear first-hand experiences from individuals with various religious beliefs or sexual identities, and allow them to practice asking open-ended questions, as described above, to gain further knowledge. Furthermore, the educator could assign a capstone cultural immersion project in the course that would allow students to discern a religious or gay community that they would like to know more

about, conduct research on, observe to a degree, and finally to engage directly with that community (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011).

Integration into other counselor education courses. Although maybe most easily applied in a multicultural counseling course, material related to sexual and religious identity could be integrated in a variety of courses by counselor educators. During an orientation to counseling course, one of the first courses students take, students can be introduced to concepts related to sexual and religious identity through class discussion and provided the list of competencies to highlight in what manner they are expected to develop professionally through a counselor education program. Within a human growth and development course, a counselor educator could easily introduce students to various sexual and religious development models, discuss with students the importance of considering these when conceptualizing a client, assign case studies to have students apply this developmental knowledge, and then review these cases with students to edify their growing understanding. In a counseling ethics course, an educator could direct students' attention to the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) and facilitate in-class activities that allow students to link specific ethical codes to their future work with clients who have a sexual and/or religious identity. For instance, a counselor educator could divide the students into groups and have each group examine one of the sections (The Counseling Relationship, Confidentiality and Privacy, Professional Responsibility, etc.), see how it might apply to work with a religious client or a client who identifies as gay, and then share their findings with the class through a small presentation. Furthermore, counselor educators who find themselves teaching practicum

and internship classes might have students at counseling sites who are seeing clients who have a religious or gay identity. These instructors could have students share in class what it is like working with such a client, write a case conceptualization about the client that is shared with other students, or have the students review research literature that informs their work with this client and provide a brief overview with the other students.

Doctoral counselor education. Other implications of this research exist for doctoral counselor education. While masters-level students should be introduced to fundamental terminology (e.g., religion, spirituality, LGBTQ+, heterosexism), doctoral students should go beyond rote memory to deeper knowledge, discussion, and application in their role as future educators. For instance, doctoral counseling students should be able to discuss heterosexism, what practicing counselors can do to avoid heterosexist situations, and how heterosexism can impact clients and the therapeutic relationship (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Doctoral students should begin to consider how they might collaborate with local community or campus resources to creatively introduce such topics to future students (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Students at this level should be familiar with ASERVIC and ALGBTIC competencies (ASERVIC, n.d.; Harper et al., 2013) and discover how they may implement them into their future courses as instructors. This could involve having doctoral students prepare and outline a course that meets these competency standards. These students should also begin considering how the topics of religious identity and sexual identity can be implemented in all courses they teach, as well as across the academic program (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). As some future colleagues may not discuss either sexual or religious identity in their

courses (J.S. Young et al., 2002), doctoral students should also consider how to have conversations with these future colleagues on the importance of these topics and how to hold colleagues accountable for implementing this material in their courses (Troutman and Packer-Williams, 2014).

Education of counselor educators. Counselor educators must first have a working knowledge of these areas themselves in order to effectively facilitate all of these educational ideas. Researchers found that some educators do not formally address certain areas in the classroom, such as religion or sexuality, due to their own lack of knowledge (Garnets et al., 1991; Liddle, 1996). Rudolph (1990) found that some educators avoid the topic of religion and sexuality due to a lack of comfort in discussing them. It is recommended that counselor educators abate these educational trends by bolstering their own knowledge of religion, religious considerations in counseling, local and national LGBTQ+ communities, LGBTQ+ counseling considerations, religious and sexual identity development models, and how these facets of identity can fit together, or not, in the same individual. Counselor educators could be preemptive in gaining knowledge in these areas through taking courses during their graduate program in the areas of human sexuality, LGBTQ+ counseling, religious and spiritual considerations in counseling, and additional multicultural courses beyond those required by CACREP (CACREP, 2016). Additional education in these areas can be completed through a counselor educator's own study, attending workshops and conferences where presentations on these topics are available, or through seeking out local community individuals and resources (i.e., church, pastors, LGBTQ+ centers) that can offer guidance on these topics. Counselor educators

will hopefully become more comfortable through this education in discussing these concepts.

