A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF GAY MEN COMING OUT WHILE IN COLLEGE

by

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ABSTRACT

ADAM WILLIAM CARTER. A phenomenological study of gay men coming out while in college. (Under the direction of DR. EDWARD WIERZALIS AND DR. HENRY HARRIS)

This research was conducted to explore the phenomenological essence of gay men who choose to come out while in college. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-identified gay men, ranging in age from 18-23 years old, who reported that they had come out while in college. Using a phenomenological approach, this research sought to explore the following research question: What are the lived experiences of gay men who came out while in college? To help organize the experiences of the participants, the following sub-questions were used to help guide the research: 1) What factors inhibited participants from coming out pre-college? 2) What factors inhibited and enabled coming their out while in college? 3) What are the factors specific to the collegiate environment enabled or supported their coming out?

The results of this study indicated that the participants did not factor in their impending coming out into their choice of college. The factors that inhibited the participants from coming out before college were: 1) lack of LGB social support, 2) faith based concerns, 3) concern regarding familial response, and 4) security in perceived heterosexual identity. Both supportive and inhibiting factors were found that influenced the participants' coming out while in college. Identified supportive factors were: 1) welcoming campus environment, 2) public examples of gay relationships, 3) possessing a masculine disposition, 4) increased use of technology, 5) desire to help others come out, and 6) a believed change in public perception about coming out. Identified inhibiting

factors were: 1) LGB as a hidden population, 2) being involved in non-public relationships, and 3) security in possessing a perceived heterosexual identify. Lastly, the results of this study indicated that gay men who came out while in college chose not to be involved in campus LGB student organizations in favor of integrated social advocacy organizations.

DEDICATION

To and for:

Allyson Paige

Ryann Mackenize

Landyn Eric

In memory of Mason Holmes

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

On September 22, 2010 Tyler Clementi, an 18 years old Rutgers University freshman, jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge. Three days prior to Tyler's death his roommate had set up a webcam in their dorm room to covertly observe then broadcast Tyler and a male friend romantically embracing. One day prior to Tyler's death his roommate announced via Twitter, "Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes, it's happening again (Parker, 2012)." Tyler was made aware of his roommate's actions and future intentions and reported being taped to University officials. Feeling unsupported by the University system, Tyler left his room on September 22 to get dinner. At 8:42 p.m. Tyler made his way to the George Washington Bridge and posted from his cell phone on Facebook, "Jumping off the gw bridge sorry (Parker, 2012)."

Dan Savage, a lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) advocate and author, and his husband Terry Miller responded to Tyler's death by posting a message to LGB youth on YouTube. In this video, Savage and Miller shared that they had both experienced bullying surrounding their sexual identity throughout their youth but that life had gotten better as they got older (Savage & Miller, 2010). This video was the first of over 50,000 videos posted on YouTube on the It Gets Better Project's page. Celebrities, politicians, teens, and grandparents alike looked at their webcams and shared with the LGB youth

watching that life was worth living and they are not alone. These videos altruistically pleaded with those watching to remain alive for the *good things* that life had in store for them, but are these promises of a brighter future enough to support our LGB youth through the coming out process?

A core supposition of the It Gets Better campaign is that the current social environment for LGB youth is not only unaccommodating but also dangerous. Cross-sectional data supports this belief by indicating that when compared with heterosexuals, LGB youth experience elevated levels of multiple negative outcomes such as victimization and bullying, drug use, and mental health difficulties (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). Youth who were questioning their sexual orientation reported more teasing, greater drug use, and more feelings of depression and suicide than either heterosexual or LGB students (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett & Koenig, 2008). Prior empirical work further suggests that non-heterosexual males, African-Americans, and transgender individuals report greater levels of victimization as youth into adulthood (Poteat, Aragon, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009).

To provide LGB youth with examples of how it was possible to transition from a bullied and victimized LGB adolescent to a safe and happy adult, the It Gets Better campaign increased the amount of mentorship efforts to support LGB youth. In a longitudinal study of LGB identified youth, Birkett, Newcomb, and Mustanski (2015) concluded that although current social support was significantly associated with lower levels of psychological distress, prior social support did not have a significant impact on later levels of psychological distress. This longitudinal evidence suggests that experiences of victimization impact psychological distress more, over time, than support.

In other words, supportive relationships might not be enough to buffer psychological distress if experiences of victimization still occur.

Upon studying the lived experiences of gay men, Bachmann and Simon (2014) reported that victimization regularly occurs past adolescence into adulthood. This study underscored the fact that while it is important to understand the relevance and impact of physical harm and psychological distress obtained through the victim-perpetrator relationship, the greatest instances of victimization of gay adults occur through a perceived lack of social recognition in society. The denial or withdrawal of social recognition as a respected and esteemed member of society negatively impacted gay men's life satisfaction. Those who had yet to publicly divulge their sexual identity also reported decreased life satisfaction indicating that this level of victimization does not rely on the individual's level of outness.

The lack of social recognition of LGB individuals in society is manifested in the debate over marriage equity legislation (Overby, 2014). As of February 9, 2015 thirty-seven states have secured marriage equity; twenty-six through court decision, eight through legislation, and three though popular vote. Of the thirteen states that ban same-sex marriage, twelve do so through constitutional amendment and state law and one through constitutional amendment only ("37 States with Legal Gay Marriage," n.d.). Webb and Chonody (2013) report that marriage inequality helps to legitimize negative attitudes and discrimination toward the LGB community by supporting the belief that same-sex relationships are not equal to opposite-sex couples' relationships. Whereas some see obtaining marriage equity as a rallying point for change, others may internalize the lawful denouncing of their relationship resulting in further victimization.

According to the findings of the aforementioned research, the It Gets Better campaign is correct in their assumption that LGB youth are coming of age in an unsupportive social environment. For some, experiencing the support of at least one person will help address the adverse experiences endured as a result of their sexual identity. For others, the victimization experienced during adolescences can never be fully mediated with familial or social support. Regardless of the negative experiences LGB youth are experiencing, many still consider coming out as vital to their personal development. In order to study the coming out experience in adolescence, it is important to understand the factors that both support and inhibit coming out during this developmental time.

Coming Out in Adolescence

Adolescents who covertly identify as LGB, or 'closeted,' are faced daily with the choice of keeping their sexual identity private or choosing to make it publicly known. An anonymous post dated June 9, 2013 on a message board entitled "When I Came Out …" illustrates the struggle felt by many LGB individuals as they decide how to navigate the coming out process:

> "As I said I'm gay and in the closet. Those stories make me feel something strange. I feel happy because they could do something I couldn't do yet. But, I also feel sad because I wanna do the same and feel free but there's something in me which is stopping me.
>
> It is so strange for me….
>
> How can I know when is the moment? how can I know who is the first person I should say it? Who can give me an advice?
> I think I should have a mate before saying nothing because he would support me in that moment… I don't know, I'm confused, so confused. Moreover, I don't have gay friends so I can't talk to anyone…"

As LGB individuals experience this period of self-exploration regarding coming out, they begin to recognize the emergence of their sexual orientation in a world that stigmatizes homosexuality (Cass, 1984; LaSala, 2000). Whereas it is considered to be psychologically healthy to embrace one's sexuality, if that sexuality does not fully align with societal norms the individual may be placing his or her self at risk by coming out. Thus, when deciding if or when to come out, timing plays a vital role in the process.

Adolescents tend to be socially motivated and choosing to disclose a non-heterosexual sexual orientation that may not fit within social and familial expectations is a social decision (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). Developmentally adolescents can understand that their sexual identities express inherent desires that they were born with but remain under the scrutiny of community norms and expectations of having a life as defined through a traditional heterosexual lens (Gray, 2009). The potential dissonance between what is expected socially and what is felt intrinsically can result in an individual choosing to delay coming out.

Coming out in early to mid-adolescence when individuals are in high school and still subject to parental authority poses different challenges when compared to coming out in late adolescence or adulthood. Fearing isolation from one's family of origin and questioning where and how one's basic needs would be met if no longer supported by caregivers tends to inhibit the coming out of LGB youth in early adolescence (Chapman & Werner-Wilson, 2008). In late adolescence and early adulthood individuals generally have greater financial independence, access to a wider range of social options, and are farther along in educational and career attainment which makes them less dependent on direct parental support (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006).

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who require continued parental support, as often found in adolescence, actively weigh the perceived costs of disclosing a LGB identity to parents. Waldner and Magruder (1999) suggest that LGB individuals refrain from telling their parents because physical violence and homelessness are real concerns, even for those having a positive pre-disclosure relationship with their parents. While some fear rejection, others want to avoid hurting and disappointing parents and assume the physiological distress of staying closeted to maintain the familial status quo (Cramer & Roach, 1988). Martin and Hetrick (1988) suggest that ‘‘the primary familial problem for the individual lies in the cognitive dissonance that arises from the knowledge of the family’s expectations and the contradiction that the adolescent’s homosexuality poses for these expectations (p. 174).’’

When choosing to come out to parents, LGB adolescents often hope for acceptance but are frequently hesitant of their parents’ initial reactions. It is proposed that coming out to parents is predicted by perceptions of family relations, LGB identity expression, and perceived resources (Waldner & Magruder, 1999). Common fears of coming out to parents include feeling rejected, provoking parental guilt, worsening the relationship with parents, being blamed, and hurting or disappointing parents (Rossi, 2010). If the family is functioning and coexisting peacefully these fears may be accentuated because the individual has more to lose by coming out (Waldner & Magruder, 1999).

In addition to familial responses, peer perceptions and beliefs about having a nonheterosexual identity impact adolescent choosing to coming out. Individuals who are not out publically may have chosen to not come out upon observation of how society

responds to the mere thought of same sex attraction. The perception of being gay often rests in the societal constructs of what is deemed masculine and feminine behavior. More specifically, scholars have noted that the dominant group typically defines what appropriate behaviors for a given gender are and that subordination and marginalization of those who violate these norms are used to sustain the constructs (Connell, 2005; Young & Sweeting, 2004). Gay men, or those perceived to be gay, are seen to break from traditional masculinity ideology and as such are often targeted for oppression (Sánchez, Greenberg, Ming Liu, & Vilain, 2009).

Harassment for being perceived as gay has been documented within educational settings. DePaul, Walsh, and Dam (2009) reported that for every LGB student who reported harassment, four heterosexual students reported harassment for being perceived to be gay or lesbian. School counselors have reported witnessing the harassment that students perceived to be gay or lesbian encounter in schools, including ridiculing, exclusion, physical intimidation, hitting, and shoving (Striepe & Tolman, 2003). Young and Sweeting (2004) found that gender atypical boys were victimized, lonely, had fewer male friends, and experienced greater psychological distress than gender typical boys. Thus, behavior that is gender non-normative appears to be a salient developmental issue for males and impacts the timing of coming out.

When adolescents do decide to publicly self-identify as LGB, they do so knowing that they may face an adverse social environment, especially in a school setting. LGB students have historically faced significant risks such as verbal and physical harassment and an overall lack of safety in school settings. A 2013 national survey of LGB identified youth conducted by the Gay Lesbian and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN) found

that 55.5% of LGB students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 74.1% reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. Fifty-six point seven percent of LGB students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported. In fact, 61.6% of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response.

The unsafe school environment reported by LGB youth had a negative impact on their academics as well. LGB youth were almost four times as likely to skip school in the last month because of feeling unsafe according to a secondary analysis of a random sample encompassing 52 urban, suburban, and rural schools (Chirrey, 2003; Riley, 2010). Thirty point three percent of LGB students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and over a tenth missed four or more days in the past month (GLSEN, 2013). These levels of absenteeism were believed to be correlated to the lower grade point averages of LGB students when compared to students who were less often harassed (2.8 vs. 3.3) (GLSEN, 2013).

The high school environment does not intrinsically support LGB youth which places this population at risk for dropping out or not continuing on to higher education, either by choice or a result of their grades (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). For those who do continue on to higher education, it may provide them with the space needed to explore their sexuality, often for the first time (James, 2006). Many will use this newly found space and sense of freedom to explore the possibility of publically declaring their sexual identity or to ‘come out.’

In 2010, Campus Pride published the "State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People" (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld & Frazer, 2010). In this report, which documents the experience of over 5,000 students, faculty, staff members and administrators who identify as non-heterosexual, findings were presented that supported previous research that suggests that LGBT individuals often face an unfriendly and often hostile campus climate (Dolan, 1998; Noack, 2004; Rankin, 1999, 2003, 2006). These studies underscore LGBT individuals as the least accepted group on college campuses when compared with other under-served populations and, consequently, more likely to indicate harmful experiences and less-than-welcoming campus climates based on their sexual identity.

With respondents who identified as gay or similar being most often targets of derogatory remarks (66%) (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010), this study explored how and why a gay male would choose to come out while in college. What were the supportive factors and perceived benefits of publically disclosing a gay identity in an environment that research has shown to be particularly difficult for this population? What were the societal, interpersonal, and environmental influences that initially inhibited then empowered coming out in a less than favorable environment?

Phenomenological Question

The overarching question that directed this qualitative research study was "What are the lived experiences of gay men who came out while in college?" Additional questions that helped guide and focus data collection and analysis were as follows:

1. What factors inhibit coming out pre-college?
2. What factors enable coming out while in college?

3. What factors inhibited coming out in college sooner?
4. What are the factors specific to the college environment that enabled coming out?

Significance of the Study

Rhoads (1997b) identified that the "lack of knowledge of the collegiate experiences of lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual students form a significant gap in the higher education literature (p. 460)." This study was significant in that it added personal voices to the experience of coming out while in college. With increasing numbers of gay students coming out pre-college, this study spoke to the experiences of those men who do not feel comfortable coming out until their time in college. Additionally, this study highlighted administrative and environmental factors that gay college students identify as supportive in their coming out; these findings will hopefully allow for colleges and universities to intentionally recreate these factors to help further foster nurturing environments for gay college students as they come out.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex. (The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [GLAAD], 2010).

Adolescence: Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to adulthood. As used in this study, adolescences (or adolescent when referring to the individual) refers to late adolescence that chronologically is between 18 – 25 years old.

Cisgender: A type of gender identity where individuals' experiences of their own gender match the sex they were assigned at birth (Crethar & Vargas, 2007).

Coming out: An individual acknowledges having gay feelings then shares these feelings with at least one other person (Coleman, 1982).

Sexual Orientation: The preferred term used when referring to an individual's physical and/or emotional attraction to the same and/or opposite gender. "Gay," "lesbian," "bisexual" and "straight" are all examples of sexual orientations (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], n.d.).

Sexual Identity: How an individual sees his or her sexual self and how he or she express that part of self to others.

Delimitations

For the purpose of this study, the following delimitations were established:

1. Participants were limited to cisgender males.
2. Participants indicated that their self-identified sexual orientation was gay.
3. Participants indicated that they came out as gay while they were in college.
4. Participants were enrolled in college at the time of the study.
5. Study participation was limited to people who agreed to be interviewed and recorded.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included participants' ability to voluntarily participate or to decline participation. Individuals choosing not to participate may have responded differently from those who chose to participate. Differences may exist between participants of this study and other individuals who came out in different geographical regions. Also, differences might exist between participants and individuals who came out to self (interpersonally) but have chosen not to share that information with another

individual (publically). This study only included participants who have come out publically as gathering a sample of men who have come out interpersonally would require that they in fact come out externally. The small sample size may have limited the researcher's ability to obtain a culturally diverse sample of participants.

Summary

This chapter provided the context in which the proposed study is situated. This chapter also included the research statement, the purpose and significance of the study, the research questions, the need for the study, study delimitations and limitations, and operational definitions. Chapter two will provide a review of relevant literature related to the purpose of the study. Chapter three will detail the methodology of the proposed study, including the research design, description of participants, data collection and analysis, and strategies to ensure quality in the research. Chapter four will present the results of the study highlighting the participants' choice of colleges, factors that inhibited coming out before college, both supportive and inhibiting factors that influenced coming out while in college, and participants' involvement in LGB campus originations. Chapter five will provided a discussion of the results in relation to the literature reviewed and research questions used to guide the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant literature pertaining to gay men coming out while in college. First. homosexuality in a societal context will be discussed followed by an overview of adolescent sexual identity development, which serves as a framework for understanding the participants in this study. Models of sexual identity development, including both stage and lifespan, are presented to contextualize how the LGB community has been historically studied. Literature pertaining to coming out and being gay while in college are reviewed to help provide an understanding of the lived experiences of gay men in college. Finally, the impact of the university environment on coming out is shared to connect the act of coming out and the collegiate experience.

Homosexuality in Society

Although humans have never limited their sexual identity expression to what is now call heterosexuality, the history of homosexuality is relatively short (Ford, n.d.). The sex of one's partners was not the definitive criterion for distinguishing homosexual and heterosexual selves until the last third of the nineteenth century (Cory, 1951). During the 1860's and 70's, European public administrators began noticing that some people were organizing their lives around various forms of *sexual pleasure* and not around family,

household, and reproduction. Alarmed, officials began studying these populations, whom they characterized as sexual deviants and grouped according to the particular practices they engaged in; one such class of deviant came to be called ‘homosexuals’ (Broude & Greene, 1976).

In the 20th century sexual roles were redefined which, for a variety of reasons, allowed premarital intercourse to became more common and eventually acceptable (Halperin, 2004). With the decline of restrictions against sex for the sake of pleasure, even outside of marriage, in the 1960's it became more difficult to argue against same sex relations (Robinson, 1976). This was the context of the gay liberation movement when in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969 the patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, rioted after a police raid (Ford, n.d.; Katz, 1976).

In the aftermath of Stonewall, LGB groups began to organize around the country. Gay Democratic clubs were created in every major city, and in 1970 one fourth of all college campuses had gay and lesbian groups (Halperin, 2004). In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official listing of mental disorders (Spitzer, 1973). The increased visibility of gays and lesbians has since become a permanent feature of American life despite the two critical setbacks of the AIDS epidemic and an anti-gay backlash (Sepkowitz, 2001).

Around the world, public opinion concerning homosexuality continues to differ considerably. While same-sex marriage is permitted in Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands, homosexuality is illegal and gay marriage is unthinkable in most African nations (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). In the United States, rights for LGB individuals fluctuate state to state influenced largely by public opinion. The difference amongst

religious behaviors and beliefs account for a great deal of the differences in the way homosexuality is viewed (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Whitehead, 2010). Whereas the inclusion and acceptance of LGB rights appears to be gaining momentum, often in spite of religious opposition, the presence of homophobia continues to influence homosexuality within a societal context (Herek, 2004; Sullivan, 1993).

Religion

The relationship between homosexuality and religion has been found to vary greatly across time and place and within and between different religions and sects (Whitehead, 2014). Just as people vary widely in terms of sexual experience, attraction, and identification, their religious views of homosexuality also vary widely. The "born gay" and "sinful choice" views are perhaps the most familiar and widespread although they are not the only two views held in religious communities (Moon, 2014).

Homopositive (born gay).

Believing that it is wrong to shut people out of communities of faith, people with homopositive views find homosexuality to be a good thing (Moon, 2014). Proponents with these views see the scriptural passages commonly used to prohibit homosexuality as needing to be understood in their historical context and irrelevant to contemporary, egalitarian, committed same-sex relationships (Cheng, 2011; Cornwall, 2011). They also see homonegative interpretations of scripture as oversimplifications that justify contemporary prejudice.

Pastor Cordelia Strandskov (2011) published a homopositive sermon where she remarked:

> How often do we hear people talk about homosexuality as something that is "not a choice," as if it would be the wrong choice? ... I'm here to let you in on a secret:

> Being a lesbian is a wonderful thing, and I wouldn't change it if I could. I have always felt like being gay was a blessing. God made me this way and I am SO grateful! When discussions about gay rights in government and churches focus on the argument that we have no choice, they completely disregard the fact that we are whole, beautiful, blessed people. Those arguments serve to keep us in a state of victimhood, to make us feel like equal rights and opportunities would be benevolent gifts from people who were born better than us, rather than what we deserve as citizens and children of God. ... By marching in Pride, we are standing up to say that it's not about loving the sinner while hating the sin—it's about rejecting the idea that love is ever a sin!