Supervision of Counseling

There are other implications and recommendations from this study for counselor supervisors. As experienced counselors are required to provide supervision to junior members of the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014), this professional responsibility provides supervisors the opportunity to discuss with supervisees the topics of sexuality and religion as it relates to their clients. It is recommended that supervisors be knowledgeable about these topics, as discussed in previous sections, in order to facilitate these conversations. Supervisors can utilize this knowledge to help supervisees consider where a client is developmentally according to various sexual and religious models (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). If, for instance, a client self-reports that he is gay and the supervisee believes that he is in the early stages of Cass's (1979, 1984) sexual development model, then this awareness can inform the supervisee's conceptualization of the client, treatment goals, and objectives. In addition to helping the supervisee be aware of this information, it is also recommended that the supervisor review with the supervisee what emotions were mentioned in the session and how the client views his overall sense of worth. Some clients may present with concerns of their own sexual feelings due to religious beliefs (Eriksen et al., 2002) and struggle to reconcile a held religious identity with their gay sexual identity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). These are opportunities for a supervisor to assist supervisees in being aware of what emotions are mentioned, what emotions are not mentioned, and the client's sense of worth. Having a knowledgeable

supervisor in this area is important, as J. A. Murphy and colleagues (2002) noted that it is in supervision where many supervisees first learn how to work with LGBTQ+ clients. Therefore, it is recommended that supervisors obtain as much information and skills related to working with this client population as possible.

As the information suggested above is gained, it is recommended that supervisors assist supervisees in helping a client share his narrative. Clients may present with supervisees struggling or report previously struggling to integrate their religious and sexual identities (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Such clients may need to share this narrative with the supervisee. It was evident from this study's participants that positive benefits can be experienced by sharing such a narrative. Suggestions of prompts that a supervisor can use in a supervision session to help facilitate this conversation include: (a) How do you (the supervisee) view the client's narrative? (b) What "holes" or missing elements may you still need to find out to complete the client's narrative? (c) What is meaningful for the client within his narrative? (d) How does knowing this narrative of the client inform your future counseling work with the client? Such questions can help the supervisee consider the narrative he or she has heard thus far, what further information he or she may need to gain, and how this narrative can inform counseling work.

Potential concerns in supervision. Supervisors should also be aware if supervisees are purposefully not inquiring or discussing a client's religion or sexuality. Balkin et al. (2009) noted one possible problem for supervisors is when supervisees appear homophobic towards clients due to their own religious beliefs. These supervisees may provide poor service or possibly refuse to see certain clients. Such was the 2009

case of *Julia Ward v. Wilbanks* where a counseling practicum student, Julia Ward, sought

to refer a client seeking counseling due to concerns of depression because the client had

previously disclosed to another counselor a gay identity (Hancock, 2014). If this occurs,

it is recommended that a supervisor help the supervisee understand the importance of

inquiring about the sexual and religious identity of the client, as well as remind them of

their professional ethical standards (Hancock, 2014; Hermann & Herlihy, 2006). Such

ethical standards that a supervisor could discuss, maybe through the role of a teacher,

would be how counselors should avoid harming a client, not impose personal values and

beliefs onto a client, not refer clients to other counselors due to their own personal

beliefs, and "respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients" (ACA, 2014, p. 4).

These considerations could help a supervisor work through the resistance of the

supervisee. All of these considerations could bolster the work of supervisors and assist

supervisees in their work with a client who presents a gay or Christian identity in session.

     The discrimination model of supervision. To accomplish such work in

supervision as listed above, it may be helpful for some supervisors to adopt a model that

will inform their work. The discrimination model of supervision (Bernard & Goodyear,

2014) is recommended for this task. This model was first conceptualized as a framework

to aid new counseling supervisors in organizing their supervision sessions and is

composed of three foci (e.g., intervention, conceptualization, and personalization) and

three supervisory roles (e.g., teacher, counselor, and consultant; Bernard & Goodyear,

2014). These three foci, interventions, conceptualization, and personalization, concern

the supervisees' observable counseling behaviors and skills within session, how

supervisees are understanding the client in session, as well as their own personal style of

counseling, history, or characteristics, respectively (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). These

foci are meshed with the three roles of the supervisor: teacher, counselor, and consultant

(Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Within these roles, respectably, the supervisor provides

information or evaluation, focuses on the supervisee's emotional transference or

reflectivity, and becomes a resource as a supervisee seeks to gain and develop his or her

own professional insights and behaviors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Through

combining these supervisory roles and foci, the discrimination model offers nine distinct

approaches the supervisor can utilize to effectively meet the needs of the supervisee.