Homonegative (sinful choice).

The homonegative view finds no place for same-sex attractions among the faithful (Cobb, 2006; Sayeed 2006). Verse twenty-two of chapter eighteen of the book of Leviticus, which is found in both the Christian Bible and the Torah, has been used to condemn same sex relationships: Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable. Later in the book of Leviticus it is revealed that the consequence for engaging in sexual acts with a member of the same sex is death. Religious leaders have used this section of scripture to distinguish between a person's inner feelings of same sex attraction and their sexual actions. In other words a person with homosexual thoughts and feelings could possibly be a member of a faith-based community as long as he or she does not act on that inclination (Gold, 1992).

All major Islamic schools disapprove of homosexuality. Islam views same-sex desires as an unnatural temptation, and sexual relations are seen as a transgression of the natural role and aim of sexual activity (Burton, n.d.). Today in most of the Islamic world homosexuality is not socially or legally accepted. In largely Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen, homosexuality continues to carry the death penalty (UK party leaders, 2011).

The homonegative view of faith often sees the gay agenda, which Blackwell,

Ricks, and Dziegielewski (2004) defined as “the cessation of practices and cultural norms that inflict harm on homosexuals,” as threatening and in direct opposition to the faith community. The following is a post found under the 'Solid Answer' section of Dr. James Dobson, an evangelical Christian author and psychologist's, website:

> That agenda includes teaching prohomosexual [sic.] concepts in the public schools, redefining the family to represent "any circle of people who love each other," approval of homosexual adoption, legitimizing same-sex marriage, and securing special rights for those who identify themselves as gay. Those ideas must be opposed, even though to do so is to expose oneself to the charge of being "homophobic." (Christian Response, n.d.)

Homophobia

George Weinberg, a psychologist in the 1960s, coined the term *homophobia* from a blend of the word *homosexual* and *phobia* meaning "fear" or "morbid fear" (Herek, 2004). Weinberg's term quickly became an important tool for gay and lesbian activists, advocates, and their allies. He described the concept of homophobia as:

> [A] phobia about homosexuals.... It was a fear of homosexuals that seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for — home and family. It was a religious fear and it had led to great brutality as fear always does (Herek, 2004, p. 7).

While there have been significant changes to the experience of homosexuals since Weinberg introduced the term homophobia nearly forty years ago, anti-homosexual attitudes remain and may be now more aligned with discrimination than fear (Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010).

The discriminatory aspect of homophobia can be found in the prevalence of hate crimes, also known as bias-motivated crimes, toward members of the LGB community. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s [FBI] 2013 Hate Crime Statistics, of the 5,933 single-bias hate crimes reported to the bureau in 2013, 20.2%

(approximately 1,232 crimes) were found to be a result of homophobic reactions to sexual orientation (Latest hate crime statistic, 2014). The report highlights the story of a Texas man who was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for luring a young gay man to his home and brutally assaulting him because of his sexual orientation.

Research regarding homophobia has traditionally focused on men as the predominant standard of masculinity while homophobia has promoted aggression, and required the suppression of emotion (Lim, 2002; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003). The drive to become successfully male within the context of any given culture's definition of 'successful' is influenced by cultural norms, and learning these norms is accomplished through social interaction, observation and replicating praised behaviors. Homophobia plays a role in shaping heterosexual identity in terms determining what is appropriate sexualized behavior, which in turn shapes social ideas of how successful masculine gender is constructed (McCann, 2004).

While studying the use of homophobic humor by male high school students, Pol, David, and Victor (2010) asked students who at their school they wanted to avoid being associated with. The answers were overwhelming related to boys who were gay, suspected of being gay, or who partook in activities that were considered within the domain of gay boys. Regardless of their actual sexuality, the boys who attracted homophobic labels generally did so because they failed to conform to gender norms. Homophobia effectively policed which gendered behaviors were acceptable, and which could attract humiliation. The consequences of such classifications had profound influence on the lives of these individuals, often lasting a lifetime.

Adolescent Sexual Identity Development

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood and involves the intersection of major developmental complexities related to the formation of personal identity (D'Augelli, 2002). Adolescent development issues occur during the course of biological changes, changes in family relationships, and reorganization of peer social networks (Graber & Archibald, 2001; McClintock & Herdt, 1996). Adolescence finds individuals looking for resources to the help them answer the question *who am I* (Marcia, 1980; Waterman, 1985).

When considering developmental issues of adolescents and sexual orientation, it is important to note that this phase of development is characterized by sexual experimentation as well as by identity confusion (Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1990). As with Erikson's (1950) psychosocial developmental process, adolescent sexual identity development is situated within a social construct. If an adolescent finds himself or herself faced with same sex attractions that are not echoed in their culture of reference, this impacts both their psychosocial and sexual identity developmental processes (Erikson, 1950; Remafedi, Resnick, Blum, & Harris, 1992).

Leading a productive, psychologically healthy life requires certain developmental tasks be mastered during adolescence (D'Augelli, 1992a, 1992b; Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997). These tasks include adjusting to the physical and emotional changes of puberty, establishing effective social and working relationships with peers, achieving independence from primary caretakers, preparing for a vocation, and moving toward a sense of values and definable identity (Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997). Accomplishment of these tasks can be complicated by conflicts that arise as these adolescents become aware

of their sexual orientation and the implications this orientation will have for their lives. In addition to the stressors associated with normative adolescent development, LGB youths face specific gay-related stressors, especially disclosing their sexual orientation to family and friends (Savin-Williams, 1990).

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are a hidden segment of the adolescent and young adult population (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006). By most accounts, LGB individuals are able to identify their non-heterosexual orientation during adolescence although they may not be able to act on this knowledge until later in their development. LGB adolescents deal with developing an identity within the context of social stigmatization, often without support of family, peers, schools, and service providers (Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997; Remafedi et. al, 1992). Accurate information regarding unique LGB developmental issues, healthy relationships, and navigating heterosexual privilege homophobia is not readily available and is not discussed alongside heterosexual development which is taught as typical (D'Augelli, 1992a).

Unlike heterosexual adolescents who have numerous role models for dating procedures and responsibilities in sexual relationships, LGB adolescents have virtually no opportunity to learn how to manage their sexuality in a positive manner. The lack of lifelong models of gay relationships and of gay relationships that include children perpetuate the belief that they will forever be shut out of creating a partnership and family life (Patterson, 1994). These adolescents will find it difficult to positively integrate their sexual orientation into their self-concept and sense of identity. As a result, "they are likely to impute a more global significance to their sexual orientation than it warrants" (Hammersmith, 1987, p. 176). As a result, gay adolescents are deprived of peers, positive

role models, and support groups that could disconfirm negative and frightening stereotypes, and have only stereotypes and myths from which to learn what it means to be gay (Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997).

In line with the negative stereotypes of being a LGB youth is the belief that disclosing a nonheterosexual orientation to primary caregivers will often result in disastrous consequences. D'Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) found that many of the young people in their study experienced non-heterosexual feelings for eight years, and labeled themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual for nearly four years, without telling their parents or siblings. The risks of such disclosure occur at a time at which the person's family relationships are undergoing changes associated with adolescence. Although the developmental challenge of adolescence is often conceptualized as disengagement from childhood patterns, this individuation generally occurs in the context of family and peer relationships-- the family providing stability and support as peer bonds develop and strengthen (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998).

There are few empirical reports about how parents respond to their children's sexual orientation (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; D'Augelli et al., 1998). Anecdotal reports of parents' reactions to their children's disclosure of sexual orientation suggest that initial responses of shock and surprise are typical, followed by varying degrees of psychological distress. The difficulties experienced in telling parents can be found in the fact that LGB adolescents rarely first disclose their nonheterosexual orientation to a parent. For those who do, they experience increased victimization by their families (D'Augelli et al., 2005). Victimization leads to

lowered self-esteem, which in turn heightens psychological distress, and then both of these are jointly predictive of suicidality (Waldo, Hesson-McInnis, & D'Augelli, 1998).

Although no empirical evidence has found LGB youths to be overrepresented among completed suicides, studies based on convenience samples have consistently found high suicide attempt rates among LGB youths (D'Augelli, 2002; McAndrews & Warne, 2010). International epidemiological studies suggest that gay and bisexual males are four times more likely to report a serious suicide attempt than their heterosexual counterparts (Bagley & Tremblay, 1997; Fergusson, Horwood, & Beautrais, 1999; Riley, 2010; Sandfort et al., 1999). Garofalo et al. (1999) consider sexual orientation a significant risk factor for predicting a suicide attempt, with period prevalence rates indicating that gay and bisexual males between the ages of 17 and 29 years have a much higher suicide attempt rate than men who have not declared themselves gay. Likewise, Skegg, Nada-Raja, Dickson, Paul, and Williams (2003) found that 25% of deliberate self-harm among men was attributed to men with same-sex attractions.

LGB Models of Sexual Identity Development

The 1970s marked the beginning of a new period in research regarding sexual orientation identity development with the introduction of theoretical stage models describing homosexual identity (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). These models highlighted the need for resolution of internal conflict related to the process of identifying as LGB, and informed what is commonly termed the coming out process (Cass; 1979, Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1979, 1988). Using studies with small sample sizes, most often of men, these theoretical perspectives suggest that during the teenage years or early twenties non-heterosexuals move through a series of identity development stages.

Though the number of stages and their names vary across theories, they have been found to share common characteristics. While most scholars describe the coming out process in distinct stages, they also note that it is generally fluid, with stops, starts, and stage hopping (Cass, 1979, 1984; Gonsiorek, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1990; Troiden, 1979). Differences among the stage models highlight the difficulty of using a single model to understand such a complex psychosocial process as the development of sexual orientation identity.

Responding to the fact that stage models of LGB sexual identity did not adequately describe all nonheterosexual identity processes, scholars began to describe lifespan models of non-heterosexual identity as a fluid and complex process influenced by other psychosocial identities (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Lifespan models propose that the development of a sexual identity is a process rather than a set of predetermined stair steps (D'Augelli, 1994). Models that use a lifespan approach address social contexts for which stage models do not often account. Whereas no model of sexual identity development is able to address all variables and facets of the human experience, life span models seek to address the multiple intersections of development to account for a wider range of experiences and individuals.

Rhoads (1997b) warns researchers who explore LGB youth in collegiate contexts to take into account the limitation of developmental models and at times resist the inclination toward overgeneralizing. The following sexual identity models are presented to contextualize, rather than overgeneralize, the way researchers have traditionally viewed the coming out process. The stage models served as a first attempt to normalize the process of developing a nonheterosexual identity. These models were synthesized by

Lipkin (1999) highlighting the fact that the similarities among the models represent with some accuracy the developmental process. D'Augelli's life span model is presented after the stage models to highlight how adding psychosocial factors allows for fluidity in the developmental process.

Cass' Homosexual Identity Development Model

Cass (1979; 1984) proposed a model of homosexual identity development that normalized LGB development within a heteronormative society. This six-stage developmental model included the assumption that "people can accept homosexuality as a positively stated value" (Cass, 1979, p. 219). Cass believed that individuals had an active role in their homosexual identity acquisition and as such the stages were different based on individuals' perception of self. This model incorporates the individual's perception of his or her behavior and the consequences that arise as a result of this perception. By recommending a link between assigned personal meaning and behavior, Cass' model proposed an interactionist version of homosexual identity formation and recognized the significance of both psychological and social factors (Cass, 1979). The stages found in Cass' model are identity confusion, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis.

Coleman's Developmental Stages of Coming Out

Coleman (1982) proposed a five-stage model of coming out in response to the changing literature in his time that was finding that "there is no psychopathology inherent in homosexuality" (p. 31). Coleman sought to provide clinicians working with non-heterosexual individuals with a theoretical frame on how people enter into their non-heterosexual identity. Coleman (1982) acknowledges that this model does not assume

that all individuals follow each stage and that some will not progress past certain points in their development. Coleman's model is based on the assumption that identity integration is dependent upon task completion at earlier stages in the model. Individuals may work on developmental tasks of the higher stages before or even simultaneously with those in the lower stage but all tasks will be completed before identity integration is completed (Coleman, 1982). The stages in Coleman's model are pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and identity integration

Troiden's Homosexual Identity Model

Troiden (1989) saw sexuality as being primarily social in nature and as such sexual identities are constructed within a societal context. As a sociologist, Troiden held that people learn to identify and label their sexual feelings through experiences and interactions with gender roles and their related sexual scripts. It is the privilege of the individual to decide what type of feelings they possess and what label they choose to place on them (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Troiden, 1979, 1989). Individuals discern which feelings are predominant and significant and then they alone decide how those feelings are to be labeled and navigated. Troiden (1979, 1989) proposed a four-stage model of homosexual identity development based on the social nature of identity development; the four stages of Trioden's model are sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment.

Lipkin's Mega-Model of Five Stages

Lipkin (1999) acknowledged the striking similarities that occurred among the themes of the preexisting sexual-identity development models highlighting the similarities between the Cass (1979), Coleman (1982), and Troiden (1979, 1989) models.

Lipkin (1999) went on to add that "although they differ in some details, the models have significant features in common: initial ambiguity, frequent questioning, disequilibrium, and information seeking" (p.100). Due to the innate resemblances among the models, Lipkin proposed an integration of the theories into a "mega-model" of sexual identity development. Combining the three models of LGB identity development previously discussed in this chapter, Lipkin proposed a mega-model of five stages.

Lipkin's five synthesized stages are listed below. In parentheses are the names and stage of the three models used to formulate Lipkin's (1999) model:

1. Pre-Sexuality: (Troiden 1: Sensitization) – Individuals are not identifying same sex attractions as LGB thoughts or feelings but are experiencing feelings of difference and dissonance with the heteronormative culture.
2. Identity Questioning: (Coleman 1: Pre-coming Out; Cass 1: Identity Confusion, 2; Troiden 2: Identity Confusion) – Individuals are experiencing ambiguous, repressed, sexualized same-sex feelings or activities. Individuals are actively seeking to avoid the stigmatization of labels while attempting to self-identify the feelings that are perceived as dominant and innate.
3. Coming Out: (Coleman 2: Coming Out, Coleman 3: Exploration, Coleman 4: First Relationships; Cass 3: Identity Tolerance, Cass 4: Identity Acceptance; Troiden 3: Identity Assumption) – Individuals move from merely tolerating their nonheterosexual feelings to accepting them as an inherent part of self. Individuals use careful, selective self-disclosure outside of the LGB community.

4. Pride: (Coleman 5: Integration; Cass 5: Identity Pride; Troiden 4: Commitment) – The individual has successfully integrated his or her non-heterosexuality into his or her self-concept. An outward showing of their LGB identification is often seen and may be a chief way the individual expresses himself or herself.
5. Post-Sexuality: (Cass 6: Identity Synthesis) – This individual's homosexual sexual identity has a diminished centrality in self-concept and social relations

D'Augelli Lifespan Model of LGB Identify Development

D'Augelli (1994), believing that the stage models of LGB identity formation were based on an excessive emphasis on the internal processes of personal development proposed a human development, or life span, model of LGB development. D'Augelli proposed that by using human development as a guide that several processes must be factored into LGB identity development. These processes are facilitated by the cultural and sociopolitical contexts in which they occur. D'Augelli put forth the following six processes, not stages, as foundational to his life span development model:

- Exiting heterosexual identity: Recognition that one's feelings and attractions are not heterosexual as well as coming out to others that one is lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This coming out begins with the very first person to whom an individual discloses and continues throughout life (D'Augelli, 1994).
- Developing a personal LGB identity status: Individual has a "sense of personal socio-affectional stability that effectively summarizes thoughts, feelings, and desires" (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 325). One must also challenge internalized myths about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Developing a personal identity

status must be done in relationship with others who can confirm ideas about what it means to be nonheterosexual.

- Developing LGB social identity: Creating a support network of people who know and accept one's sexual orientation. Determining people's true reactions can take time and reactions may also change over time and with changing circumstances (D'Augelli, 1994).
- Becoming a LGB offspring: Disclosing one's identity to parents and redefining one's relationship after such disclosure. D'Augelli (1994) noted that establishing a positive relationship with one's parents can take time but may be possible with education and patience. This developmental process is particularly troublesome for many college students who depend on their parents for financial as well as emotional support.
- Developing a LGB intimacy status: This is a more complex process than achieving an intimate heterosexual relationship because of the invisibility of long-term lesbian and gay couples in society. "The lack of cultural scripts directly applicable to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more personally adaptive" (D'Augelli, 1994, p. 327).
- Entering a LGB community: Making varying degrees of commitment to social and political action. Some individuals never take this step; others do so only at great personal risk, such as losing their jobs or housing (D'Augelli, 1994).

As the developmental processes are independent of each other, an individual may experience development in one process to a greater extent than another. An individual

may have a LGB social identity and a long-term committed same-sex partner but not have come out to family and thus not have developed as a LGB offspring (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). As the developmental processes are situated within social constructs, it is possible that an individual may be at different developmental points in various processes in different settings. For example, an individual who openly identifies as LGB in a social setting may choose not to disclose his or her LGB identity in the workplace.

No measure exists for D'Augelli's model of LGB identity development. D'Augelli's emphasized the importance of using multiple measures to assess each of the processes that influence development across the life span (Risco, 2008). Although the life span model was developed to represent sexual orientation identity development, D'Augelli's model has also been used for understanding corresponding processes in the formation of transgender identity (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). In a study of transgender identity development in college students, Bilodeau (2005) noted that participants described their gender identities in ways that reflect the six processes of the D'Augelli model.

Coming Out in College

As more youth are self-identifying as LGB, it is becoming more likely that students will enter college having begun the self-reflection process that immediately proceeds coming out. The late adolescent years of college and university life are well suited for a time of identity exploration. For college students who are LGB, normative expectations of identity exploration are rendered much more complex as they simultaneously confront the processes of non-heterosexual identity development.

D'Augelli (1991) found that nearly all of the gay college students he had interviewed for studies on coming out or being gay in college were aware of their gay feelings before attending college and had personally labeled themselves as gay at some time in high school. Once in college these men were faced with the decision to publically share their sexual orientation or continue to personally identify as gay in private. The many conflicts and confusions of these years become greatly intensified as young lesbians and gay men essentially reestablish themselves and begin to construct a new life trajectory (D'Augelli, 1993).

Merighi and Grimes (2000) identified that finding a community of support for gay men to come out to and then identify with was important in helping this population affirm a core aspect of their overall identity. Whereas coming out in college is impacted by numerous factors, such as developmental readiness, motivation, audience, and context, a sense of belonging, safety, and likeness are primary influences in coming out (D'Augelli, 1992a, 1992b; Evans & Broido, 1999). Interacting with other gay men and supportive heterosexual people, feeling safe and publically being in a gay relationship, having close relationships with gay friends, and finding a gay social organization that matched the interest level of the individual all support the coming out process while in college (D'Augelli, 1992a, 1992b, 2002).

Understanding the factors that support coming out is critical to understanding the identity struggles that gay and bisexual college students experience but so is recognizing that coming out is an ongoing process (Rhoads, 1995). One of these struggles is that many of the scholars who are writing about sexual orientation and sexual identity are doing so from a heteronormative framework (D'Augelli, 1992b). Because most people in

our society assume others to be heterosexual, coming out is a never-ending process. No matter how many people know about a person's sexual orientation, there will be others to whom that individual has yet to come out to (Rhoads, 1994). LGB students in a collegiate setting are regularly in contact with new people and the opportunity to come out or share a nonheterosexual orientation is often present.

Evans and Broido (1999) found that coming out directly to others while in college is more the exception than the rule. LGB college students are inclined to adopt symbols (rainbows, pink triangle, equality symbols) that indicate a nonheterosexual orientation rather than repeatedly share with others their LGB orientation. Rhoads (1997a) shared that among the gay male college students he interviewed, some had begun incorporating language or gestures that others could identify as "stereotypically gay" to communicate a gay identity rather than overtly saying, "I am not heterosexual." The use of symbols, gestures, or language was used to indicate to other nonheterosexual people of a LGB identity and thus portraying a sense of 'sameness.'

Even after coming out to some, LGB college students are faced with the choices on how visible they wanted to be within the gay community and within the larger university community (Rhoads, 1997a). An increased LGB presence may escalate heterosexist reactions, resulting in greater conflicts for LGB students. As more conflict is experienced, more LGB students may seek mental health services on campus. Many will seek support as a result of the psychological consequences of persistent harassment and need help dealing with reactions to incidents of violence (D'Augelli, 1993).

For LGB individuals of color, coming out in college is compounded by the intersection of multiple aspects of self. Racist attitudes tend to complicate developmental

process; this population often has to maneuver through homophobic tendencies in racial communities and racial prejudice in LGB communities (Stevens, 2004). Whereas Rosario et al. (2004) found that race did not impact the timing of coming out, the level of involvement in the LGB community by people of color was less than that of Caucasian individuals. Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, and Parsons (2006) hypothesize that this is the result of LGB people of color prioritizing the development of a racial and ethnic identity over a sexual identity, as their racial identity cannot be hidden. LGB individuals of color are therefore choosing to less often publically identify as LGB while addressing racial identity developmental concerns within a collegiate environment.

The University Environment for LGB Students

Lesbians and gay can be the easiest group for academic and administrative leaders of a university to ignore. This population literally cannot be seen and have developed successful ways to avoid being known and hiding this part of self to avoid unfavorable reactions from peers and university faculty and staff (D'Augelli, 1989). In support of this concept of hidden self is the fact that the LGB population is highly underrepresented in the curriculum taught at the undergraduate level. At a time when accurate information and supportive experiences are critical to their development, young LGB individuals find few, if any, affirming experiences in the mainstream higher education course of study (D'Augelli, 1992b; Rhoads, 1997a).

Homophobia and heterosexism are at the heart of the hostile climate faced by LGB students on campus (Rhoads, 1997a, 1997b). Institutions of higher education, unfortunately, too often reflect the homophobic and heterosexist nature of society rather than taking an active part in educating students, confronting harassment and

discrimination, and creating a welcoming and inclusive environment in which all students can be themselves in an open and accepted way (Evans & Broido, 1999). D'Augelli (1989) highlights that heterosexual privilege is fostered by the fact that most overt, and especially covert, discrimination is supported by a lack of documentation. Without a record of documented instances of discrimination, none exists and therefore no action is required on the part of the university; this lack of acknowledgment of discrimination assists in the maintaining of a hostile learning and living environment for LGB students.

Outside of a course specifically designed to discuss LGB issues, LGB students do not feel as though they are equally represented in the university academic setting (Ryan, Broad, Walsh, & Nutter, 2013). Rhoads (1997a) found that of the 40 gay and bisexual male students he interviewed nearly all had reported instances of heterosexism in the classroom. Students reported numerous examples of instructors frequently using heterosexual couples as examples as if same-sex couple did not exist. One participant shared an experience in a human development course where a professor talked about behavior modification as a means of treating the 'homosexual' (Rhoads, 1997a).

While exploring the coming out experiences of LGB college students who lived in residence halls, Evans and Broido (1999) found that factors such as a hostile living environment, as a result of the lack of community in the university environment, discouraged coming out. Reflecting on the lack of support within his residence hall, a gay male stated, "I think it was a 'don't ask, don't tell' kind of thing. You know, 'Don't let me know; I really don't care' kind of thing (p. 663)." Another participant mentioned the hostility he experienced: "I faced a lot of direct and indirect homophobia—a lot of people

who would make comments about the fact that all queers should be shot, or put on a desert island and nuked, or stuff along that line (Evans & Broido, 1999, p. 663).

Of the LGB individuals who are out and feel supported in college, the factors that encouraged them to come out included being around supportive people; perceiving the overall climate as supportive; and having LGB role models in the university environment (Evans & Broido, 1999). Bowen and Bourgeois (2001) found that that by establishing environments in which LGB students experienced a safe and supportive atmosphere for expressing their sexual orientations, the perception of prejudice by LGB students was decreased. Out LGB students reported that identifying a supportive peer network, followed by a supportive collegiate environment, was a factor in if, but not necessarily when, they came out (Holland, Matthews, & Schott, 2013)

Summary

While completing a comprehensive study of coming out in college, Rhoads (1997b) identified that the "lack of knowledge of the collegiate experiences of lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual students form a significant gap in the higher education literature (p. 460)." This unique population is comprised of individuals who are at a time in their lives in which coming out is likely to occur and in a place where the attitudes of others are likely to be especially important. The lack of scholarly-based research in the area of LGB individuals' experiences in college is compounded by the fact that the most of the literature on the subject tends to cluster lesbian woman, gay man, and bisexual men and women into a larger 'homosexual or LGB' category which minimizes the unique experiences of each population (D'Augelli, 1994; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006; Rhoads, 1997a, 1997b).

A development task that is common among all LGB subgroups is the process of coming out. Although the specifics of how each subgroup or individual choose to come out vary, many theorists have attempted to describe the coming-out process. Three types of models exist based on whether the primary emphasis is on internal processes, external manifestations, or a combination of the two (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996). Stage models have predominated with identified stages centering on self-awareness, self-labeling, self-disclosure, stabilization of lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity, and active involvement in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community (Coleman, 1982; Evans & Broido, 1999; Hencken & O'Dowd, 1977).

Research has shown that rigid stage models do not provide an accurate portrayal of identity development for many individuals, particularly lesbians (Brown, 1995; Kahn, 1991). Recently, models have been developed that emphasize external influences on coming out. D'Augelli (1994) viewed coming out as a fluid process influenced by personal subjectivities and actions, interactions with others, and socio-historical connections (Evans & Broido, 1999). D'Augelli's model accounts for adolescent developmental issues that run concurrent to LGB identity development and provides a larger picture of overall personality development.

Little is known about when during these years young lesbians and gay men disclose to someone else. Given the difficulties involved in studying self-identified lesbians and gay men, as well those who consciously conceal their sexual identity or those whose identity is in process, it is not surprising that there is relatively little data on the relative proportions of lesbians and gay men who disclose to others before, during, or after their college years (D'Augelli, 1993). Researchers need to further examine the

coming out process for LGB college students. How do individuals learn to “read” the environment, to find or develop support systems, to prepare themselves to live in a hostile environment, and to assess their own level of readiness to come out and what are the consequences if the student’s personal assessment, or assessment of the environment, is inaccurate (Evans & Broido, 1999)?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore gay men's experiences of coming out while in college and to gain insight into their perceptions of factors that facilitated and impeded this process. This study explored the research question, "What are the lived experiences of gay men who came out while in college?" As this study sought to explore the lived experiences of the participants, a phenomenological research design was used. This chapter is divided into six sections. The first subsection describes the qualitative inquiry of phenomenology and its place in this study. The second subsection discusses participant recruitment and selection. The third section describes the researcher's plans for data collection. The fourth section discusses data analysis procedures. The fifth section describes potential benefits and risks of study participation. Finally, the sixth section presents strategies for quality in a phenomenological study.

Phenomenology

The intention of this research was to gather data regarding the research participants' perspectives on the phenomenon of coming out as gay while in college; therefore, a phenomenological methodology was the best research paradigm for this type of study (Groenewal, 2004). Phenomenology is the study of consciousness as experienced from a first person point of view. Using phenomenology, researchers seek to obtain and describe what participants experienced as well as how they experienced it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenology design did not attempt

to create theory about how or why individuals came out, rather it was used to provide insight into the experience of the participants' coming out (Groenewald, 2004; van Manen, 1984). This philosophical foundation corresponds with the research question "What are the lived experiences of gay men who came out in college?"

Participants

This study used a homogeneous purposive sample in which participants were purposefully recruited based on their similar characteristics. This sampling method allowed the researcher to describe in depth the characteristics of participants' experiences (Patton, 1990). Participants were self-identified gay male college students who chose to come out while in college. Additionally, participants were still enrolled in college at the time of the study. It was believed that by selecting participants who were still in college the participants would be closer to the experience of coming out and able to share more details of the experience. Based on the current literature, it was hypothesized by the primary researcher that lesbian, bisexual and transgender people will report varying coming out experiences which merit individual studies within each group; these populations were not included in this study (Fassinger & McCarn, 1996; Lev, 2004; Trodien, 1989).

The original methodological plan for this study was to interview participants from a southeastern large public university. The campus diversity coordinator from this campus had agreed to contact college students who met my inclusion criteria. It was decided that a greater response rate would result if he initially contacted the students due to his prior relationship with these potential participants. From this partnership, zero participants were recruited for the study.

As the original plan to recruit participants proved to be ineffective, the recruitment plan was modified and the recruitment e-mail was posted on counseling and the LGBT listservs to recruit potential participants that met the inclusion criteria for the study. This attempt resulted in the addition of Aaron and Conrad to the study. Both of these participants reported that they had seen the request for volunteers on their university's LGBT Facebook page; the primary researcher did not personally post the request for volunteers on these Facebook pages thus someone from the listserv had done so. Beau was referred to me by a colleague and contacted me after I sent my colleague the recruitment e-mail to forward to Beau.

After several weeks had gone by and I had not received word from any additional potential participants, I resent notification to the previously mentioned listservs, this time with no responses. Taking note of how Aaron and Conrad had found out about the study, I submitted posts to campus specific LGBT listservs. I targeted larger universities on the east coast and mid-west as none of the participants in the study to that point were from large schools or from those geographical areas. This recruitment method proved to be successful as it quickly added Drake and Eric to the study.

After several weeks had passed and no additional participants had contacted me, I reposted my request for participants to the counseling and LGBT listservs to which I had originally posted. This resulted in the addition of Finn to the study. Upon the completion of Finn's interview I contacted all of the participants via e-mail and asked that they would forward the recruitment e-mail to anyone who they believed met the inclusion criteria for the study; this allowed for a snowball effect to occur within the sampling (Goodman, 1961). Snowball sampling is useful when trying to reach populations that are

inaccessible or hard to find which could be the case with this sought-after research population. This resulted in the addition of Gavin to the study.

Without taking the experiences of the participants into consideration this may appear to be a rather common struggle to recruit individuals for a study that asks participants to share an hour of their time to discuss rather personal information. As the participants in the study started to share their level of involvement in campus LGB organizations, like the ones I was approaching initially for volunteers, I came to realize it was not a coincidence that I was not securing volunteers using my original methodology. Six of the seven participants in the study shared that they did not know of or belong to campus LGBT organizations. One participant summarized this sentiment when he shared, "There is no one there that looks like me."

Attempting to recruit participants that met the inclusion criteria necessary for this study amongst LGBT student groups did not yield the result that was expected. D'Augelli (2002) noted that as men came out in college they sought LBG organizations that provided them with the ability to socialize with other out gay men but none of the participants in the study utilized the perceived support that these organizations provided. In actuality, the participants in the study saw these organizations as a hindrance to those men who were contemplating coming out. This theme will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

Data Collection

Participants were asked to participate in one 60-90 minute semi-structured audio-recorded interview (Appendix B). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are frequently used by researchers completing qualitative research (Whiting, 2008). This interview

format allows for personal and intimate encounters in which open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Englander, 2012). The semi-structured interviews took place over the phone in my home office, and each interview lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. I used my smartphone and the TapeACall application that allowed me to record the interviews using the phone on which the interview was conducted. I would have preferred to conduct all of the interviews face-to-face as I believe that it would have been easier to establish rapport and acknowledge nonverbal cues however, this was not possible due to the multiple locations of the participants.

Each interview was transcribed upon completion; the primary researcher then sent the transcription to the participant for content verification and feedback. All seven of the participants verified the context of their interviews with only one participant, Drake, adding to his original statement. Per participant verifications, no statements or context was removed from the original interviews. After the each participant confirmed the transcription reflected what he intended to share during the interview, the digital interview file was erased. Upon the participant's transcript approval, all identifiable information from the transcripts was removed and another set of data having all pseudonyms or redacted information was created; this data set was used for data analysis.

An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question. The number of required participants becomes obvious as the study progresses, as new categories, themes or explanations stop emerging from the data (data saturation) (Marshall, 1996). For this study, data saturation was reached at seven participants.

Data Analysis

The primary researcher used a six-step process for analyzing data from a phenomenological background as described by Creswell (2011) and Moustakas (1994). For this study the primary researcher:

1. Organized all transcripts and processed the transcripts in the order in which the interviews were conducted.

2. Identified and coded significant statements within the data set. "Coding is the process of organizing the materials into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those "chunks" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.171).

3. Through the process of coding, themes emerged from the data. An independent second coder completed the same task individually. Once the second coder had completed coding a transcript, the primary researcher and second coder met to compare codes. Consensus between the primary researcher and the second coder was reached before the code was included. Coding of the transcripts was an ongoing process and the data was coded soon after the interview was completed as opposed to coding all interviews at the end of the data collection phase of the study.

4. Described the essence of the experience using information gathered during the interview process. This part of the process included taking a step back from the data, and examining it from different angles to ensure a rich thick description of the reality gathered (Creswell, 2013). By using a reflection journal the primary researcher attempted to describe the essence of the experience of conducting this phenomenological study and to increase the primary researcher's reflexivity.

5. Described "what happened" as well as how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants, which are generally referred to as textual and structural descriptions. The essence of the experience emerged through this process.

6. Presented the essence of the experience through narration.

Risk, Benefits, and Ethical Considerations

The risk level to the participants in this study varied from participant to participant. As all of the participants were still relatively close to the experience of coming out, some may have possessed strong feeling surrounding the experience. During the interview, unpleasant feelings or memories may have arisen as a result of the topic of the study or the questions asked by the researcher. The researcher inquired about the participants' wellbeing at the conclusion of the interview and was available to debrief with participants if needed. Although it was never needed, the researcher would have referred the participant to the counseling/mental health services on the participants' campus if the participant had experienced a negative response to the interview process.

The benefit of this study to participants is that it allowed for a safe and confidential environment to explore their experiences of coming out. The primary researcher allowed time for participant reflection during the interview making sure not to rush the participant during their time of sharing and contemplation. The benefits to society include: increased understanding of supportive factors that help empower gay men to come out while in college, increased understanding of inhibitive factors that help prevent gay men from coming out while in college, and an increased understanding of specific campus factors that support gay men as they navigate coming out while in college. Understanding the aforementioned factors will allow counselors, administrators,

and educators to provide targeted, evidenced based services to gay men in an intentional effort to increase their quality of life as a college student.

Strategies for Quality

To aide in the quality of this qualitative research study, the primary researcher utilized researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity is commonly used in qualitative research and has been posited and accepted as a method qualitative researchers can and should use to legitimize, validate, and questions research practices and representations (Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity is often viewed as the analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research (Gouldner, 1971). Researcher reflexivity required that the researcher be aware in the moment of what is impacting both his internal and external responses while concurrently being aware of his relationship to the research topic and the participants.

Reflexivity required the primary researcher to operate on multiple levels and acknowledge that the researcher is intimately involved in both the process and product of the research (Dowling, 2006; Etherington, 2004). Using tools of reflexivity, the researcher's often subconscious knowledge was investigated making the reflexive process an aggressive one that brought awareness to blind spots and biases (Macbeth, 2001). The researcher engaged in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal and was able to explain how his own experience had or had not influenced the research process (Koch & Harrington, 1998).

Researcher's Reflexivity Statement

I am a Caucasian, male third year doctoral student pursuing a Ph.D. in Counseling from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I received my Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from the University of Wisconsin – Stout and my

Bachelor's Degree in Education Studies from Berea College. I currently hold licensure in the state of North Carolina as a Licensed Professional Counselor- Supervisor (LPCS) and national licensure as a Nationally Certified Counselor (NCC). In addition to teaching undergraduate courses as part of my graduate assistantship, I work as a contract counselor with two local community outreach agencies.

I identify as a gay man having coming out five years ago at the age of thirty. I was in a heterosexual marriage for nine years that resulted in the birth of my three children but ultimately ended in divorce. I remain amicable with my former partner, who currently identifies as a lesbian, and we continue to actively co-parent our children. Neither my former partner nor I identified as gay while in our marriage or prior to our partnership. Whereas I acknowledge that I had same sex attractions, I never allowed myself to identify as a gay man until my former partner ended our marriage. It was only after the marriage was dissolved that I was comfortable identifying as a gay man.

I provide clinical supervision for counseling interns at an agency dedicated to providing a safe environment for LGBTQ youth. I noticed that the youth there appear to be more comfortable with their sexual identity than I would have ever have imagined being at their age. I began to question what was it about the experiences of these youths that afforded them the opportunity to come out at such a young age. I personally did not feel comfortable identifying as a gay man until much later in life and even then it took a series of life changing events to bring me to a place where I would even consider saying the words out loud.

I believe that it is the combination of my training and experience as a higher education professional and counselor combined with my experiences as a gay man having

lived through his own coming out experience that will enable me to be successful as the primary researcher in this study. It is my understanding that more youth, specifically college aged young adults, are coming out as LGB at earlier points in their lives than previously experienced. I would like to use this study to explore the coming out experiences of college aged individuals to discern the factors that the stories share that have allowed these individuals to come out while some of their LGB peers remained 'closeted.' It is my hope that by revealing these factors that I can add to them to the current dialogue of LGB youth mental health and continue to support youth as they explore their sexual identities.

Bracketing as a Tool of Reflexivity

In phenomenological research, the researcher is the principal instrument for data collection and analysis (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The findings are processed through this human instrument. Crotty (1996) pointed out that it is not humanly possible, or even necessary, for qualitative researchers to be totally objective. If the researcher is unaware of his or her preconceptions and beliefs, it is impossible for him or her to put these issues aside. Bracketing is the attempt to acknowledge these biases, beliefs, and values regarding the phenomenon being researched prior to and during the data collecting process. The utilization of bracketing is an effort to put aside assumptions so that the true experiences of respondents are reflected in the analysis and reporting of research (Koch & Harrington, 1998).

In order to attain reflexivity aimed at bracketing biases, the use of a journal is promoted (Koch & Harrington, 1998). During this project the primary researcher used a

reflective journal as proposed by Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004). The three-stage process that was used for the journal is as follows:

1. Bracketing Pre-action: The first stage was to employ pre-reflective preparation where time was set aside before interviews to raise awareness of the specific issues that will require bracketing.

2. Bracketing In-action: The second stage required reflection on situations, including specific interviews, and methodological progression that will be undertaken. After reflection, an identification of new learning was identified. This stage is referenced in step 3 of the data analysis process.

3. Bracketing On-action: The primary researcher identified how the new learning can be utilized during subsequent interviews.

Summary

This chapter presented a rationale for using the phenomenological method of qualitative inquiry to explore gay men's experiences of coming out while in college and to gain insight into their perceptions of factors that facilitated and impeded this process. This chapter also presented information on the methodology of the proposed study, including a description of participants, data collection and analysis, risks and benefits of participating in the study, and strategies to help ensure quality throughout this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose in conducting this study was to explore the phenomenological essence of coming out as gay while in college and the coinciding experiences related to that decision. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with gay men who chose to come out while enrolled in college. According to my inclusionary criteria, the participants were cisgender men who identified as gay and came out while in college. My sample included four participants from the northeast, one participant from the south, and two participants from the east coast. Participants' ages at the time of coming out ranged from 18 years old to 20 years old. Participants' ages at the time of the interview ranged from 18 years old to 23 years old. Five of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, one as Chinese, and one as Hispanic. This information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

			When Came Out		Time of Interview	
Name	Ethnicity	University Type [a]	Age	Year in School	Age	Year in School
Aaron	Caucasian	Medium, public	20	Sophomore	22	Senior
Beau	Caucasian	Small, private	18	Freshman	19	Sophomore
Conrad	Caucasian	Medium, public	18	Freshman	23	1st Year Grad
Drake	Chinese	Large, public	20	Sophomore	22	Fifth Year
Eric	Hispanic	Large, public	18	Freshman	19	Freshman
Finn	Caucasian	Small, private	18	Freshman	19	Sophomore
Gavin	Caucasian	Small, private	18	Freshman	18	Freshman

[a] Small = under 5,000 students; Medium = 5,001-15,000 students; Large = over 15,000 students

Participant Profiles

Aaron

Aaron was 20 years old and attending a mid-sized public university in the northeast when he came out. At the time of our interview Aaron was 22 years old and was a senior at a different mid-sized public university within the same state; Aaron transferred to a school that offered the degree program he wanted. Aaron appeared to be nervous at the onset of the interview as his answers were constructed largely of sentence fragments as though he was painstakingly choosing the *right* things to say. As the interview progressed Aaron began to sound more comfortable and confident in his responses. Several times toward the end of the interview Aaron took the lead in the conversation taking the discussion in a direction that I had not considered; this direction ended up being a major theme in the study (involvement in campus LGB organizations).