Researchers have already illustrated how the discrimination model of supervision

can be used to work with supervisees who have a religious identity (Polanski, 2003). For

instance, a client may choose to discuss with a supervisee her strong religious beliefs in

session and the supervisee may bring this clinical incident to supervision. By using the

discrimination model, the supervisor can discern if the supervisee is struggling because

she cannot connect this new religious information with the rest of the client's personal

information (conceptualization), because now she does not know what next steps to take

(intervention), or because she feels uncomfortable working with the client now

(personalization). After determining which foci to choose, the supervisor can then select

which role he or she will adopt in addressing this with the supervisee. Similarly, the

discrimination model has been used to inform the supervision research work of other

individuals who have worked with LGBTQ clients (Luke & Goodrich, 2013). A similar

example could be drawn that illustrates a client's disclosure of his gay identity to the

supervisee and the supervisee bringing this incident into discussion during the supervision session. Through using the discrimination model, supervisors have options to help them discern how to focus the conversation and what role they should play. This model allows the supervisor in these situations to be versatile, consider the specific situation, and even change the foci or the role within the same conversation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014).

Service in Counseling

Service implications from this study can come through the form of counselors engaging in advocacy efforts. Sangganjanavanich and Reynolds (2015) stated how important it is that professional counselors are aware of and involved in public policy at all levels of government. Such involvement can help protect clients, ensure counseling positions are funded, and inform our leaders at different levels of government about the work counselors are doing for this population (Sangganjanavanich & Reynolds, 2015). Counselors could serve through advocating on behalf of religious and LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, counselors could email their state representative informing them of the potential harm to clients when counselors make professional decisions based on their religious beliefs. Such ethical and legal battles are currently being fought in the states of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas (ACA, 2017; DeMillo, 2016; Green 2016). Counselors take opportunities to talk with congressional leaders through events like "Day on the Hill" and inform policymakers about promoting ethical counseling practicing related to working with gay and religious individuals, inquire about upcoming policy changes or legislation, as well as request funding to support future work in this

area (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Halkitis et al., 2006; Ritter & O'Neill, 1989). These

implications create positive advocacy efforts from professional counselors and hopefully

produce positive policy for those who identify as gay and Christian.

ASERVIC. Other recommendations and implications for professional counseling

service could occur through involvement in ASERVIC, and ACA division organization.

ASERVIC's vision is to create an empowering atmosphere within the profession of

counseling where one can develop and express his or her religion (ASERVIC, 2003).

This mission statement aligns with the findings of this study, as these participants

reported how they sought to develop and express their own religious identity. This

division is currently composed of the national division, 15 individual state divisions, and

boasts over 4,000 members (Miranti, 2017). With such a foundation to this division, it is

recommended that ASERVIC members use this current platform to advocate for this

client population and inform its members, other counseling professionals, and individuals

in general about the findings from this dissertation at the local, state, and national level.

Counselors should know that individuals can identify strongly as both a gay male and as

a Christian, that one's religious identity develops over a period of time, that there is a

mosaic of emotions encompassed within these identities, and that individuals with these

identities can recognize their own self-worth, as these elements can inform the treatment

offered to clients. Efforts could therefore be taken to disseminate this information

through division newsletters, published articles through ASERVIC's journal of

Counseling and Values, and presentations at ASERVIC national conferences.

ALGBTIC. Another outlet for service where recommendations and implications could be discussed based on the results of this dissertation is through the ACA division of ALGBTIC. ALGBTIC has historically focused its efforts on the education and advancement of LGBTQ+ initiatives in the field of counseling (ALGBTIC, 2014b). The findings of this dissertation connect directly to this division of ACA, as illustrated by the duality that many individuals experience between their religious and sexual identities and the very relevant and important implications this has for the counseling field as a whole. From the findings and meaning derived from this dissertation, initiatives can be created to develop discussions about what it is like to possess a gay sexual identity and Christian religious identity. Additionally, more research can be conducted on this topic, and research findings can be disseminated through the *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling.* Service could be offered through ALGBTIC at the national level and at the state level through one of its 18 state divisions that promote the findings of this study. Furthermore, service could be offered through writing short pieces related to the information within this dissertation for the electronic newsletter that is sent to ALGBTIC members. As more professionals become educated on and equipped to assist clients that possess strong religious and sexual identities, the counseling services offered to gay clients will be improved. All of these service opportunities help develop a fuller sense of equality for gay males, as people become more informed that being gay and being Christian are not mutually exclusive.