Aaron grew up in a conservative suburb in the northeast where, "homosexuality was not really a thing that anyone encountered or knew about." Aaron attended a large suburban high school that was populated with "90 % white suburban kids." Aaron did not know of anyone who was openly gay in high school but "there were people you suspected, but no I didn't even know anyone who was." Aaron described himself as "sexually confused for awhile" while in high school and dated females although he "wasn't really sure what I oriented sexually." "I don't know if I was necessarily trying to deny myself, I just think [being gay] was just such a foreign concept to me that it wouldn't have even popped into my head yet." In high school Aaron would not have come out "because people would've probably made fun of me so I probably wouldn't have even if I was fully aware."

Once Aaron entered college he did not feel compelled to immediately come out. It was not until the summer after his freshman year that Aaron decided to come out socially. While at a party with close friends, Aaron shared that he was attracted to another guy at the party and then immediately denied saying it. Aaron's friends started to support him by saying they had thought he might be and if he was gay "it is ok." When asked why he chose that moment to come out Aaron shared, "I had been tempted to come out of the closet for a while and I was just so comfortable with [not coming out] that I was just like, 'Should I really do this, should I *really* say this?' I don't know it was just pretty much that and then eventually I just let it go I just came out."

The social make up of Aaron's friend group supported his continued coming out on campus.

> Most of the people I knew were not prejudiced against [being gay] even though they look like the stereotypical conservatives. My friend circle was made up of a lot of macho super hyper-masculine guys. They had a reputation for being the kind of people you don't want to fuck with. I figured since they were cool with it I really didn't have a lot to worry about; I didn't worry about anyone else giving me shit.

Having success in coming out socially, Aaron decided to come out to his family a year after coming out to his friends. Aaron's parents were raised in Appalachia in a "super conservative environment." Aaron shared that his parents were "educated enough to not be prejudiced" but they were not suspecting Aaron to be gay so, "it was probably a super culture shock when I came out to them." When choosing to come out to his younger sister and two younger brothers Aaron shared:

> I told my sister first and she was cool with it she was fine but was surprised. Then I told my younger brother and he was, since he was in a younger generation he is more used to the matter so he wasn't really shocked he was just, 'like whatever.' I think with one of my brothers it just hasn't come up because I haven't talked with

> him that much. He's super Christian, he doesn't eat bacon so he may not be tolerant of that but I have no idea.

Since coming out, Aaron has not been in a long-term relationship with another gay man. Aaron has "tried online dating but nothing serious has happened yet." Aaron believes that he has yet to enter into a long-term relationship because he is regularly busy in addition to the presence of "cultural differences" between him and the other gay men in the area. Aaron shared that "stereotypically people don't expect me to be gay, you know, like with most of the traits and interest I have," and that this "more masculine" identity that he possesses is what he is looking for in a partner. Whereas Aaron does not condemn "flamboyant" gay men, he does find it hard to relate to them on a social and romantic level and as such does not find himself interacting with other gay men often.

Beau

Beau was 18 years old and attending a small private college in the south when he came out. At the time of our interview Beau was 19 years old and was still enrolled in the college at which he had came out. From the beginning of the interview Beau's enthusiasm for discussing his experiences of being a gay man were evident. Beau contextualizes his sexual identity within a social advocacy framework and as such saw participating in this study as a way to contribute to the overall well-being of gay men who choose to come out in college. Beau combined a youthful enthusiasm with a desire to be more knowledgeable of LGBT issues that added a rich dimension to the study.

Growing up Beau recognized that he did not experience girls in the same way that his peers seemed to. "In elementary school I would have pretend crushes on girls that I thought were nice people and I was like. 'Oh yes, I am romantically interested in this girl!" In the sixth grade Beau "discovered porn, and I was like this is normal. This is

okay. This doesn't mean I'm gay." As Beau grew older and began to suspect that he was gay he found himself socializing with a group of friends that he believed would not support him in his coming out. Beau shared,

> I knew that I could never talk about anything with them, because it wasn't the right thing, and then I had this idea in my head for the longest time that I just needed to pray on it longer, and I wouldn't need to tell anyone except for God about it, and that he would change me. I thought that for the longest time.

Beau attended a high school that "was not very gay friendly." He knew of two openly gay guys that attended his high school and the experience they had was not something he was interested in replicating. "They were harassed so much. It was not a good environment to be in, and there were people that stuck up for them, but it still wasn't enough to deal with people that didn't." Beau "accepted the fact" that he was gay his senior year in high school and eagerly looked forward to college although he was not sure what his coming out was going to look like.

Beau described his coming out in college as two separate events with the first being "as soon as I got to campus it was actually orientation week. I decided that when I got to [college], I would live as though I were out, just without putting it on social media for people back home to find out." Beau continued to share:

> I got here and I just decided that this is the way that it was going to be. Every time I would say it, or it would get brought up, or I would talk about a romantic interest, it was exhilarating, and I was nervous to say it, because it was something totally new to just pretend like this was a ... That being out was something I was used to, because that's how I was acting at college. Every time I got to say, "Oh, no, I'm gay," or, "Yeah, I'm totally gay," it was something about just being out was awesome.

Beau's second coming out event occurred on New Year's Eve of the same year. The weekend prior to New Year's Eve Beau had drunkenly texted his mother, "Hi, Mom.

By the way, I'm gay." Beau's mother did not overtly get upset which lead to the Beau's coming out on New Year's Eve.

> But I think the big one, telling everyone in a sober way, it felt good. I posted, "Hi, this is Beau. I'm gay. I always have been. Happy New Year." Very short, sweet, and I just got so much support. I got like over a hundred and fifty likes on that status. Just piles of comments of just people supporting me. No negative comments. It was really, really encouraging, and what really touched me the most was when someone texted me, and said, 'Look at all those people commenting on your status. Look at all the lives you've touched, and all the people that love and support you,' and that really stuck out to me. I think that's what stuck with me the most about my coming out experience was the number of people that supported me.

When asked about his thought process in not coming out to his family prior to college Beau shared,

> Well, I didn't want to share it with my mom, mostly because I think that she thought it for a while, and I just sort of wanted to prove her wrong, and think that I wasn't. My dad is just an interesting character. I don't really speak to him at all. He lives in the house, but we don't speak at all, and we didn't in high school either. It was just something I didn't really feel like I needed to share with my family. I wasn't really connected with my family at all anyway.

Since coming out, Beau has had two relationships with other gay men. When asked how Beau connected with his former partners he shared,

> Honestly, it's usually been that they're involved in something that I'm, also, involved in. The relationship I ended a few weeks ago, I met him through a campus thing for get out the vote initiative, right before the November 4th election. I get interested in, "Oh, we are similar people," so I attempt a relationship, and I realize that the romanticism isn't really there.

Conrad

Conrad was 18 years old and attending a mid-sized public university in the northeast when he came out. At the time of our interview Conrad was 23 years old and was starting his first year of graduate school at the same university. Conrad started the interview asking me questions that led me to believe that privacy and anonymity within

the structure of the study was important to him. Conrad was the only participant in the study to have had a long term relationship with another man since coming out; in fact the relationship had ended immediately before Conrad entered graduate school as his boyfriend had chosen to peruse a professional degree at another school. Conrad's level of self-reflectivity and understanding of personal and social factors that influenced his sexual identity development add a unique layer to this study and provide several opportunities for future research.

After I shared with Conrad my reflexivity statement he started the interview without prompt by saying, "I always wondered what my life would have been like if I had came out in high school, as opposed to coming out in college, I don't think it would have gone particularly well for me in high school." He went on to say that he "graduated with a class of about 130 kids so pretty small. Everyone knows everything about you whether you want that or not, but I was able to remain under-the-radar." Conrad shared that he was able to survive high school by assuming an asexual identity where if anyone asked him about his romantic interest he would dismiss the conversation entirely providing the asker with no context clues as to his genuine interest.

Conrad recounted his memory of his peers coming out in high school,

> I'll just speak about guys because there were girls that came out lesbian, and that usually went well for them; that was fine, but for guys it didn't really pan out well for anybody I knew whether I knew him personally or I just knew of him.
>
> Even displaying like a slight interest in men, not even kidding that they were bi or gay or whatever, if anybody even stated that he was curious it did not go well. They were ostracized from their social groups. I think there was one kid who left, he transferred entirely. His family actually moved away. I don't know how much of that was due to him coming out, but I do know that he left my school to attend a private school. He wouldn't even attend another school district nearby.

Conrad first came out to a friend he met his first week in college. “The first time I met him I was standing at a perfect angle that I could see through his sunglasses and there was a fairly attractive man who walked by, and I saw his eyes kind of follow that guy so I was pretty certain he was gay.” Conrad shared that at the start of their friendship neither Conrad not his friend discussed their sexual identity although Conrad felt that his friend was attempting to “get it out of me” several times during the fall of their freshman year. After five months of knowing each other Conrad shared that he was gay with his friend and his friend replied, “Well, you know, we actually have a lot in common.”

When I asked Conrad, “What was it about that moment that made you feel safe enough to come out?” he quickly replied,

> I would not go as far to say I felt safe. I'll be honest, I was definitely ... and I don't really think this is part of the study but I think it's a point of mention ... I was a pretty drug-addicted individual so I was definitely highly intoxicated when I told him.
>
> I think part of it was I was so smacked-out that I just didn't ... you know, heroin will pretty much make you do a lot of things you might not necessarily do otherwise. Heroin and Xanax will do a lot of things to you. I used those drugs kind of as a way to numb out from life in general and numb out from my sexuality because heroin and opiates in general prevent a person from having a sexual drive. I kind of used the drugs to numb out any feelings to men, women, anybody.
>
> I wouldn't say that I felt safe, but I had this chemical safety blanket, this ‘if it goes wrong, whatever, it's gonna be okay’ kind of thing. I just want to say I didn't necessarily feel safe. It was just like a, excuse my français, but kind of like a fuck-it attitude. I had a strong fuck-it attitude back then. Hence, why I was addicted to such powerful drugs.

Conrad entered into a relationship with the friend he came out to and they dated for nearly four years. Conrad shared that this relationship was supportive in that he felt comfortable having someone know he was gay and love him for it but it also inhibited his coming out on a larger scale. Conrad’s partner did not want to come out, and by

Conrad's report is still not out, and he encouraged Conrad to keep their relationship private. Conrad shared that he "was trying to get out there more and [my boyfriend] was saying like, 'No, please let's just keep it to ourselves. Everyone likes us for who we are, as is, so let's not change anything."

When asked how he felt about the secretive aspect of his relationship Conrad shared,

> Just from the people I allowed myself to get to know I figured just keep everything how it is. I'm sure if my social anxiety hadn't been so bad it probably wouldn't have turned out the way it did. It was to the point my anxiety was so bad I couldn't even order food via a drive-through. I wouldn't speak to anybody I didn't know. People had to approach me; I would never initiate things with people I didn't know.
>
> Things probably would have been different, but I did not allow myself to get to know more than, I don't know, ten people or so. It was kind of ... I think a lot of it is on me that I didn't allow myself to get to know more people, and if I had then maybe there would have been more things to support my decision.

Conrad shared that he came out to his parents a year after he started dating his boyfriend without incident. "When I told my parents my mom was totally 100 percent supportive. My father was fairly supportive, but I could definitely sense some reservations." When asked about coming out to the remainder of his family Conrad shared that,

> It didn't go well with my bother. It was kind of odd with my sister. My maternal grandparents always knew; 100 percent supportive. My maternal uncle always knew; 100 percent supportive. I do not have any sort of relationship with my paternal uncle so he probably has no idea. We don't speak at all ... not anything due to this, just other familial problems. My paternal grandfather would absolutely, 100 percent disown me so he does not know, and will never know.

Drake

Drake was 20 years old and attending a large public university on the east coast when he came out. At the time of our interview Drake was 22 years old, attending the

same university at which he came out, and was preparing to graduate within the year. Drake, like Beau, was eager to be a participant in the study as he saw it as an opportunity to add to the body of research on LGBT issues as they relate to college students. Drake's eagerness to share his personal journey and willingness to hypothesize the 'whys' of the current state of affairs of LGBT youth led to a thick description of who Drake is and how he perceives the world. Drake was the only participant that added content to his transcribed interview indicating that even after our conversation ended he was deep in thought about the conversation and had a need to share more of his story.

Drake, who identifies with a Chinese ethnicity, went to a high school that consisted of mostly Hispanic students followed by Caucasian then Asian students. Drake estimated that his overall school consisted of nearly 2,000 students with his senior class representing 300 of them. In high school, Drake was not out even though "there were people that were out, but they were the butt of the joke of a lot of things. I was certainly not going to come out then." Drake shared that while in high school "my friend and his boyfriend were called very derogatory things."

Drake shared that he was aware that he was gay while in high school, however, having any type of relationship was not expected, or even supported, by his family. "I grew up being very, very careful, and hiding anything that I own that might have any inclination to show me being gay." When recounting his high school experience Drake shared:

> My high school experience was that I did everything perfectly, because I knew I needed to get out of where I was. Obviously, my family's expectations were there, in terms of wanting me to succeed, wanting me to get into a good college. Beyond that was my own personal aspirations. The getaway that I used to ignore the sexuality part of high school was working really, really hard. I did everything in

> high school so that I could leave [my hometown], so I could leave and go to some place where I knew that things would be different.

Drake knew that when he went to college there was “no looking back”; there was never going to be a thing where he would go back into the closet. “I knew, going into college, that this was what I was going to eventually ... and I didn't know when ... but eventually it was going to happen.” Drake spent his freshman year trying to get to know people hoping that he would “spontaneously meet other LGBT people.” Drake made friends with another man who was openly gay and happened to be taking some of the same classes as Drake. This friend attempted to support Drake in coming out by sharing his own coming out story and highlighting the support systems that were available at their university but Drake was not ready and did not come out until his sophomore year.

“It didn't happen until sophomore year, where I was tired and down about it.” Drake saw a flyer for a gay and bi men’s group that was offered through the University’s counseling center. As Drake sat in the intake to become a member of the group he remembers,

> That's where everything just came out: emotions were flying. I had no reservations about saying it. This was certainly facilitated by me talking to my counselor, but at that point I was talking to this particular person, who was also gay as well. It was just, "All right, that's it. I'm going to say that this is who I am. I am gay, period. That conversation was the turning point.

Throughout the entirety of his collegiate experience Drake had been involved with a professional fraternity on his campus. Drake cited the openness of this organization as a catalyst for his ability of come out socially in other settings. Drake recounted that,

> When I got there, there were people across the entire spectrum of sexuality, in terms of straight people and LGBT people. They all got along together. Nobody said anything, nobody made an issue out of it. I was like, "This is what I've been looking for, and this is what I've been hoping to find my entire life."

Drake's coming out to his parents did not go as well as he would have hoped. Drake and his father "didn't have a relationship" and Drake did not desire to share his sexual identity with his conservative father. Drake's father died the summer after his sophomore year and Drake remembered thinking, "Oh good, thank God I don't have to tell him that." Drake came out to his mother the summer after his fourth year in college. Drake shared,

> It didn't go well. She ignores it now, and we've never talked about it since then. She said that she didn't accept it. She said, "I don't think you should get married. I think you should just find a lot of friends." I blew up at that point, because, in my mind, that is my ideal: I want to find somebody that I can marry and spend the rest of my life with. That was a very argumentative conversation. Got all over the board in terms of cultural differences, in terms of how we were raised up. Because my mum is actually a bit more liberal, a bit more freethinking than my dad was, but still, just because of the life that she's had as an immigrant, and just not having the same experiences that our generation had, it was just foreign.

Eric

Eric was 18 years old and was attending a large public university on the east coast when he came out. At the time of the interview Eric was 19 years old and was still attending the same university at which he had come out. Eric presented as personally relieved that he was able to publicly identify with his innate sexual identity, especially within the social context of his University. Eric's story provided a unique look at the early experiences of a man coming out in college and complemented the stories of the other participants by providing context that showed a beginning to end collegiate timeline within the study.

Eric, who self identifies with a Hispanic ethnicity, went to a "large urban high school." Eric's high school had close to 4,000 students and 927 of those student's were in Eric's graduation class. Eric estimated that of those 4,000 students approximately 30 of

those students were openly gay. Eric remembered that some of the out students were looked down upon while some were just treated the same. Thinking about what factors influenced how the out students were treated Eric shared that “some of them weren't so flamboyant, but the ones that were flamboyant were treated down upon. In general, the population at my school they were like, "Okay, it's not my business. I don't care."

Eric was the only participant who shared that his parents were “really religious” and as such raised him in the Catholic faith. Eric shared about being unaware “that gay people actually existed until about my freshman year in high school. The whole time I’m just like, ‘I’m a freak’, thinking the worst, about myself.” The first person Eric ever told he was gay was a priest in confession the summer after he graduated high school. “What [the priest] told me was, ‘It's not a sin to be gay. God will still love you,’ even though it was against everything I learned that the Catholic Church had said about gay people."

Eric cited receiving this information from his religious leader as a turning point in his sexual identity.

> I was like, "Okay, this is different. I think I can start to accept myself a little bit." Then slowly at first I started talking to other gay people in my city, which was just a few people that I knew and I was safe asking them questions about it. Without revealing that I was actually gay, I was asking them, how did they really come out and how did they get the strength to do it. I started to get tired of hiding a part of who I was from everybody and not being true to who I was.

When Eric got to college he decided that he did not want to hide his gay identity as he did in high school. Eric moved into university housing three weeks into the semester as he was “dreading moving in” in fear of who he would have as roommates. “I just wanted to see how my roommates were for the first few weeks before I tell them. They were really decent.” Eric shared that “they automatically assumed I'm straight because I'm a Hispanic and I'm living with them.” Eric remembered being nervous

because his roommates made fun of each other by calling each other “gay”. “The way they were acting, I was scared to tell them, ‘Look. I'm actually gay.” It was several months later when his roommates started a conversation about the types of girls they liked and that Eric shared with them, "I don't like girls."

Eric shared how his roommates are currently responding to him being an openly gay man.

> After [I came out], I felt a little bit more comfortable but now they're still joking around about the gay stuff. Whenever I have been friends with a guy and I hang out with them they automatically ... they happen to see me with someone even if it's just joking, it's a little bit more joking about sleeping with him and I'm just like, "I don't sleep with every guy and I don't have sex with friends." I'm like, "Just like you guys don't sleep with every girl. Do you guys have a friend?" I feel like it's new to them to actually have a gay person in their lives.

Eric’s religious upbringing colored his experience of coming out to his parents. “The most difficult I think was telling my parents. My parents are really religious and all. That was so hard because they were always asking, ‘What did I do wrong?" Eric remembers being hurt that he felt his parents “were making it about themselves when it really didn't have anything to do with them.” Eric’s family does not publically acknowledge that Eric came out to them and Eric has chosen not to bring it up to them again.

Finn

Finn was 18 years old and attending a small public college in the northeast when he came out. At the time of our interview Finn was 19 years old and was still attending the same university at which he came out. Finn, like Beau and Drake, was eager to participate in the study as he saw it as a way to contribute to the body of literature on coming out in college. Finn described himself as active in campus LGBT education

organizations and felt that talking with me would be in the same vein as his advocacy work on campus. Finn appeared to be comfortable talking about his coming out experience and answered several of the protocol questions without being directly prompted.

Finn shared that it was during his senior year in high school when he acknowledged to himself that he was gay. Finn recalled his thought process as follows:

> We were just getting back from a band trip. We were in a coach bus and all my male friends were sitting with their respective girlfriends, and I was sitting with a friend of mine, a female friend. She was very comfortable with me. We had never dated or anything of that manner, but she felt comfortable enough to be sleeping on my shoulder for the trip. I'm seeing all my friends around me with their girlfriends, and I'm wondering why this isn't working between me and the girl sleeping with me.
>
> She's smart, she's attractive, she likes me, I like her. Why am I not feeling this romantic attraction with her? Of course, I've had these homosexual thoughts before, and I, of course, just tried to-… Normally, I would say, "I'll pass through it." Then I realized, "You have the perfect set-up here, Finn. It's really not a phase."

Finn decided to tell his sister about his realization later than evening. Although this would be the first time Finn shared his non-heterosexual identity with anyone else, he does not define this as his coming out.

> My sister picked me up from the bus that day. It was just her and I in the house, and I spent about twenty minutes staring at a wall while she's watching TV. I grabbed the remote and turned it off, and she's like, "What the hell was that for?" I'm like, "Sis, I'm gay." She's like, "Oh, we should talk about this," so we did for about forty minutes or so. Then I went to bed, because I didn't know what to feel at that point, so I just sort of went off there.

Finn's choice to not tell his parents at this point proved to be a point of contention for Finn and his sister.

> Then, the next day, she's like, "Okay, so we need to tell Mom and Dad." I'm like, "Oh, I'm not going to," because it wasn't time for me yet, I wasn't ready to come out. That's the angriest I've ever seen my sister, because she wanted me to get this

> done, and I didn't want it done yet. She stayed that way for, maybe, less than a week, but she was fine and we never brought it up again until I had gone to college.
>
> Coming out was not a simple thing for me to do. It was a time of "Finn is gay. He needs to think about this for a while. He needs to internalize it. Then, he needs to work for it, and actually make it a solidified thing."

Finn choose to come out to his parents six months after his told his sister; at this point Finn was a freshman in college. Finn shared that although he was extremely anxious to come out to his parents, their reactions were warm and welcoming.

> The first thing I hear is from my Lutheran pastor dad. He says, "Okay," and that's it. It was shocking because I had no idea how they would react. My father is Lutheran pastor. My mother is a physician's assistant, and it was never really addressed. I never really knew their thoughts on it before, but they took it absolutely fine and have taken it absolutely fine. They've been wonderful, wonderful people. It's to the point where my mom, she'll give me gift cards to restaurants I like around school so that she knows I can take people there for date night.

After coming out to his parents Finn choose to start coming out to his friends on campus.

> After I told my parents this, it wasn't until two months later that I actually told really a very good friend of mine up at school about that. We were just hanging out in his room, and I just sat him down and just told him this. That was the first time he hugged me, and he actually showed actual affection. I'm like, "Oh, so, like, no one really cares here, do they?" I just realized over and over again no one at my school has cared. In the best possible sense. It's just another fact about me. I'm six foot tall, I have brown hair, and I'm gay.

Finn described experiencing a warm a welcoming environment every time he came out to someone on campus. When he came out to his fraternity pledge class he was one of four other pledges who identified as gay. It was his experience in receiving such a positive response that has encouraged him to participate in numerous campus wide initiatives. Finn is a speaker on Safe Zone panels, is a member of a LGB mentoring network, and will be on his campus' orientation team in the fall.

Finn shared that although he is comfortable being out on campus that his comfort does not immediately equate to his ability to be in a same sex relationship. Finn shared that while he is active in LGBT advocacy groups and is well versed in LGBT student issues but the "act of being a gay man" is something that he still struggles with.

> It's very strange where, on one side, I totally identify with this part, and I'm fine doing that, but on the other side, I have absolutely no experience with this portion of romance, and it's very flip-floppy. I'm actively trying to resist that for fear of emotional hurt or mental hurt, however you want to call it, but I don't think that's going to help me in the longer run as a person who's still getting used to this new stance in the world.

Gavin

Gavin was an 18 years old attending a small public college in the northeast when he came out. At the time of our interview Gavin was 19 years old and still attending the same university at which he came out. Of all of the participants in this study Gavin had come out the most recently; at the time of the interview Gavin had been out for six months. Gavin was willing to share his coming out story but was sure to clarify that he was still in the process of coming out to his friends and family. Gavin was the only participant who had not come out to his family nor his friends from home. Gavin was comfortable with being out but had not found the appropriate time or place to come out to anyone who did not attend his college.

Gavin described his hometown as "pretty run of the mill." "It's a small, middle-class town that's grown over the years. Its not wealthy, its not poor, just middle-class working families." Gavin enjoyed his high school years and he did well academically and was MVP of his cross-country team. Gavin reported not being aware of anyone who was openly gay in his high school and he was not sure how he or she would have been treated by his or her classmates if they were. Gavin shared that he knew he gay in high school

but did not feel comfortable coming out to people who knew him as heterosexual. Gavin avoided conversations about sexuality and dating in high school and he shared that his friends were comfortable with him not dating or "needing a girlfriend."

When he left for college Gavin did not have any plans to come out as gay.

> I actually had no intention, I hadn't even really thought about it before [I did it], it just kind of happened. I know in high school I had already made a bunch of friends, I had known them for a long time. I felt sort of uncomfortable coming out to people I already had established friendships with, they already have a firm idea of who I am.

Several months after arriving on campus and having completed the pledge process for his fraternity, Gavin decided to come out to his pledge class during an initiation activity.

> It was very surprising the way I did it. I hadn't come out to anyone my whole life. Except for a few people who I had been involved with [physically] back home, but those are obvious. I had pledged with [my fraternity] at [my college]. So I was going through pledging, I had been pledging for seven weeks. It was the beginning of our initiation, so I'd been through initiation, but this was the first day of our actual initiation. One of the activities that we did, sort of in private with our pledge class was we went around and each person shared a secret about themselves. I was at the end of the circle and I was trying to think of something to say, and I don't really have any secrets that come to mind except for that. I'd never told anyone before so I was really debating whether I should come out with it or not.
>
> It was like a million thoughts are going through my head and it was a huge thinking process and I just decided, now that I'm in college, I haven't really met these people, gotten to know them yet, its only been a few months. So I may as well try to redo, try to start out again, let them know that before they really got to know me and I'd be more hesitant to come out. Eventually it got to me and I just announced it to my whole pledge class. Obviously they were really supportive but it was definitely really nerve-wracking. After it was over I felt really weird for a little while, but I got over it pretty quickly and everyone's been very supportive of it

Gavin shared that coming out this way supported his personal preference of "not making a speculate of myself or making it all about me." After Gavin came out to his

pledge class he did not make any additional formal declarations of his sexual identity but shared he felt comfortable discussing it socially as though it was common knowledge. Gavin shared that not wanting the spotlight has been part of the reason he has not come out to his parents.

> I feel like, if I just bring it up out of context to them, then that's sort of me trying to draw attention to myself and making a spectacle of myself. Its also about just finding the right time in a conversation to bring it up. Oftentimes that time never really comes up so I've just been thinking about it for a while. I'm been planning on telling them sometime at the beginning of the summer if I don't see them any sooner, so very soon.

Gavin shared that he plans on telling his parents before he comes out to his friends from high school. Gavin explained that, "Even now I'm still hesitant to come out to people who I've known all the way through high school. Just because they've already formed their ideas of me." Gavin described this sense that his immediate family would have no issue with him coming out as gay as his parents have "always supported me and my brother." Gavin's largest concern is that the people who he has known the longest and view him as heterosexual by default will view him differently and even possible choose to end their relationships with him. "The last people I'll come out to is my friends at home. But my friends, some of them are still in high school, I feel like they're not as matured and they might react a little bit differently."

Choice of College

To help establish rapport at the onset of the interview and understand the participants' decision-making process in choosing a location for their higher education, I began each interview by asking the participants to share their rationale for choosing the college they chose to attend. Although all of the participants except two, Aaron and Gavin, shared that they knew they were going to come out after they left high school and

started college, this did not overtly influence their choice of college. The participants' responses were rooted in the belief that they choose an institution that would be a good fit with their personal and professional expectations of college.

> I wasn't terrible in high school but I did horrible on the SATs so I went there because it was a cheap school and I wouldn't get a lot of debt from it and it had my major interest and the availability of transferring. (Aaron)

> From what I had heard about [the college] it seemed like a good place to be involved in good things, like active social justice activism, those things. It just felt like the place I needed to be. (Beau)

> My family's down here. I have a lot of cousins around here. Just the weather, I like much more. The decision to come here was not based on the program and what that was, it was based off of when I visited [the college], it was like, "That's where I want to be." Anywhere else, it wasn't a consideration anymore. (Drake)

> When I came to visit the campus it was one of the most, more open campus. Everybody just looked so friendly and accepting. I visited places all over the campus and I felt like I belonged there. (Eric)

> It was a very abrupt thing. It was either going to be this school or [my college]. I was talking to both my parents, and we discussed finances. We figured out it would only be $10,000 more to go to [my college] than [another college I was accepted to]. That was worth the debt for me, because of what I saw at the school. Right now, I could not be happier with my choice of school. I love it very much. (Finn)

> Pretty much what tipped it off was I won, there's a scholarship program called the [my college] medal. I had been looking at [my college] originally, I looked at it once, and I had won the medal in high school so that kind of piqued my interest a little bit, I came and visited a few more times, I started getting more attached to it and then went on tours other places and I started to apply to more top tier schools because I figured now that I had the medal, my chances for getting into [my college] were probably a little bit greater now. (Gavin)

Believing that the college would provide the opportunities for growth academically and socially were at the heart of the participants' decisions to come out. In summary, the decision to choose the schools they attended was based on similar academic or financial reasons and was not based on the participants' intent to come out

once there. Even though most of the participants knew they were going to come out in college this did not impact the college that they chose to attend.

Factors that Inhibited Coming Out Before College

To explore reasons the participants chose not to come out before college, I asked them to talk about the things they believed inhibited them from coming out while they were in high school. In addtioan, I also asked the participants to share reasons they are aware of that others did not come out in high school as well. By asking this question in two different ways I supported the participants in feeling comfortable sharing inhibiting factors that they may not feel comfortable identifying as their own. The responses can best be categorized into four themes: 1) lack of LGB social support, 2) faith based concerns, 3) concern regarding familial response, and 4) security in perceived heterosexual identity.

Lack of LGB Social Support

All seven of the participants shared that they did not experience the presence of a supportive environment for gay youth to come out while in high school. Five of the seven participants shared experiences of knowing, or knowing of, openly gay youth at their high school who were ridiculed and bullied.

> In high school I probably wouldn't have come out because people would've probably made fun of me. (Aaron)

> I think it definitely has something to do with the environments they come from, which is one of the reasons that I didn't talk about earlier. Our high school was not very gay friendly. The two openly gay guys at my school were harassed so much. It was not a good environment to be in, and there were people that stuck up for you, but it still wasn't enough to deal with people that didn't. (Beau)

> The first guy I knew came out as bi in eighth grade. It didn't go well at all. People kind of invalidated his bisexuality and said, No, you're hiding behind this as like a veil. You're really gay, and you're just using bisexuality as like a crutch to be

> more accepted. I think there was one kid who left, he transferred entirely. His family actually moved away. I don't know how much of that was due to him coming out, but I do know that he left my school to attend a private school. He wouldn't even attend another school district nearby. When I say nearby they're about 15 miles apart, fairly rural, and it's because even other school's kids, kids at those schools, knew because that's how intertwined everything is where I lived. Everyone knows everybody. (Conrad)

Drake shared that he was aware that the environment was not supportive but felt powerless to do anything to help when a friend of his was bullied for being gay.

> I'm pretty sure that my friend and his boyfriend were called very derogatory things. They were both on the cheerleading team, so it's like they're welcoming ... or not welcoming ... there were a lot of comments made about them. Not necessarily being provoked in any way. When conversations would end up onto that particular person and his boyfriend, it was not a fun experience, and not something that I could change in anyway, because I didn't have any confidence in trying to stop that.

Faith Based Concerns

Four of the participants shared that having a faith that did not support nonheterosexual identities was an inhibiting factor. This theme applied specifically to the way the closeted gay man sees him self through this lens and does not address the way that family members may project their faith systems on the individual as this is addressed in the subsequent theme.

> I was surrounded by those church friends that I talked about earlier, and I knew that I could never talk about anything with them, because it wasn't the right thing, and then I had this idea in my head for the longest time that I just needed to pray on it longer, and I wouldn't need to tell anyone except for God about it, and that he would change me. (Beau)

> Let's say someone went to a private school that had roots in Catholicism, I'm guessing, or it could be another religion. Could maybe have that an effect? I would imagine that would be pretty detrimental. (Conrad)

> In general in our town there was a church on literally every corner so it would have been hard to be open about it outside of school, because of all the churches around every corner. We had different, all the religions. There were places of

> worship all over town. It is hard for me to be open about it now because of the churches over town. (Eric)

Concern Regarding Familial Response

Being concerned about the way family members would respond to their coming out was present in all seven of the participants' interviews. The concerns were found to fall into three subthemes: 1) family's faith affiliation, 2) relationship with family prior to coming out, and 3) generational differences.

Family's Faith Affiliation

Four of the seven participants reported that the faith affiliation of family members did or could inhibit someone from coming out.

> I mean it could be his family just not his being supportive because of being super religious. (Aaron)

> It's odd because my grandfather, my paternal grandfather, it's such a huge inhibitor. It was. In general. It remains, for him ... I will never tell him ... solely because of his religious affiliation. (Conrad)

> I was wondering about the religious upbringing, the family in general, and they have to be very conservative about it. They might have the religious aspect or they had an idea about growing up and being different and having the hetero normal family that they were expected to have growing up. (Drake)

> But some people grow up in an environment that's less accepting of it. I think if you're raised in an environment where your parents are less accepting of that [religiously] and you are thrown into a mass confusion. A lot of them feel like this isn't supposed to be how ... they know they're gay but they're sort of just less comfortable expressing it, out of what their families will think. I feel like it makes people less secure in that regard, based on their upbringing. (Gavin)

Relationship with Family Prior to Coming Out

Four of the seven participants believed that familial relationships prior to coming out influenced in the study.

> If they're in an unsafe situation where their families are going to kick them out of the house then maybe they shouldn't come out. (Aaron)

> I guess I didn't want to tell [my mom] because it upset me that she thought that she could know before I told her, because I'm a very firm believer that you don't know until someone tells you, and so it upset me that she thought that she could know, and that's why I didn't tell her even though I thought she knew. My dad is just an interesting character. I don't really speak to him at all. He lives in the house, but we don't speak at all, and we didn't in high school either. It was just something I didn't really feel like I needed to share with my family. I wasn't really connected with my family at all anyway. (Beau)

> They might still be struggling because they might have family that, they're dependent on their families so they don't want to damage that relationship or they're really close to family and they don't want to lose their family and they know their family isn't gonna accept it well. (Drake)

> Honestly, some of these closeted people on campus may still remain the same because of their financial state. It's an expensive school, and if they have conservative parents back home, they're going to want to remain closeted until they're done, because should word of this, as I thought, should word of this somehow get back to my family, that's not what I would want. For them it may be financial. For me it was emotional. (Finn)

Generational Differences

Generational difference, especially between first-generation Americans and their gay children or grandchildren, were known inhibiting factors for four of the seven participants.

> Some of my friends they're first-generation Americans and their parents were raised in other countries where it's very looked down upon to be gay. One of my friends, their father served in the Soviet Army, so he, there are a lot people who served in the Soviet Army who were against gay people. That's why they're afraid to come out to their parents. (Eric)

Conrad was encouraged to not disclose his sexual identity to his ninety-three year old grandfather in fear of the complete dissolution of that relationship.

> I will never tell him. It has nothing to do with the will. I can care less about his money. I don't care about that at all. It's more we have good memories. He's a good person; he's not a bad man at all. It's just he's just from a different time. He just doesn't understand, that's all. It's nothing against him. I blame more the society and culture he was brought up in.

Drake shared that his decision to not come out to his parents, especially his father, before college was heavily impacted by the cultural differences in their generations.

> I think what I was stopped by, and what I think a lot of people are stopped by, is the fact that a lot of the culture frowns upon it as I had two immigrant parents. There's certainly a cultural difference between my parents and I, not just on sexuality, but across the board. That was definitely what I dealt with growing up. My dad, I was never going to tell.
>
> The Asian culture is very notorious about being hush hush about sexuality. Even heterosexual relationships were never mentioned. Particularly in my family, you knew somebody was single, and then you knew somebody was engaged, there was no information in between.

Gavin shared that his grandparents where acculturated to being discriminatory as a result of when they grew up.

> As far as my extended family goes, my grandparents are definitely not accepting, they grew up in a different time, they're more used to being more discriminatory. I don't know how they'd feel about it but at this point now that I'm in college I don't really care. I wouldn't really come out to them, like my parents, I don't think, I just really think they wouldn't care about that.

Security in Perceived Heterosexual Identity

Four of the seven participants shared that finding security in being perceived as heterosexual was an inhibiting factor in coming out. By maintaining a heterosexual presence, security was achieved by the knowledge of what to expect, whereas not knowing what to expect when coming out removed that security.

> I was always tempted to come out of the closet for a while but I was just like so comfortable with not that I was like should I really do this, should I really say this. Even if you're around an environment that is tolerant and accepting of, it is still a move that you have to make to get out of the closest. It's a life change. They're probably just thinking just like, how is this going to drastically change my life if I come out? That's pretty much what I can think of and, and how will my family would react to that? (Aaron)
>
> I was embarrassed by it, and I felt like I could deal with it on my own, and I didn't want them to look at me differently or treat me differently. (Beau)

> My parents always told me I always had a lot of trouble with change, as a child and having to come out was going to be a big change, or so I thought. (Conrad)

> Or they (gay college students) themselves, even though they accept it (being gay), they're still not comfortable with the fact that they are. They have always been seen as straight and that is who people think they are. (Eric)

> I'm planning on [coming out to my family] in the near future. It's the same sort of concept with them, I've obviously known them my entire life and they've built up an idea of who I am. Telling them about that is very nerve-wracking. (Gavin)

Factors that Influenced Coming Out in College

The crux of this study was to explore the coming out experiences of gay men who choose to come out in college. At the heart of the decision to come out were factors that supported and inhibited the coming out process; this section addresses both sets of these factors. Whereas each participant shared experiences regarding their coming out that were situated in unique individual circumstances, common themes surfaced amongst the participant interviews.

Supportive Factors

Through this study it was my intention to have participants reflect upon thoughts, feeling, and experiences that they identified as supporting them in their decision to come out while in college. The participants' responses are best categorized into six themes that included: 1) welcoming campus environment, 2) public examples of gay relationships, 3) masculine disposition, 4) technology, 5) the desire to help others come out, and 6) change in public perception of coming out.

Welcoming Campus Environment

Aaron felt support from the other men that lived on his floor in his residence hall and as such felt safe in coming out to the larger campus.

> Living around other males who didn't care if I was gay probably encouraged me to come out because since they didn't care I knew I was going to be ok.

Beau's perception that there was a strong presence of social advocacy organizations on his campus indicated to him that his campus was welcoming of his coming out.

> [My college] is very, very gay friendly now. It seems like every other man that I meet is gay. Like I said, with the activism, there were events like the March for Fairness that happened, and it was within weeks of me being on campus. The Harvey Milks Society that I talked about a little bit earlier. The people that were involved in that organization, and they're the ones that sort of planned ... Facilitate the Fairness events. The people in those organizations were really personable. I became good friends with all of them. I felt like they supported me, and I felt like if this organization could support me, that I was good. I had a good level of support to come out.

Additionally Beau cites having knowledge of out faculty as a factor that contributed to a welcoming campus factor.