Future Research in Counseling

Other research could be pursued through utilizing this study's narrative methodology that could enhance the body of knowledge within the counseling profession. For instance, this study could be conducted again, but designed to explore the narratives of older gay Christian males. The ages of the participants in this dissertation ranged from 27 to 72 with an average age of 47. It could be assumed that an individual who lives for a longer period of time would have more life experience from which to draw a narrative. Older individuals who are gay have lived through more socio-cultural changes that have impacted the LGBTQ+ community and would be able to speak to these developments. Instead of setting a minimum age of participants at 18 years of age, as was the case in this study, future researchers could set a minimum age of 65. This age difference might foster different narratives that illustrate how the identities of being gay and Christian have been viewed over a longer period of time, through different historical periods, and developed over a longer lifespan. Knowledge gained from such a study would help individuals in the counseling profession better work with an aging gay population that possesses a Christian religious identity.

Future research emphasizing sexual identity. Future research could explore how one's race and/or ethnicity may impact the narrative he tells about his gay sexuality and Christian religion. While this study did not have inclusion criteria based on race, seven of the eight participants self-identified as Caucasian. Researchers could further explore how the racial identity of being a black male or the ethnic identity of being Latino impacts one's view of his gay sexual identity and Christian religious identity. One

would be able to examine how narratives are affected by different cultures through these different studies. Furthermore, specific cultural elements, such as the idea of machismo in Latin American culture, can be examined through such narratives.

Researchers have noted discrimination towards and within the LGBTQ+ community because of the contraction and potential sharing of the human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS; Marsiglio, 1993; Yoder et al., 1997). Participants in this study were not asked to self-report if they were HIV positive and no one mentioned either HIV or AIDS within their narrative, yet the contraction and spread of HIV has historically been seen as a problem for the LGBTQ+ community (Yoder et al., 1997). Counselors may wonder how the narratives of those who are HIV positive or who have developed AIDS might be different from other individuals. How might the added identity as an individual with HIV or AIDS mesh with a gay sexual identity and a Christian religious identity? Flannelly and Inouye (2001) indicated through a stepwise regression that someone's quality of life is affected by their HIV-positive status. Yet, gaining the narrative of these individuals through applying the methodology of this study could give us a more complete picture of what this life looks like for individuals. This broader understanding would be important for counselors as they work with individuals who do disclose they are HIV-positive, help these clients work though this stigmatized identity, and assist them with possible current and future discrimination.

Future research emphasizing religious identity. Researchers could also apply this methodology and examine the narratives of individuals who identify as Christian, but with a different sexual minority other than gay. Researchers could seek to understand the narratives of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer Christians to examine how these individuals' narratives are different than the ones gathered in this study. Such studies would potentially illuminate information for various individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. Counselors could benefit from knowing what salient elements would be contained within these individuals' narratives, as they would then be better able to serve these various populations.

Another area of potential future research is to apply narrative methodology and explore the narratives of gay individuals who self-identify with a religion other than Christianity. One participant, Wes, reported growing up in India and very briefly mentioned differences between children and families who believe in Catholicism compared to those who identify as Hinduism or Islam. Although it was outside the scope of this dissertation to explore this further, future research could study the narratives of LGBTQ+ individuals who identify follow Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, or another religion. Even though the majority of Americans identify as Christian, there are still approximately three out of 10 Americans who identify with some other religious belief (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Furthermore, the number of people who self-identify as Christian seems to be decreasing with successive generations (Pew Research Center, 2015a). It is becoming, therefore, more important for counselors to be aware of different

religions and the beliefs comprised within these religions, particularly an understanding of how they address and view sexuality.