> We have a lot of queer faculty here, and I know that ... For me, I've never gone to speak with them about those sorts of issues, but I think that for me just seeing the queer faculty live their lives, I think that's really encouraging to just see them talk freely about their partners, their husbands and wives. I think just seeing them live freely is an encouragement for me.

Drake found his welcoming campus environment through an academic fraternity he joined the spring of his freshman year.

> It wasn't until spring quarter of my freshman year, where I ended up rushing for the professional chemistry fraternity that's on campus. I hold our chapter very near and dear to my heart, because when I got there, there were people across the entire spectrum of sexuality, in terms of straight people and LGBT people. They all got along together. Nobody said anything, nobody made an issue out of it. I was like, "This is what I've been looking for, and this is what I've been hoping to find my entire life."

Eric shared that the campus LGBT provided a welcoming campus environment for him.

> I just started hanging out a little bit more in the LGBT Center and I could be a little more open, then I met a couple friends there and we get along really well. The kinda friends that like you for who you are. I think college offers you all the resources you would need if you are thinking about coming out and since, at home you're not as pressured to be the perfect child that your parents or your family expect you to be. I think that college is a much more open environment. It gives them the opportunity to come out if they want to.

Eric remembers believing that his campus environment was going to be welcoming even before he started classes.

> When I came to orientation they had this panel of students and where they came from and two of the students were gay and they were talking about how open it was here and how everybody really didn't care if you were. That, first off put in my mind, okay, it's going to be easier out here. Then I went to check out the LGBT Center here at school and everybody was so friendly and everybody was fine with everybody coming out. I was like, okay, this is going to be a lot easier.

Finn shared that once he came out to his fraternity brothers and moved in with them he was pleasantly surprised at the level of support he received.

> I went from having no roommates to, all of a sudden, seven roommates and none of them had any indication of surprise or-. No, no, sorry. That's not the phrasing I want to have. None of them factored [that I was gay] in with the fact that I was going to live with them, and it was wonderful to see. It was something I didn't expect for whatever reason, I don't know.

Gavin shared that the supportive environment he felt from his fraternity brothers lead to his coming out.

> Yeah it was definitely a supportive environment. After I shared it people were very happy or very proud that I was willing to share that big of a secret.

Public Examples of Gay Relationships

Seeing examples of openly gay individuals in same-sex relationships on campus supported four of the seven participants in their coming out.

> … seeing other gay men, I think that that was almost saying I can live my life, and date people, and other options now that I did not have at home at all, because the two openly gay men back home were not people that I wanted to be associated with. But I think that the presence of those people ... The presence of dating

> opportunities made it easier, too, because it was almost like what's the point of coming out back home when there's no one to date back home, and that's really just that sort of thing. (Beau)

> I remember my second or third week on campus, and I was walking to class and I saw two guys kiss. I literally stopped in my tracks. I was blown away that people, that guys specifically, would show PDA and no one noticed. Everyone just kept walking. No one cared, no one said anything. I was the only one standing there staring at them, like a weirdo, because if that had happened [at home] the reaction would not have been very well. People definitely would have said something like "faggots" or whatever slurs what have you. Probably no it wouldn't have progressed to a level of physical violence. (Conrad)

> I did meet somebody in my freshman year who I knew was openly gay. I just became friends with him. He actually was taking some of the same classes that I was taking, so I just wanted to get to know him and have a friend. Secretly I was jealous the fact that he had a boyfriend; although it wasn't going to be any time soon that I was going to have a boyfriend. (Drake)

> Everybody's talking and you see random couples holding hands out there. In my hometown that wouldn't have been possible. Everybody would be talking about them and shaming them down. Here it was a totally normal thing and I'm like, okay, this is gonna be a good place to come out. (Eric)

Masculine Disposition

Four of the seven participants shared that since they had a “masculine” presence, as compared to a self described “flamboyant” one, that they felt supported in their coming out.

> I'm the kind of like, stereotypically people wouldn't, people wouldn't expect me to be gay, you know, like with most of the traits I have an interest. I feel like people who are more masculine are more accepted, I'm not going to lie about that, yeah I think that is true. But sometimes more feminine gays, I feel like some people they already, they do kind of already suspect. I don't know if that's true a 100 %percent of the time. (Aaron)

> I don’t look what you think gay would look like. I never go to clubs, I never hookup, I never dress in absurd clothing. I dress in a very plain ... I just wear jeans and a t-shirt, I'm not going to wear weird dress shoes or whatever. I hold the people who are flamboyant to some regard because of the fact that they have been open for very long amounts of time, to the point where they can do what they do. That being said, that's the image that everybody has. That's the notion that everybody has of who we are. (Eric)

> I think I'm in the middle. I don't think I'm very flamboyant, but I think I'm very open about it, but not too open. I feel I'm in the middle. I don't know. I knew those people were brave enough to be completely who they were without caring and I think that bugged a lot of people that these people were able to be who they were without being afraid of who they were and that they were so confident and that these people were jealous about that. They wanted to be as confident as them so they looked down upon them and made fun of them because they didn't have that strength to act like them. (Drake)

> How it actually works is that, because I lead a lot of things, I have to act a certain way or another in order to command people's respect or to get them to along with what I'm saying. By nature, I'm not a very aggressive person at all. I try to understand people's emotions as much as I can, but every once in a while, I almost need to-. Apparently, I lead well enough to the fact that people, by default, like in a group project, they'll look towards me. I really hate saying this, but if something goes wrong, they'd be like, "Finn, what do we do?" (Finn)

Technology

All of the participants spoke of how technology either supported their coming out directly or how they have personally observed others be supported in their coming out by technology.

> …[The internet] is definitely a support network that's out there… (Aaron)

> I think that things like Facebook, so for me being able to post a status, instead of calling people up and waiting for it to go from person to person for people to find out that I'm gay, I could just do it in like one swoop, say, "Hey, this is who I am," and you can subtly change who you're interested in on Facebook, things like that. I think it makes it easier to act as though it's always been that way, that you've always been out, the presence of technology, because you can ... The way you set it up, there's no historical context to changing who you're interested in on Facebook. (Beau)

> I think that you can find an online environment that is probably far more accepting. (Conrad)

> To me, those websites, those resources, have helped other people, who are more ... not necessarily more confident, but more outgoing, more ... I guess outgoing is the best word I can think of right now in terms of using those apps. Taking initiative, kind of deal. They take more initiative on those apps than I do. They can find other people that they may find attractive. I guess attraction is one level

> of how they interact with each other, or how they start interacting with each other. (Drake)
>
> If you find a relationship that you really want to pursue then obviously, I feel like people would be more inclined to come out at that point. So just the ease of being able to find someone given the new technology makes it easier to come out. Or not easier, but people become more apt to. (Gavin)

The use of gay dating websites and "hook up" apps was another way technology was used to support the coming out process.

> [Dating apps] probably has helped people for the most part get connected. (Aaron)
>
> Yeah. I would say that the presence of dating apps and things like that make it hard to hide on campus. If you don't want to come out, but you're on the dating sites, the campus finds out either way, because with there being so many gay people on campus, it's a topic of discussion. (Beau)
>
> I would say it's probably related more heavily toward the hooking up process, but I have a degree of confidence it would aid in the coming-out process. Maybe because for me all I really needed was that one person to accept who I was and then the ball started to roll and I started to tell more people. Eventually it led to telling my family and everything so I would think that maybe it would help that lonely, gay boy who's all by himself find someone else who accepts him, and then maybe that would also help him get the ball rolling by him telling other people. (Conrad)
>
> I think, for my friends who are LGBT identifying, that's what they appreciate about those types of apps that they can talk to other people about these issues. Not necessarily about specific issues, but just about themselves, just talk about themselves. (Drake)
>
> I feel it makes it a little bit easier but it's also a little bit tricky. People who use apps, the dating apps like Tinder and all that, people can out them easier if they wanted to. It's also easier to come out because it's like, oh, it's casual and you casually get used to it. It's how you can be able to come out to everybody else. Technology, in general, you get to see other people being open about it. That makes you maybe possibly motivated about getting yourself out, too. (Eric)
>
> People can make themselves a limited source of anonymity, at the same time as they're able to selectively choose who they come out to, to an extent. They're able to not put their profile picture up on Grindr. (Finn)

The presence of LGBT content, especially coming out videos, on YouTube was shared by three of the seven participants.

> When I was in high school and middle school, I was on YouTube a lot and on a lot of websites. I would see these stories of people that come out, and their communities and families turn on them, or stories like this one person in this person's life was very supportive, but no one else was. (Beau)

> I think YouTube has done a great job. I think YouTube is where a lot of people go. YouTube itself is trying to promote that with the content they run. YouTube has many advocates and allies making "It Gets Better" videos, whether they are straight or LGBT. That has certainly been a huge thing for a lot of people. That certainly helps. (Drake)

> I watch YouTube videos of, some of my favorite YouTube videos out were Gay and Out and some of them had their coming out videos and I saw that there were others that did the same thing I did, having the same feelings and I was like, okay, it makes a little bit easier because you feel like not you're not alone in this and that there's other people going through the same thing. (Eric)

Desire to Help Others Come Out

Four of the seven participants shared that their desire to help other LGB youth come out was a supportive factor in their decision to come out.

> I think that that transition from not being out at all to being out on campus was being involved in things like Fairness, the Fairness rally, where we had a large pool of straight allies that could come help us, and I think that they could participate in these events without saying I'm gay, and I think that made that transition easier for them to hold a sign at a Fairness March to dating someone, like that progression should happen. (Beau)

> That's another thing that I think about constantly, is the invisibility of LGBT people in the sciences. That's what I want to try to impact to some degree. My goal is to get a PhD, and then become a professor, and then in some way help the next generation of scientists, who may or may not be LGBT identifying, but still I'll contribute in some way. (Drake)

Eric spoke of a program sponsored through the LGBT center on his campus that he was looking forward to volunteering with in the future.

> Yes, there's one called Project One. They go to high schools and help LGBT high-schoolers transition into high school and into college and help mentor them in case they need any help with coming out or anything like that. I want to do that.

Finn shared that he has become aware of the role he wants to play in supporting others in their coming out as he has become more aware of both his level of privilege and of oppression.

> Sometimes, I struggle with thinking of how much impact I can make in minority issues, such as racism or sexism, but I realize I am in an "-ism" myself, so if I can help people work through this, then I'm doing something to help get rid of the "-isms."

Change in Public Perception of Coming Out

Six of the seven participants shared that they have noticed a positive change in the way that coming out as gay has been perceived socially.

> This [his coming out in college] was the time when Glee and stuff was coming out and it was more, like, people knew about this stuff more. In high school it wasn't as well known, people didn't know about this stuff and it wasn't like considered cool to be gay back then. I mean the culture shift wasn't yet. (Aaron)

> I think that culturally, with support being publicized the way it is now, I think that's changed a lot, and I think that if the world was the way it is right now when I was a freshman in high school that I would have came out in high school. I think the more opportunities to be involved in things, so ... Like at my high school they just over the summer started the first LGBT support group back home, and that's a thing that people can get involved with, that people can support now. (Beau)

> I think there's a palpable change over the last four years. I don't know why, but to me, there has been a change. The primary message being that it is no longer acceptable to be derogatory or make derogatory comments about the LGBT community. This is where we should start, but is only one element in improving the coming out process in college. (Drake)

> I feel people are getting more accepting about coming out. A little bit. Because our generation is growing up. Our generation's just starting to become parents and all and a lot of them are growing up and being more accepting. The conservative generation, they're starting to grow out of it also because they don't want to lose touch with families, too, because folks are getting old. I feel we're getting to the point where coming out is becoming okay and it's becoming a little bit easier as we go. (Eric)

> Besides making it more orderly, rather than the general confusion, having it be more accepted, people are making sort of a less big deal out of it. I don't want to say that sexuality is becoming more fluid, because I'm coming from a very small part of the world, and a very small community of that part of the world. The way I see it here, yeah, people don't care as much. (Finn)

> I'd say generally over time its definitely become more accepted by society. People are more willing to accept people of all different sexualities at this point. Definitely has been the general trend over the years I'd say. (Gavin)

Inhibiting Factors

While discussing factors that supported their coming out in college, participants also shared factors that either inhibited their coming out initially or inhibited them from coming out to more people. The responses shared by the participants can be classified into three themes: 1) LGB as a hidden population, 2) non-public relationships, and 3) security in perceived heterosexual identity.

LGB as a Hidden Population

Not seeing out faculty and staff or openly gay students in relationships contributed to a feeling that the LGB population is nonexistent or hidden, which can inhibit students from coming out. Drake shared:

> Most of my classes are in the sciences, I alluded to that earlier, and there are no ... at least what I see on a daily basis, there is [no out faculty]. There was no visibility of LGBT people there. That was certainly very difficult for me. In North Campus (social sciences) there's a whole bunch of people. You can look on their faculty page, if they are an ally, or even identifying. You can find them.

> In South Campus, there's nobody, absolutely nobody. The academic structure of, "I'm a professor, here's my wife. Our wives should meet. Let's go out to dinner, and have some wine, and talk about our research. Let's do this." That's very structured. People do it, people continue to do it just because, well, what else are they going to do? They have no other guidelines, so let's just continue what we've been doing. In South Campus, you don't see anybody at all.

Finn echoed Drake's sentiment:

> As for on campus, you never really know whether-. You're never like, "Oh, yeah, 'Professor Joe', no, he's totally gay." You don't know that. You never do.

Non-public Relationships

After coming out to at least one person, three of the seven participants either entered into relationships with men who did not want to make their sexual identity public or knew of such relationships. These relationships inhibited those in the relationships from coming out to other people.

> When I came out, my then boyfriend was even more closeted than I. He still has not come out. He kind of kept my viewpoint of first semester of don't change anything because everyone likes you now. He kept that going for ... well, he's kept it going now for years. It was kind of a bit of a vicious cycle because I was trying to get out there more and he was saying like, "No, please let's just keep it to ourselves. Everyone likes us for who we are, as is, so let's not change anything." (Conrad)

> My first relationship, despite him being more knowledgeable, I guess you could say, about being gay, the specifics, the knowledge of sex and whatever, he didn't want to be out in public. Despite him being more experienced, I, at that point, was like, "I want to be able to walk down the street holding hands with another dude. I want to be comforted by somebody. I want the possibility to be comforted by somebody in the physical sense, not just an emotional sense." I wanted a relationship like you see in all of the movies and everything else, which I know is unrealistic, but that's what I wanted, and that's what I was seeking. (Eric)

Finn shared a story of friend who was in a non-public relationship.

> Recently, I've heard another friend of mine who is gay, that he has this complicated relationship with a boy because he doesn't want the person he's dating or however it is doesn't want to come out to his fraternity, because they're gung-ho and masculine.

Security in Perceived Heterosexual Identity

As with factors that inhibited participants from coming out before college, participants believed that the fear of losing the heterosexual perception inhibits gay men from coming out in college.

> I think that the people on campus that don't want to come out are still dealing with a lot of ... Not accepting the fact that they are, or maybe assuming that accepting that means that they are what [the student LGBT organization] looks like, and they don't want to do that. That might come from some sort of internalized heterosexism, or something like that. But I think that they still don't feel comfortable coming out, because that means that maybe the people back home will treat them differently. Maybe they think that the people they surround themselves with on campus will treat them differently or see them differently, or maybe even that doing that means that they have to change the way they act. (Beau)

> I figured I've made friends, they know me for how I present myself, let's not change anything and let's just keep things the way they are. That way there's no way they could not like me. (Conrad)

> They were making these jokes about being gay with each other and always joking around with me and I'm like this would be a little bit awkward if I did come out then and tell them, actually. So that's why, that's one of the reasons that kept me from coming out to them. I was like I might have to switch rooms and they might think it's really awkward and because of how just they were. I was like, okay, maybe I might actually have to switch rooms. In my mind, I was really hesitant to tell them. (Eric)

> I think that's a major reason why a lot of people keep closeted, and they keep within this modicum of normal, in this false normalcy. When one realizes more of the world, starts socializing more, one realizes that there is no normalcy and what you feel and cannot control is absolutely fine, and that should be examined. (Finn)

> Plus, for example, I'm a freshman, so I just met all the people at school a few months ago. If you take a junior or senior who has been here for years and they have friends that they've gotten to know over a couple of years, then they might be a little less comfortable given the fact that they've known these people for so long and those people have identified them as straight just because people tend to identify whoever as straight by default unless they say otherwise. So I feel like if you have two different seniors they might be less willing to do it as well just because of that. (Gavin)

Involvement in Campus LGB Organizations

Before starting the study I assumed that campus LGB organizations would be referenced as factors that supported coming out but Aaron, in the very first interview, provided a different viewpoint. Six of the seven participants shared that they did not currently belong to a LGB campus organization and for six out of the seven, student led

LGB organizations were seen as a factor that could inhibit gay men in college from coming out.

Aaron's story in the first interview led me to add a question to the interview protocol to address this concept in subsequent interviews. When sharing about his experience with LGB student led organizations Aaron said:

> I don't know, it's stuff like that when they complain about that it sort of makes people alienate certain people and they come across as overbearing. It doesn't mean that, you should, you should still encourage people to come out of the closet and be encouraging of them. I just mean that when there are serious issues related to LGBT people in the world but when people complain about little, I feel like some people kind of look for things to complain about.

Aaron found that the people at his college were behaving in a way that Aaron did not find to be familiar, comfortable, or welcoming.

> But like everyone I know in the area that I grew up in whether they're like gay or lesbian or transgender they don't talk like the way that people here talk about like just different, like, like different gender phrases. Like I've heard people here say like the people here have complained like, "You used the word gay as a noun and not as an adverb," and stuff like that I mean maybe that's a more extreme case but there are little things like that that kind alike but make people roll their eyes at them. It's like as long as you believe in freedom for everyone who cares what words you use.

When Beau answered the question about student led LGB campus organizations I found that he began to trip over his words as though he was searching for the 'right way' to share his beliefs.

> That choice [to not belong to the student led LGB organization] is because of the ... I don't really like that sort of environment. I just ... Let me think about how ... That sort of stuff doesn't interest me, to talk about ... I'm trying to think of an event that they had. Like the drag shows they put on, and the talking about ... Like discussing of the different queer communities, and the sub-communities in the communities, and all of that. I mean I'm in total support. I'm not doing any sort of fem shaming or any sort of ... Anything like that. I'm totally for that. I just don't really enjoy it, so I've never really wanted to be around those ... Yeah. I know that some people, also, really like to discuss the differences between ... Looking at gender roles and gender norms in the queer community, and discussions about

> Grinder categories, like masc for masc and things like that. Discussions like that, I know that those are important, but those aren't what I really feel like I get involved in.

Beau appeared more confident when he shared what type of organizations he enjoyed being a part of.

> I enjoy myself more when I'm around both queer and non-queer people, as opposed to [the student led LGBT organization], which is mostly just attended by queer people. The door is open, of course, to not queer people, but it's not really appealing to not queer people, but they don't have much of a reason to go.

Conrad was not aware of any LGB organization on his campus and when asked if he would have been part of one he shared, “No…that’s a strong no.”

Drake shared his reasoning for not being involved in a student led campus organization.

> When you see people in organizations who are devoted to LGBT issues, that's all they're talking about, that's all the group is meant to be for. It's about shouting, it's about promotion, it's about advertising; it's just about visibility. I don't think, necessarily, that's what everybody wants. I know that's not necessarily what everybody wants. I think for me, and for a lot of other people, you get turned off immediately, you get disinterested immediately because there's a coherency that already is there with a lot of people and you don’t feel welcomed. We all don’t have to be in an LGBT oriented club. Like I mentioned earlier, many of us don’t feel like we fit in.

Eric is aware that the organizations are available to him but has yet to get involved.

> [I’m not currently involved] because all the ones that I wanted to join are conflicting with the ones I already started, I already committed to. I didn't want to lose the commitment I had started.

Gavin too was aware of the organizations available on his campus but had chosen to not utilize them in his coming out process or beyond.

> We have, obviously we have programs for LGBT, people on campus, mentoring networks, there's counselors you can talk to about it. In my case I just didn't feel the need or want to go in search of those people and get help with it.

Ideal LBG Organization

Following up on the fact that most of the participants were not involved with student led campus based LGB organizations, I asked participants if they were to be in charge of a campus LGB organization how they would structure it to attract more people. Three participants shared suggestions on how to improve LGB organizations on campus, two participant did not think campus based LGB were effective and offered no opinions on how to improve them, and two participant was comfortable with the way the organizations on his campus were run but chose not to participate at this time. The three participants who shared suggestions on how to improve campus LGB organizations all shared that making the organization more accessible and inclusive would improve the quality and appeal of the organizations.

> If I had to make a rule, that if people are trying not to be prejudiced at all and they might use a different pronoun or a different word that I really don't see a big deal. But that's what I'd encourage, for people to get involved some people to pay more attention to like the attitudes and not the actual language. It doesn't bother me that much it seems like if you're trying to draw people to your cause it does try to make it overbearing, I mean if you're trying to convince other people to be more accepting but when you would you make up all these arbitrary rules it seems like it may throw people off in my opinion. (Aaron)

> If I were to structure an organization, it would definitely be focused on the advocacy, and so like planning events like that to learn about queer issues. I guess events to promote learning about queer issues, instead of the queer culture, if that makes sense. A more issue based event would appeal to people like me, but, at the same time, if I was the head of this organization, I would, also, want to do things that [the current campus LGB organization] does, like plan drag shows, because I know that doesn't do anything for me. That's not something that I see as expressing my sexuality or myself, but I know that others do feel that way, and I would want to keep that door open for those people, because I know people ... A lot of people that are just coming out, and that's something that they want to do. That's something they feel that makes them feel comfortable. I don't understand it. I don't understand drag culture at all, but I know that some people really get a lot out of it. So, that's not something I would want to forget about.
> I like things that allies can participate in more, so it's sort of a joint effort. I don't like to just be in the queer circles. I think it's more comforting for me to be in a

> setting where it's not just queer people. It's a lot of not queer people and queer people together. Like the Fairness is a very both sides thing. The Harvey Milks Society, all the volunteering for that is done by allies and queer people. (Beau)

Drake was the only participant to share that that the formation of a LGB organization that was discipline specific would increase accessibility to this type of support system.

> We were there, people joined, because they had interest in the subject, or interest in science and wanting to know people. The members are not exclusively chem majors, they're from all over the sciences. That casual grouping, that casual selection, is what fosters that now. This is my ideal: I would love to see a group that's just devoted to scientists who are LGBT identifying.

Conclusion

In chapter four I reported the results and themes elicited through my semi-structured interviews with cisgender gay men who came out while in college. I first reported the finding that recruiting participants for this study required recruiting beyond student led LGB organizations. Next I reported on how the participant's choice of college was influenced by their intention to come out while in college. I then reported the factors that influenced the participants to come out in college that included supportive and inhibiting factors. I concluded chapter four by reporting how the participants would modify current campus LGB organizations to increase the quality and accessibility of these groups to gay men who came out while in college.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

In chapter one, I introduced the context of this study by discussing the death of college freshman Tyler Clementi after his roommate broadcasted his same sex romantic interactions online. Feeling as though the university was not supportive of his concerns regarding the violation of his privacy, Tyler committed suicide presumably from the embarrassment he experienced from the exposure. I further set the context for this study by discussing factors that influence coming out in adolescences. The fact that adolescents are socially motivated, per their developmental phase, explains how perceived parental and peer reactions to coming out impact the coming out process. Furthermore individual's experiences with being perceived as gay, prior to coming out, in addition to an often non-supportive high school tend to inhibit individuals from coming out prior to college. This chapter also presented the research question for this study, "What are the lived experiences of gay men who came out while in college?"

In chapter two the relevant literature on gay men coming out while in college was reviewed. I concentrated on the experiences, including supportive and inhibitive factors in the decisions to come out, of gay men aged 18 – 23 who identified as gay and came out while in college. I found a lack of breadth in this these types of research studies as the coming out processes of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are often studied collectively which gives the indication the process is the same if not similar for each of the subgroups. I therefore concentrated on adolescent development highlighting how the

development of a nonheterosexual sexual identity influences typical adolescent development. I then presented information on five LGB developmental models to provide a historical context for the way the coming out process has been previously studied; the way the results of the study support and differ from Lipkins' Mega Model and D'Augelli's Lifespan model will be discusses later in this chapter. I presented the literature on the coming out experiences in college and the factors that influence that choice. I ended the chapter by discussing the university environment for LGB individuals which researchers suggest are less than supportive.

In chapter three I outlined the methodological structure of my research. I introduced the purposes of phenomenological research and my justification for choosing this research paradigm to answer my research question. I continued by sharing a detailed framework of how I solicited participants, conducted interviews, analyzed data, and presented the findings. The strategies I used to help ensure a quality study, including my researcher subjectivity statement, concluded this chapter.

Chapter four explained the structures and themes of the research findings. In this chapter the findings from the seven semi-structured interviews completed with gay men who came out while in college were presented. Textual support from the participant's interviews was presented that reinforced the following findings: the decision to attend a specific college was not influenced by the decision to come out once there, the decision to not come out before college was largely due to relational issues, the collegiate environment had factors that supported and inhibited coming out, and finally most of the participants in the study did not utilize campus LGB organizations as a source of support.

In the final chapter of this dissertation I will summarize what I have discovered about the experiences of gay men who came out while in college. I start this chapter by comparing the finding of my study to the literature that I reviewed in chapter two. I will share the implications of the findings of the study as they relate to supporting gay men who have come out, or are considering coming out, while in college. I will also discuss areas of future research that have come to my attention as a result of completing this research study. I will finish this chapter my critiquing my research by presenting the limitations found within this research study.

Findings Compared to Review of Literature

Moustakas (1994) indicated that the conclusion of a phenomenological study should include a comparison of the findings to the literature reviewed at the onset of the study. Relating the findings to previous research will allow for linkages to be made prior to presenting the implications of this study. Having collected and analyzed my data, I will now situate my study and its findings in relation to my review of literature.

Homosexuality in a Societal Context: Religion and Homophobia

Four of the seven participants in this study indicated that their experiences with religion impacted their coming out. Only one participant, Conrad, shared that he experienced a homopositive response to his coming out; this was from his maternal grandparents who had been missionaries before retirement. Conrad shared that his material's grandparent's understanding of faith saw scriptural passages commonly used to prohibit homosexuality as needing to be understood in their historical context and irrelevant to contemporary, egalitarian, committed same-sex relationships (Cheng, 2011; Cornwall, 2011). Conrad shared:

> I always thought my maternal grandparents would not support it because they're so religious, however I found out they had gay friends. They don't care. If anything, they support it because they view religion as we are all God's children; who are you to shun others based off something like that. You cannot do that, through their eyes.

Five of the seven participants described experiencing a homonegative response to their coming out. The homonegative view finds no place for same-sex attractions among the faithful (Cobb, 2006; Sayeed, 2006). Aaron and Conrad shared that although they were not personally involved in a community of faith, their family members were. Aaron had not come out to his brother or Conrad his paternal grandfather due largely to their family member's homonegative view. Conrad shared, "... I will never tell him [grandfather] ... solely because of his religious affiliation." Beau and Eric shared that they were members of a community of faith and that the homonegative view shared by those communities were inhibiting factors in their coming out. Fearing that they would be asked to leave their communities of faith, Beau and Eric avoided coming out or discussing homosexuality with other community members prior to college.

Eric spoke of a general homonegative feeling in his hometown based on that did not support his coming out or being gay at all.

> In general in our town there was a church on literally every corner so it was hard to be open about it outside of school, because of all the churches around every corner. We had different, all the religions. There were places of worship all over town. It was hard to be open about it all over town.

Once Beau's friends at home found out that he identified as gay it negatively impacted the way he was able to practice his faith.

> [Going to church] has sort of faded out, because it was a Southern Baptist church, and they're not exactly the most accepting group of people. I am still in contact with some of them, and if I go back, it's just sort of an awkward, "Oh, Beau is back. He can't do these things, but he can sit there in the pew."

All seven of the participants in this study shared that they had experiences with homophobia, mainly in high school. Homophobia in this context was experienced through bullying and anti-homosexual attitudes that align more with discrimination than fear (Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010). Although none of the participants were out in high school, their experience with homophobia via other out students was cited most often as the reason for not coming out before college (Lim, 2002; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Phoenix et al., 2003). Drake summarized this point when he shared, "In high school, I wasn't out. While there were people that were out, they were the butt of the joke of a lot of things. I was certainly not going to come out then." Beau echoed this point when he said, "The two openly gay guys at my school were harassed so much. It was not a good environment to be in…"

Several of the participants shared that they witnessed homophobia and bullying behaviors while in high school but felt powerless to address it. The social system was constructed in such a way that if one attempted to intervene or combat the oppressive behaviors that person then become a target of the oppressors. As none of the participants felt supported in coming out prior to college, attracting attention to themselves as advocates for those being bullied was not something that any of the participants felt capable of doing.

Adolescence Sexual Identity Development

D'Augelli and Grossman (2006) found that LGB individuals are able to identify their non-heterosexual orientation during adolescence although they may not be able to act on this knowledge until later in their development. This study supported these finding as six of the seven participants identified as gay while in high school but choose not to

come out until they were no longer living with their families. Beau shared that he had same sex attractions as early as the sixth grade but did not identify as gay until his senior year in high school. D'Augelli, Hershberger, and Pilkington (1998) found that many of the young people in their study experienced non-heterosexual feelings for eight years, and labeled themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual for nearly four years, without telling their parents or siblings. On average, the participants in this study had less than two years between the time they personally identified as gay and the time they initially came out which differs from what has been previously reported.

None of the participants in this study had been involved in a romantic relationship with another man prior to coming out in college. Only two of the participants shared that they had been physically involved, or a "friends with benefits type of thing," with other men prior to college. Finn shared that he believed that his gay identity impacted his social development in that he did not feel safe exploring interpersonal relationships and dating while in high school.

> One issue that I have constantly been struggling with is the fact that everyone else, I say "everyone else," it's the vast majority, has gotten rid of these awkward dating circumstances while in high school. They were able to do that, and that was an acceptable environment for them to be awkward because everyone's awkward. Whereas here, having never been in a relationship, because I was not finding that area because of general confusion in high school, I have to start from the ground up in an environment where people know how to find mates that they're looking for and also know the social cues of how to coordinate these pairings…I don't yet!

Finn's example, and the other participants' lack of relationships, supports the literature on sexual identity development in LGB adolescents. LGB adolescent are often provided with fewer examples of healthy same sex relationships and often do not feel supported or safe

to explore their same sex attraction in a high school setting (Radkowsky & Siegel, 1997; Remafedi et al., 1992).

The difficulties experienced in telling parents can be found in the fact that LGB adolescents rarely first disclose their nonheterosexual orientation to a parent. Four of the seven participants in this study came out to their parents only after coming out to a peer first; at the time of the study Gavin has chosen not to come out to his family. There was not a consensus regarding the timing of when the participants came out to their families with some doing so almost immediately after coming out while others waited as long as three years to do so. Beau shared that he did not come out to his mother in high school although he sensed she thought he was gay. He wanted to tell his mother on his own time rather than feeling "outed" by her questioning.

> When she would ask, "Is there anything you need to tell me?" After she would say, "Oh, we got some work done on the computer today," and she would say, "Is there anything you need to share with me, to tell me." Like, "No. No, mom. No, not a thing." When she would ask about, "Are there any cute girls in your life," and she would just look at me like she knew, but she didn't want to say anything. When I did finally come out to her, I said, "I know you've known, but thanks for loving me anyway."

D'Augelli, Grossman, and Starks (2005) found that those who came out to their families in adolescence were at greater risk to experience increased victimization by their families. Although no one in this study reported experiencing victimization from their families, this may be a result of the participants who self selected to be in this study. The participants in the study were still in college and their families were supporting them emotionally and in some ways financially.

There are few empirical reports about how parents respond to their children's sexual orientation (D'Augelli, 2006; D'Augelli et al., 2005; D'Augelli et al., 1998).

Anecdotal reports of parents' reactions to their children's disclosure of sexual orientation have suggested that initial responses of shock and surprise are typical, followed by varying degrees of psychological distress. The findings of this study add 'prolonged denial' to the anecdotal reports of parents' reactions to their children's coming out.

Four of the seven participants shared that since they have came out to their families they have not discussed their sexual orientation with them again. Several of the participants shared that their parents had behaved as though their child had not come out and purposely avoid conversations that would bring up the topic. When asked if his sexual orientation was ever discussed within family settings, Aaron shared, "The few times I told them it was but after that it's never come up in conversation, yeah." When talking about his mother, Drake shared, "She ignores it now, and we've never talked about it since then. She said that she didn't accept it."

Only Finn shared a parental response that indicated initial and prolonged support for his coming out from both his mother and his father. Finn shared,

> My father and I, whenever he picks me up from school, on the way back and forth from school, we talk about LGTBQ in society, and how it appears in the religious world that he is in. We talk about things that he's uncomfortable with, like visible affection between homosexual couples or the idea of transgender people in his industry or, I guess you'd say here, in the religious world. It's fascinating, just getting this entire different generational view on how he thinks about things and how my mother thinks about things. The entire process itself was not as terrible as I thought.

LGB Models of Sexual Identity

This area of the literate was reviewed to provide a historical context for the way the coming out process has been previously studied. This literature provides previously established models of coming out which include both stage and developmental models of LGB development, which includes coming out. The findings of this study will be

compared to one stage model, Lipkin's Mega Model of Five Stages, and one developmental model, to D'Augelli Lifespan Model of LGB Identity Development.

Lipkin's Mega Model of Five Stages

The findings of this study supported Lipkin's Pre-sexuality and Identity questioning stages. All seven participants indicated that they had a period of time in their development where they knew they were "not like the other guys in my class." Lipkin (1999) describes this as when individuals are not identifying same sex attractions as LGB thoughts or feelings but are experiencing feelings of difference and dissonance with the heteronormative culture. Echoing Lipkins belief that individuals experience ambiguous, repressed, sexualized same-sex feelings, Aaron, Conrad, Drake, and Gavin all shared that while in high school and early college they attempted to project an image that did not welcome conversations regarding their sexuality. Conrad shared, "I never showed interest in anyone. I didn't try and mask it by saying like, Oh that girl is attractive, or whatever. Everyone kind of viewed me as almost asexual in a sense."

The findings of this study differed slightly when it came to the Coming Out stage of Lipkin's model. Lipkin surmised that individuals experienced a distinct move from merely tolerating their nonheterosexual feelings to accepting them as an inherent part of self. Only one participant, Eric, shared that he had an experience where he remembers reconciling his gay identity with self. Eric shared, "That part was the hardest. Admitting to myself I was actually gay." The remainder of the participants did not recall having a distinct thought or feeling of 'allowing himself to be gay.'

The major differences between the findings of this study and Lipkin's model were found in the pride and post-sexuality stages. Lipkin (1994) postulated that the

individual's sexual identity began to have a diminished centrality in self-concept and social relations in the post-sexuality stage only after a sense of pride for being gay had been established. Lipkin, like other stage theorist, believed that the post sexuality stage occurred mostly commonly years after the act of coming out occurred. The findings of this study suggested that men who came out while in college had already begun to or had already fully integrated their sexual identity into their self-concept. Phrases like "it is one part of who I am" or "it does not define me" were used by most of the participants to indicate that although they acknowledged and accepted their gay identity they did not want their sexual identity to be the focal point of their daily interactions. Finn illustrated this when he shared,

> We were just hanging out in his room, and I just sat him down and just told him this. That was the first time he hugged me, and he actually showed actual affection. I'm like, "Oh, so, like, no one really cares here, do they?" I just realized over and over again no one at my school has cared. In the best possible sense. It's just another fact about me. I'm six foot tall, I have brown hair, and I'm gay.

The diminished presence of a clearly defined pride stage for this population may be the result of an empathetic heterosexual peer support network. Participants did not report having to seek out other gay men to be understanding of their identity as supportive heterosexual peers were cited as providing the needed encouragement and subsequent support. Gavin shared that it was the heterosexual members of his fraternity that supported his coming out,

> …everyone who I'd gotten to know outside the pledge class and in the pledge class, they had all made [support for coming out] known based on their personalities, I had an idea that they weren't the types to start discriminating people for something like that. I think it was a very comfortable environment and I just decided to do it.

Drake reported that his fraternity had heterosexual and non-heterosexual members and it was the feeling that "nobody cares" that helped him feel the most comfortable in this setting.

> Seriously, nobody cares. We have the same conversations that we would have if were a straight individual about your relationship as if you were a gay individual and your relationship. They're the exact same thing.

Having the support of his heterosexual friends was a supportive factor for Aaron to come out in other aspects of his life.

> [My friends] had a reputation, [they] always had a reputation for being like rightly or wrongly the reputation for being the kind of people you don't want to fuck with. Since they were cool with it and they encouraged me to come out I figured I really didn't have anything to worry about because, because if that many people were cool with it then…

The questioning of the term "pride" to describe sexual identity development was addressed by several of the participants. Finn shared,

> Some people just don't want to participate in the loud and proud life, and I totally understand that. I'm part of that crowd. I'm confused a lot by the Pride movement, because I don't understand how can be proud of something you can't control. What do I have to be proud of? I understand the arguments of, "You should be proud, because other people can't," but it still seems strange to me. It seems that it would be better, better to go help them directly, rather than a parade.

Although other participants did not overtly share this direct sentiment, the idea of being an advocate over "marching in a parade" did appear in other participants' narratives. Beau shared that his campus' student ran LGB organization had a pride presence but it did not align with his understanding of the role of his sexuality.

> I think that when I look at [the organization], I see what you see at a pride fair, at a pride festival. People celebrating, really celebrating their sexuality, and just having fun, and being colorful and just wonderful, but I'm just not that sort of person. I very much celebrate who I am in a way that says this is who I am and here I am, but not in the way that [the organization] does.

The participants in this study appeared to define "pride" in a larger social sense rather than being a way to identify with the LGB population. This revised definition of pride may account for the clear absence of the Pride stage in their narratives and an increased sense of identity integration at an earlier point in their sexual identity development.

D'Augelli Lifespan Model of LGB Identify Development

The findings of the study closely mirrored the six development processes of D'Augelli's Lifespan Model (1994). This was not surprising as D'Augelli is well published in the coming out process while in college. All participants shared examples of how they had excited a heterosexual identity, developed a personal gay identity status, developed a gay social identity, and developed an initial relationship with parents as a gay offspring.

As for developing a LGB intimacy status, whereas none of the participants were currently in a relationship with another man, all seven shared their interest in being in one. Only one participant, Conrad, had experienced a long-term relationship and this relationship was never made public. Drake shared,

> I want to be able to walk down the street holding hands with another dude. I want to be comforted by somebody. I want the possibility to be comforted by somebody in the physical sense, not just an emotional sense. I wanted a relationship like you see in all of the movies and everything else, which I know is unrealistic, but that's what I want, and that's what I am seeking.

Finn shared that he was "working on [a relationship] right now. I've never had an actual relationship, someone who I would consider a boyfriend. At this point I am sort of working on a relationship but its definitely not set in stone at this point."

The developmental process of entering a LGB community was the most varied process amongst participants. Most often this process was supported in the study when

participants shared their interest in being part of social advocacy initiatives that were occurring on their campuses. None of the participants overtly shared that they had a desire to be a part of a uniquely LGB community nor were they actively involved in their campus' student lead LGB organizations. These findings may be influenced by the fact that participants did not see that their campus student led LGB organizations as geared toward advocacy rather they were peer support based and internally focused.

Beau shared that his experience of being in a community that was designed to support LGB concerns but was not LGB exclusive was a major factor in his coming out. When asked, "[Do you feel] like there was any organization that supported you in your coming out?" Beau shared,

> The Harvey Milks Society that I talked about a little bit earlier. The people that were involved in that organization, and they're the ones that sort of planned ... Facilitate the Fairness events. The people in those organizations were really personable. I became good friends with all of them. I felt like they supported me, and I felt like if this organization could support me, that I was good. I had a good level of support to come out.