Other future qualitative research methods. Other qualitative research methods could be conducted based upon this research. Phenomenological researchers examine individuals' subjective experiences and seek to understand the essence of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Future research could use phenomenology to examine the experiences of gay Christian men who try to find and pursue counseling with an affirming counselor. As these narratives showcased the development of sexual and religious identities, contained a mosaic of emotions, and illustrated a recognition of self-worth, it would seem that gay Christian males would seek out counselors who have the background and the ability to effectively work with all of these elements. Finding a counselor that has a work history in this area and willing to see such clients could be difficult (i.e., in rural areas of the country; Eldridge et al., 2006). Phenomenological research in this area could illuminate this meaning-making between client and trying to find such a counselor. The research questions for such a study would be: "How do gay men perceive and understand their experience of finding a counselor affirming of their religious and sexual identities?" This study could be conducted through semi-structured interviews with approximately 10 participants.

Another phenomenological study could examine the experience of gay males as they seek to recover their religious identity. In this study seven of the eight narratives revealed these participants disconnected from their religious identity and all narratives reported these participants were able to integrate their religious and sexual identities

together. What was the experience like between these two points? Phenomenological research in this specific area could further increase counselors' understanding of this process and strengthen our ability to help clients navigate this process. The research question for such a study would be: "How do gay men perceive their experience of reintegrating a lost religious identity?"

Future quantitative research. Future quantitative research could examine the intersection of gay sexual and religious identities. A researcher could examine the effects of different religious identities (e.g., Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam) of gay individuals on experienced religious conflict related to their gay sexual identity by evaluating group differences through inferential statistics. In such a design, the religious identity of individuals would be the independent variable and the religious conflict reported would be the dependent variable. This could be conducted through first identifying which religious identity one would like to examine, gathering participants that fit this inclusion criteria (e.g., self-identifying as male, gay, and of the selected religion), and then administering the Religious, Spiritual, and Sexual Identities Questionnaire (RSSIQ). This assessment tool specifically measures the religious conflict and religious comfort experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals through items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Page et al., 2013). From this study, the researcher would seek to answer the research question: What is the religious conflict (DV) difference between gay individuals that have a Christian religious identity (IV) versus a Buddhist religious identity?

Another quantitative study could examine the development of gay males' identity self-understanding through a longitudinal study. These narratives illustrated this development through a narrative mythology, but how might our understanding increase if viewed from a quantitative study. Researchers could administer to gay males the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS; Mohr & Kendra, 2011). This 27-item questionnaire measures identity through various factors (e.g., privacy of sexual orientation, decisiveness of sexual orientation, romantic relationship involvement, emotional factors related to sexual orientation, and sense of worth related to sexual identity) within six subscales: Internalized Homonegativity, Need for Privacy, Need for Acceptance, Difficult Process, Identity Confusion, and Superiority (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Participants would be asked to indicate their experience as a gay male using a 6-point rating scale with 1 being *disagree strongly* and 6 being *agree strongly*. This could be administered to individuals at the start of the study and again in two-year increments for a 10-year period. Researchers would then be able to conduct a one-way repeated measures ANOVA which would examine participants' LGBIS scores over time and answer the research question: How does the development of gay males' self-understanding change over time? Researchers would be able to more closely study through this research the ways and to what degree the self-understanding of these participants developed over a long period of time, instead of just as a retrospective self-report at one period in life.

Other quantitative research could utilize a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between gay identity and self-worth. The

narratives of this dissertation study illustrated the developing identity of gay males and

participants' recognition of self-worth, but what does the quantitative connection between

these two elements look like? Researchers could utilize the LGBIS (Mohr & Kendra,

2011) to measure participants' sexual identity. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

(RSES), a 10-item assessment that inquires through Likert scales about positive and

negative feelings of self, could measure participants' global self-worth (Rosenberg,

1965). Researchers could utilize these assessments to determine if there is a correlation

between the scores on the LGBIS and scores on the RSES. A null hypothesis for this

study would be that for gay males there will be no relationship between the scores on the

LGBIS and the RSES. The alternative hypothesis would be that for gay males there will

be a relationship between the scores on the LGBIS and the RSES. Such research could

help counselors further understand the connection between gay sexual identity and

self-worth and inform our work in these areas with clients.

Limitations

As one considers the limitations of this dissertation study, it is important to

recognize that results were derived from the narratives of participants interviewed at this

particular time. The events that these participants chose to share occurred many years

earlier and some details were forgotten, as some participants highlighted. It is important

to consider in this research the element of social desirability. This research element can

be present anytime a researcher talks with participants concerning topics of a sensitive

nature. Some might conclude that these participants may have spoken favorably about

their religious and sexual identities. Yet, these participants were transparent and shared

both positive and negative times in their narrative related to these two identities. I did not perceive these participants were attempting to be viewed in a favorable manner.

A limitation of the current study was the participant sample. Seven participants identified as Caucasian/White and only one participant selected "other" and chose "South Asian" as a race/ethnicity. Learning more about how different racial/ethnic groups view their Christian and gay identities would be a benefit to counselors. Seven participants had received at least some college education and one participant indicated high school was his highest completed education. One's education may change how one viewed or was able to articulate his narrative, so examining the stories from participants of various educational backgrounds could be of interest. All narratives revealed that participants were currently active in their present church. This fact could have led to the common thread in the narratives that all participants were able to integrate their religious and sexual identities. As seen in research, some participants with a gay sexual identity and a Christian religious identity ultimately reject one identity for the other (Gross, 2008; Wagner et al., 1994; Wood & Conley, 2014) or compartmentalize these two identities (Halkitis el al., 2009; Wood & Conley, 2014). A participant who was not currently active in his church and/or who had not be able to integrate these two identities would have a different narrative than the ones portrayed in this study. If this study were to be replicated with attention to racial/ethnic diversity, variation in education experience, and different levels of current church involvement, the narratives of gay Christian males may further be illuminated in ways not apparent in this study.

One may also consider my role as the researcher of this study as a limitation. This study sought participants who self-identified as: (a) gay, (b) cis-gender male, (c) Christian, (d) at least 18 years of age or older, and (e) were willing to share a rich, salient narrative related to the intersection of their gay and Christian identities. I fit the inclusion criteria. I worked closely with my peer reviewer before, during, and after data collection, as well as engaged in reflexive journaling after completing semi-structured interviews and transcriptions to help with this possible limitation. These steps allowed me to maintain a critical focus on the participants' narratives and make sure that personal assumptions, biases, and values were not being infused into the participants' narratives. I also worked closely with participants through member checking to further ensure that the work within this dissertation was representative of their narrative and not my own narrative or my version of their narrative.

Summary of Chapter Four

The purpose of this study was to understand the narratives of gay male individuals who identify as Christian through the research question: "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity?" One can see the narratives of these participants are: (a) a development of self-understanding, (b) an emotional mosaic, and (c) a recognition of identity worth. This chapter began with a discussion of these findings related to previously published literature and developed implications for the profession of counseling, specifically within the areas of counseling practice, supervision, education, and service. Finally, future research and limitations were addressed.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

RE: IRB # 17-288 entitled "A Narrative Analysis of Gay Males Experience with Christianity: Identity, Intersection, and Counseling Considerations"

Hello,
I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as a Level II/Expedited, category 6 & 7 project. **Approval is effective for a twelve-month period: July 21st, 2017 through July 20th, 2018**

For compliance with:

- DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects (Title 45 part 46), subparts A, B, C, D & E

If applicable, a copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This "stamped" copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice by email as a courtesy. **However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials.** Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date. Visit our website for forms.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or 330-672-2704 or 330-672-8058.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT INVITATION

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Invitation

Subject Line: Research Request

Hello,

My name is Rob McKinney, a Ph.D. candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. I am in the data collection phase of my dissertation research and I would like to extend an invitation to you regarding participation in my dissertation study. I am conducting a narrative analysis on the storied-experiences of male individuals who identify as gay and as Christian. This study will answer the research question, "What are the narratives of gay males who have a Christian religious identity??"

This study will require completion of two interviews with me (both approximately 45-60 minutes in duration) at a time most convenient to you. Interviews will be conducted in either a face-to-face, through Skype, or via telephone. Within one month after each interview you will receive a copy of the transcript and will be asked to review these documents for accuracy. You will be asked to discuss any changes, thoughts, or reflections concerning the interviews with me during the follow-up interview. All interviews will be audio taped, kept in a secured, locked cabinet by researcher, and all audio tapes will be destroyed at the end of the stud
y. Only limited demographic information and a pseudonym will be included in the final results. You will receive a consent form, demographic information form, and audio consent form via email prior to the first interview upon your agreement to participate in this dissertation study and will be asked to complete and return each form. Due to the nature of this study being for a dissertation, the researcher may be unable to contact all potential participants for completion of research.

If you are interested in participating, or if you know of someone who might be interested and qualified, please contact me directly at rmckin11@kent.edu. My dissertation co-directors, Dr. Steve Rainey (jrainey@kent.edu) and Dr. Cassandra Storlie (cstorlie@kent.edu), may be contacted as well. The project has been approved by the Kent State University Human Subject Review Board (#17-288).

Thank you,
Rob McKinney, M.S., LPC, NCC, Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: A Narrative Analysis of Gay Males' Experience with Christianity: Identity, Intersection, and Counseling Considerations

Dissertation Student: Rob McKinney

Principal Investigator: John Rainey, Ph.D.

Key Personnel: Cassandra Storlie, Ph.D.
Erin West, Ph.D.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. Please keep a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose
The purpose of this dissertation study is to understand the storied-experiences of gay male individuals who identify as Christian. This understanding is done through a narrative—or story—analysis. From understanding these narratives or stories provided by participants, implications for the field of counseling through various professional areas will be developed.

Procedures
You will be asked to participate in an initial individual interview lasting approximately 50–60 minute in either a face-to-face, Skype, or telephone format. You should plan on being in a location that is private and free from distraction during the interviews. This interview will consists of you sharing a salient story of your own personal experience that relates directly to your identity as a gay male and to your identity as a Christian. Your initial interview will be transcribed within three week and the materials will be sent to you through e-mail to an e-mail address of your choosing for your review. A date and time will be scheduled for a follow-up interview to expand on previously shared information that will last for approximately 50–60 minutes and be in either a face-to-face,

Skype, or telephone format. A final transcript will be sent for your review. Later, themes and a re-storied narrative will be sent to you through email for your final review and feedback. You may discontinue participation at any time, however, without incurring any penalty.

Benefits

potential benefit of participating in this study for participants may include reflecting on and sharing their personal salient narrative related to the intersection of their identity as a gay male and as a Christian. Beyond this anticipated expectation, the potential benefits of participating in this study will not impact the participants directly.

Risks and Discomforts

It is not anticipated that participants will experience any risks in the current study more than in normal, everyday life. Due to the potential for sharing personal narratives related to the intersection of a gay sexual identity and a Christian religious identity there is some vulnerability that may arise from your participation in the study. As a precautionary measure, you will be provided a list of mental health resources in the local geographic area composed of different practicing mental health practitioners and services. This list can be consulted for referrals should you feel the need to continue talking about or processing the storied-experienced shared in the study. The benefits of participating are anticipated to far outweigh any risks or discomforts.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the dissertation study and within the limits of the law. Your identity will be known only to the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used for the discussion and dissemination of the dissertation's findings. Any potential identifying information will not be included in the data you provide. All transcripts and audiotapes will be kept in a secured, locked cabinet in the researcher's office and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for participation in this study.

Peer Reviewer Consent

As a participant of this study your information will be reviewed by a peer reviewer. A peer reviewer will only be aware of pseudonyms and not your actual identity. The peer reviewer will assist in organizing data after interviews are completed. The peer reviewer understands your rights to privacy and has agreed to keep all knowledge of the interviews confidential. If you want to know more about the peer reviewing process please feel free to ask me or my dissertation co-directors. Please check one:

_____ I give permission for my information to be reviewed by the peer reviewer as described above.

_____ I DO NOT give permission for my information to be reviewed by the peer reviewer described above.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you
are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact me at rmckin11@kent.edu. Dr. Steve Rainey (jrainey@kent.edu) and Dr. Cassandra Storlie (cstorlie@kent.edu) are my dissertation co-directors and may be contacted via their listed email addresses. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at (330) 672-2704.

Consent Statement and Signature

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   **Date**

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Appendix D

Demographic Information Form

Please note that all information will be kept confidential. To help the researcher gather basic information about you, please respond to the following demographic questions:

Do you identify as a cis-gender male (someone who was born male and identifies as male)?
_____ Yes   _____ No

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
_____ Heterosexual   _____ Gay   _____ Bisexual   _____ Other

Religious Affiliation/Identity: _____

How do you self-identify your current involvement in church (please mark one):
_____ Active   _____ Inactive

Age in Years: _____

Highest Education Level Completed: _____

Relationship status (please mark one):
_____ Single, Never Married   _____ Dating/Committed Relationship
_____ Domestic Partnership   _____ Married
_____ Divorced   _____ Widowed

_____ African American/Black   _____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
_____ Asian American/Asian   _____ Caucasian/White
_____ Hispanic/Latino   _____ Arab American
_____ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
_____ Biracial – Please Describe: _____
_____ Other – Please Describe: _____

Do you have a personal in-depth/descriptive story related to your identity as a gay male AND as a Christian that you would be willing to share with the researcher?
_____ Yes   _____ No

APPENDIX E

AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Audio Recoding Consent Form

Name of Study: A Narrative Analysis of Gay Males' Experience with Christianity: Identity, Intersection, and Counseling Considerations

Dissertation Student: Rob McKinney

Principal Investigator: John Rainey, Ph.D.

Key Personnel: Cassandra Storlie, Ph.D.
Erin West, Ph.D.

I agree to participate in an audio-taped interview concerning my narrative related to the intersection of my identity as a gay Christian male as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Rob McKinney may audio-tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

_____ _____
Signature   Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:
____want to listen to the recording   ____do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Rob McKinney may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes/video tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:
____this research project _____publication _____presentation at professional meetings

_____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW ONE

Appendix F

Questions for First Interview

1. Tell me a story that is significant to you related both to your identity as a Christian and your identity as a gay male.

2. What important events in your past—before the story—contributed to it?

3. What have other people said about this story?

4. As you shared your story today, what internal emotions, responses, or reactions do you remember from that time?

5. What internal emotions, responses, or reactions have you experienced related to your story since it occurred until the present moment?

6. How has your environment affected the story you told about your identity as a Christian and as a gay male?

7. How do you envision your future based on the story you shared and these identities?

8. We have talked about a lot of things today. Is there anything else that I have not asked that you would like to share with me at this time related to the intersection of your identity as a gay Christian male?

APPENDIX G

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Appendix G

Follow-Up Interview Questions

The purpose of this follow-up interview is to enable me to clarify any information from the first interview and explore any additional reactions, thoughts or reflections you had after the initial interview. Please answer the following questions:

1. I would like to expand on (narrative story of individual).

2. After reflecting on our first interview together and considering the transcription you reviewed, is there anything you would like to clarify?

What additional reactions, thoughts, or reflections related to the narrative you shared pertaining to the intersection of your sexual identity as a gay male and your religious identity as a Christian have you had sense our first meeting?

APPENDIX H

PEER EVALUATIOR DUTIES AND EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

Appendix H

Peer Reviewer Responsibilities and Evaluative Questions

The peer reviewer was responsible for completing the following tasks related to this dissertation:

- Before data collection began
  - Obtain CITI approval
  - Review all provided background literature information, data collection and analysis procedures, and discussed the overall dissertation study with the dissertation student.
- During data collection and analysis, meet with the dissertation student via Skype for scheduled meetings once a month for approximately one hour to discuss data collected through the semi-structured interviews and reflexive journaling, data analysis, research findings, and ultimately conclusions.
- Be available for other meetings as needed for questions related to the data collection or analysis arose.
- The professional relationship between the researcher and peer reviewer concluded after the final written results were completed.

The following questions (Creswell, 2005) was utilized by the peer reviewer to evaluate the narrative analysis:

- Did the researcher collect the story of an individual's experience?
- Did the researcher restory the participant's story?
- In the restorying, was the participant's voice heard?
- Did the researcher identify themes that emerged form the story?
- Did the story include information about place or setting of the individual?
- Did the story have a temporal, chronological sequence including the past, present, and future?
- Is there evidence that the researcher collaborated with the participant?
- Does the story adequately address the purpose and questions of the researcher?

APPENDIX I

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXIVE JOURNALING

Appendix I

Guiding Questions for Reflexive Journaling

1. Does this work tell a story?

2. What were your standards for this piece of work?

3. Did you meet your standards?

4. What did/do you find frustrating about it?

5. If someone else were looking at the piece, what might they learn?

6. What was especially satisfying to you about either the process or the finished product?

7. What will you change in the next revision of this piece? (Edutopia, 2011).

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