Coming Out in College

Merighi and Grimes (2000) identified that finding a community of support for gay men to come out to and then identify with was important in helping this population affirm a core aspect of their overall identity. D'Augelli (1992a, 1999b) reported that a sense of belonging, safety, and likeness are primary influences in coming out. Gavin shared that when he was planning his coming out the use of campus-based resources was not considered an option.

> In my mind, I had a very systematical hierarchy of who I should tell, in what order. First would be family, then close friends, and then whoever else. That was the order in my mind. It didn't exactly go that way. I didn't actively seek out those resources, I think, because of that, in hindsight, in that false belief that this knowledge would get back to those I didn't want it to early.

The findings of this study maintained the community of support when coming out as an important factor. Most of the participants in the study did come out to a nonheterosexual individual first, but the support they identified as the most help was from that of heterosexual identifying individuals. The participants in the study did not seek out a community of likeness that focused on their sexual orientation, rather they sought support form a community of individuals who shared similar worldviews regardless of sexual identity. Aaron lived on campus and shared that he had the support of his floor mates in his coming out. Aaron shared, "[I was] living around other males who didn't care, [being around] other people that didn't care probably encouraged me to come out because since they didn't care."

Even after coming out to some, LGB college students are faced with the choice on how visible they wanted to be within the gay community and within the larger university community (Rhoads, 1997b). The findings of this study suggested that once the participants came out they were comfortable as being identified as gay within their current social circles. Six out of the seven participants shared that they were comfortable identifying as gay but did not go out of their way to get involved with exclusive LGB communities.

Conrad explained that he was interested in sharing his gay identity with others other on campus but since his boyfriend was not comfortable publically identifying as gay he evaded those relationships to avoid suspicion. "… I was trying to get out there more and he was saying like, No, please let's just keep it to ourselves. Everyone likes us for who we are, as is, so let's not change anything." The safety of this relationship provided needed support to Conrad but at the same time limited the amount he felt

comfortable being out on campus. Choosing to identify as an openly gay man would have ended a relationship that he was not interested in ending at that time.

For LGB individuals of color, coming out in college is compounded by the intersection of multiple aspects of self. Stevens (2004) found that racist attitudes tend to complicate developmental process; this population often has to maneuver through homophobic tendencies in racial communities and racial prejudice in LGB communities. Whereas Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter (2004) found that race did not impact the timing of coming out, the level of involvement in the LGB community by people of color was less than that of Caucasian individuals. This study had two individuals of color who choose to participate. Neither of the participants was involved in exclusive LGB communities, but both participants were openly gay in the organizations in which they currently belonged.

Eric, who identified as Hispanic, shared that his roommates assumed he was heterosexual before his coming out. “I was feeling embarrassed because I'm like, of course they automatically assume I'm straight because I'm a Hispanic and I'm living with them.” Eric did not share any instances of what he considered to be racism within his coming out experience. There were aspects of Eric’s culture that influenced his coming out, such as the neighborhood that he and his parents lived in and his identification with Catholicism, which had close ties to his ethnicity.

Drake, who identified as Chinese, shared that his ethnicity and culture played a large role in his decision to delay telling his parents about his sexual orientation; in fact Drake only came out to his mother after the death of his father. Drake shared, “My dad was very, very conservative, and that's probably why he ended up [where we lived],

considering that when he first went up there, the percentage of the population who were Asian was even smaller than it is now. He was very conservative."

Drake did not cite any instances of perceived racism in his coming out experience on campus. Drake shared that his ethnicity has impacted his coming out in college as it is assumed that he is more docile and he believes that he is expected to "act a certain way [within] the community." Drake shared his experience attending a LGBT conference session that addressed cultural consideration in the LGB community.

> One of the speakers was from the psychology department. The title of this presentation, or whatever, was "That Boy's a Bottom, Especially if He's Asian." That seriously peaked my interest, and so I went, but it didn't tell me anything I didn't already know. There are certain stereotypes about roles attributed to your ethnicity. That's what the study was affirming. It's was a psych study, it was based off of Grinder accounts. That didn't tell me anything that I didn't already know.

The University Environment for LGB Students

When researching students who felt supported in the collegiate environment, Evan and Brodio (1999) found being around supportive people, perceiving the overall climate as supportive, and having LGB role models in the university environment to be important factors. This study supported the presence of all three of these factors. Conrad shared an instance that confirmed for him that he was a part of a supportive university.

> I remember my second or third week on campus, and I was walking to class and I saw two guys kiss. I literally stopped in my tracks. I was blown away that people, that guys specifically, would show PDA and no one noticed. Everyone just kept walking. No one cared, no one said anything. I was the only one standing there staring at them, like a weirdo, because if that had happened [at home] the reaction would not have been very well. People definitely would have said something like "faggots" or whatever slurs what have you. Probably no it wouldn't have progressed to a level of physical violence, but it definitely would not have bode well at [at my previous university].

The participants indicated that being around supportive people, moreover feeling supported by the collegiate environment, had a larger impact on their decision to come out. As adolescents are social in nature the impact of peer responses and support are taken into consideration more than how the larger system would view their coming out. This is supported by the fact that none of the participants choose their school because of the welcoming LGB collegiate environment rather they choose it for financial or programmatic reasons.

Seeing out LGB students, faculty, and staff on campus supported the participants in their coming out as it provided concrete examples that they were safe in their own coming out. Gavin shared that he knew that the Panhellenic Association on his campus had a Greek Spectrum dedicated to discussing LGB issues within the Greek system. Additionally, Gavin shared that interacting with out student leaders supported his decision to come out in college.

> There was a student here who was highly, highly active just in student life, and then actually worked here for a year. I asked him for advice once about, I think it was, something homosexual-related, and he's like, "Oh yeah, by the way, I'm gay." I'm like, "Oh, I had no idea," so we talked about that for a while.

Beau shared that just knowing that there are out faculty members on campus who were comfortable with that being publically known encouraged and supported him in his coming out.

Implications of the Findings for College Campuses

Coming out is a highly personal experience that is uniquely situated within the social framework of the individual coming out. This study provides insights into factors that supported and inhabited gay men who came out while in college. Specifically this study points to the following outcomes and implications: men who come out in college

are not initially drawn to campus LGB groups, creating gay or bi men process groups can support men who come out in college, technology is impacting how and when gay men are coming out in college, and the LGB faculty and staff serve as role models for gay men who come out while in college.

Campus LGB Groups

In this study, the gay men who come out in college are not inherently drawn to campus LGB groups. These men may find these types of organizations as too focused on sexual identity and will seek out opportunities to participate in groups that support their gay identity within a larger social context. Whereas these men will support these organizations from a distance and do not overtly condone these groups, they do not participate, as they do not see people "like them" within the membership of the organization. Beau summarized this concept when she said,

> I guess events to promote learning about queer issues, instead of the queer culture, if that makes sense. A more issue based event would appeal to people like me, but, at the same time, if I was the head of this organization, I would, also, want to do things that [the student lead LGB organization] does, like plan drag shows, because I know that doesn't do anything for me. That's not something that I see as expressing my sexuality or myself, but I know that others do feel that way, and I would want to keep that door open for those people, because I know people ... A lot of people that are just coming out, and that's something that they want to do. That's something they feel that makes them feel comfortable. I don't understand it. I don't understand drag culture at all, but I know that some people really get a lot out of it. So, that's not something I would want to forget about.

Men who come out in college are more likely to participate in organizations that combine multiple aspects of their identity as they see themselves as students who are gay as opposed to gay students. Campuses can support men who come out while in college by helping to establish LGB interest and support groups within larger groups such as academic, professional, and social organizations. Drake shared:

> What will help at college is the same type of visibility; rather, ready access to that visibility. When an athlete at your college comes out, it shouldn't be a spectacle. But if his/her announcement can be seen by another, then it helps others in so many countless ways. Their sexuality isn't the only thing that defines them. Their motivations and aspirations certainly are not devoted to their sexuality. But when somebody in your major, in your field, in your club, comes out and you know about it, then it gives you reassurance that you can do the same.

A "one size fits all" approach to meeting the needs of LGB college students does not support the needs of this diverse group. The participants of this study highlight that this generation of gay men are seeking more integrated services and supports from their colleges. Unlike D'Augelli (1991, 1992b, 1994, 2006), gay men are no longer are seeking uniquely LGB organization for which to identify, rather they are looking for ways to advance professionally, socially, academically as gay men. Campuses can address this shift by intentionally incorporating LGBT professional and student associations within already existing student organizations and majors. Organizations such as Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, National Lesbian and Gay Law Association, National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals, and Pride at Work can either be intentionally added or incorporated into existing professional student to help address the desire for gays students to develop professionally within their chosen field.

The participants in the study were quick to say that social LGB campus groups should not be abolished; rather they should be seen as a part of the campuses LGB environment. All too often social campus groups are seen as *the* LGB organization on campus as these are the organizations that traditionally plan Pride events, drag shows, and other activities that highlight LGB culture. As these organizations are more intentional in identifying as being LGB focused they tend to establish the public face of

LGB students on campus. Some participants cited a reluctance to be associated with the student led LGB organization as an inhibiting factor for gay men considering coming out while in college.

Lastly, participants shared that student groups that advocated for LGB rights under an equity umbrella that was comprised of hetero and non-heterosexual members was supportive in their coming out. Campuses can support LGB students by creating, sponsoring, and financially supporting organizations that advocate for equity within the larger societal system. These types of organizations allows for students who are exploring their sexuality an opportunity to so without having to identify with an organization that is known for exclusively addressing LGB issues.

Gay and Bi-men Support Groups

D'Augelli (2002) shared that experiencing the presences of a supportive therapeutic influence significantly decreases mental health concerns for LGB youth ages 14 to 21. Campuses can use this information to support gay men who come out in college by providing them with a safe, private, and therapeutic environment in which they can explore their sexuality. As high school experiences often model adverse and less than supportive environments, men who come out in college may need time and space to create experiences that override negative past experiences. The creation of gay or bi men process groups, preferably facilitated by the campus counseling center or a therapeutic designee, would provided a safe space where individuals can explore their sexuality in a safe and confidential environment. Drake's experience in a group such as this allowed him to address his sexual orientation in a way that ultimately supported his coming out:

> It was very emotional. The [intake] touched on, "How do you feel when you see somebody that's attractive in your classroom?" My response was, "I feel helpless,

> because I self degrade into thinking that's never going to happen, it never going to happen. Nobody's ever going to find me attractive. I'm never going to be in a relationship." That conversation was the turning point. At the first meeting, it was like, "Hi, why are you here?" I was like, "I'm gay, and I'm trying to find help in accepting who I am." That's how that happened.

A group that focuses its membership on self-identified gay men allows for the group to address issues that are present in the LGB community at large and uniquely in the experience of coming out as a gay man. Gay college aged men may feel more comfortable with addressing issues that they believe to be gender specific or sensitive in a single gendered group. This does not minimize the experiences of lesbian or bi women; rather it is designed to provide a targeted service designed to address the specific needs of the group members. Multiple participants in this study shared that the concept of 'masculinity' within the gay community is something that need to be explored and a gay or bi men support group could be that place for a conversation such as this to be started on campuses.

Whereas only one participant in the study shared that he had used the campus-counseling center to help in his coming out, the creation and promotion of gay and bi-men support groups could potentially increase the use of campus resources by this population. Men who have or who are contemplating coming out in college can use opportunities like these to begin developing necessary support systems through the use of campus resources rather than initially joining a public campus LGB organization. Participants shared that campus LGB organizations included levels of social interaction and advocacy in which they were not yet comfortable participating. Sharing personal struggles, learning about campus resources, and normalizing the coming out experience

are all things that can be done in a group setting before deciding if, when, or how to come out publically.

Use of Technology to Support Coming Out

Technology has influenced the timing and way that men come out in college. Although it is not their intended purpose, dating websites and apps were found to support individuals in coming out as it allowed men who have yet to come out to experience encounters where someone supported their gay identity (Bachmann & Simon, 2014). College campuses can help replicate this environment by using technology to create safe online spaces where individuals can anonymously connect with peers prior to coming out. Gay men who have yet to come out in college may find this type of community more approachable as they can receive support during their sexual exploration while not having to make a public commitment to any specific organization.

To highlight the sense of community that technology helps establish in the coming out process, Conrad shared,

> For me all I really needed was that one person to accept who I was and then the ball started to roll and I started to tell more people. Eventually it led to telling my family and everything so I would think that maybe [internet resources] would help that lonely, gay boy who's all by himself find someone else who accepts him, and then maybe that would also help him get the ball rolling by him telling other people.

Whereas college campuses are not in the business of setting up online dating services or websites, they can help replicate a safe online environment that allows students to explore personal issues while deciding if the campus environment is a safe place to come out. The creation of moderated anonymous chat rooms, campus specific apps that allow for the sharing of the LGB experience on campus, and campus supported blogs all send a message to student who are contemplating coming out that there are

anonymous resources that can help with their exploration. These resources can also serve as ways to connect students with campus LGB resources if and when they are ready to access them.

Out Faculty and Staff

The presence, or lack thereof, of LGB faculty and staff has a profound impact on gay men who come out in college (Rankin, 2003). As gay college students may not have had many examples of relatable LGB individuals and couples, out LGB faculty and staff act as models of how things "could be." Participants in the study shared that even though they had never talked with out faculty, knowing that they were there and successful supported their coming out. Likewise, not knowing of out faculty and staff, especially within their area of study, inhibited the coming out process.

Campuses can support gay men who come out in college by helping to create an environment that supports LGB faculty and staff in feeling confident in publically identifying as such (GLSEN, 2013). The creation of a LGB faculty and staff group can support the collegiate staff and the students who look to them as example of what could be. Supporting LGB faculty may come in the form of mentorship for faculty surrounding their non-heterosexual identity, advocating for equitable benefits for same sex marriages and partnership at the university level, and the intentional recruitment of LGB faculty and staff to vacant university positions.

Implications for Counselors

Whereas the coming out process is unique to each and every person who experiences it, the results of this study do have some general implications for professional mental health counselors working with gay adolescent men. Coming out continues to be a

social construct and as such will present differently as the social function of coming out continues to evolve. For example, Coleman (1982) conceptualized her model of coming out ten years after the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). In the decade between the removal of the diagnosis from the DSM and the publishing of Coleman's model of coming out the functionality, visibility, and tolerance of coming out had begun to change which necessitated the creation of the new model. Although identifying as LGB no longer was seen as a mental disorder by mainstream medicine, public opinion was not as ready to accept the science that supported the change in the DSM.

In the thirty-three years since the publishing of Coleman's coming out model the societal aspect of identifying as LGB has evolved considerably. As society continues to change and respond to LGB individual in a different, presumably more favorable, way the functionality of coming out will continue to change. Counselors can support their clients in their coming out by understanding and reaffirming the purpose of coming out as it relates to the individual and to the systems to which he belongs. D'Augelli's (1994) model of LGB development incorporate system thinking into the coming out process and allows for the individual who is coming out to be in charge of his disclosure within the various facets of his life. Counselors can use models such as D'Augelli's to empower and support clients as the focus remains on how, if, and when the client wants to come out.

It is also important for counselors to remember that although larger systems may be changing to be appear more accepting of individuals coming out as LGB, smaller

family and immediate social circles may not as accepting. When asked if he thinks if gay men in college should come out Aaron replied,

> It makes sense because if it's not shameful it shouldn't be considered a secret so yeah, people should probably do it for the most part if they can. If they're in an unsafe situation where there are not, if they, their families are going to kick them out of the house then maybe they shouldn't but for the most part they should.

Aaron illustrates that he sees a larger system where coming out is "not shameful" but is also well aware that there are family systems that may not be receptive to someone coming out. Counselors can use this information to support clients in planning their coming out in ways that continue to be client led while also addressing safety and security issues that may arise from the disclosure. Choosing to delay coming out or coming out to only a selected few should not be seen as a denial of self or a desire to remain closeted, rather it should be seen as a decision that can only be made by the client who will share his information if and when he feels comfortable doing so.

Counselors must also take into consideration that coming out may have a different purpose and connotation for the counselor than it does for the client. Whereas a counselor may see coming out as a way to reconcile the client's perceived and ideal selves and as such necessary for therapeutic growth, the client may not view coming out in the same way. Since coming out is designed to announce or share the client's sexual orientation publically, coming out may create more stress than it would potentially alleviate. Gavin shared,

> I've never been one for making a spectacle of myself, making something all about myself. I feel like, if I just bring it up out of context to them, then that's sort of me trying to draw attention to myself and making a spectacle of myself.

Gavin illustrates the importance of counselors keeping the purpose and focus of coming out on the client and their well being however the client chooses to define that.

The participants of this study shared several times over that their sexual orientation was a part of who they are but it was not the largest part of their identity. This thought process manifested itself in that the participants sought out clubs and organizations that supported LGB inclusion but was not LGB exclusive. Counselors can use this information in conceptualizing cases when working with gay men who have come out while in college. Viewing the client's sexual orientation as a part of his experience, rather than the reason he is coming to counseling, allows the counselor to keep the focus on what the client identifies as presenting issues. Whereas difficulty navigating the world as a gay man may arise in counseling, it is supportive of the client's development to allow him to bring this into the session rather than assuming that is what is causing distress in his life.

Lastly, the participants in the study identified that knowing that there were out LGB faculty and staff on campus was a supportive aspect in their decision to come out. For this population, knowing that there are LGB counselors available to discuss their sexual orientation and coming out process may results in more individuals using counselors as resources while in college. The presence of LGB counselors relies exclusively on the self-disclosure of said counselors. This disclosure, which is a form of professionally coming out, should be made in a way that is comfortable to the counselor and is also assessable to potential clients. Some counselors may overtly discuss their sexual orientation in professional disclosure or advertising materials while others may reference professional competencies with LGB clients as a way to welcome the conversation surrounding the counselor's sexual orientation. Whereas it is not the primary researcher's belief that only LGB counselors can work with LGB clients, the

findings of this study support that at minimum knowing that LGB counselors exist and are accessible can support clients in coming out.

Limitations of the Study

Small sample sizes are common among qualitative studies, which means that generalizability and transferability are limited (Creswell, 2011). Therefore, generalization of the results of this study should be read with caution as only seven participants were interviewed. Further, a convenient and purposeful sample was collected, which indicates the possibility that the participants' experiences in this study may not be consistent with others who came out while in college, especially those of other genders and sexual orientations. Achievement of cultural diversity was also limited by the sample size. However, the researcher was able to develop themes through the data analysis process based upon the similarities among the participants' lived experiences.

This study was designed to look at the coming out process of gay men in college with specific focus on factors within the collegiate environment. As such, this study focused exclusively on external factors that both inhibited and supported the coming out process for the participants. A limitation of this study is that the internal factors and processes of the participants were not explored which could impact the phenomenological essence of the coming out process. Future studies could be conducted that incorporate the participants' perceptions of internal change in relation to the external factors found on college campuses.

It took several attempts in several different forums before participants for this study could be identified. This experience led the primary researcher to ask: Why did no one volunteer when asked by his campus organization advisor? Did a response bias occur

in that they experienced something different that was not reported by the participants in the study? Or, did they feel uncomfortable being contacted in this forum for this reason?

Another limitation of the study was that all of the interviews were conducted over the phone. Conducting in person interviews was not a feasible option because of logistical and financial considerations. It is possible that the primary researcher may have missed nonverbal cues over the phone, did not establish as strong of a rapport that could have established in person, or missed a follow-up question that would have recognized in person. Skype and other programs that would have allowed the primary researcher to use technology to interview individuals were considered, but dismissed, as the quality of the audio recording could not be ensured.

The researcher's subjectivity should be considered a limitation as well. As stated in the researcher subjectivity statement in chapter three, although I did not come out in college, I have had a coming out experience. Paired with my personal and professional experience of counseling and working in higher education, I realized that the coming out process for gay men in college can be a rather emotional one that they may have never have taken the time to process in detail. Therefore, reflecting on how coming out has impacted my own life, I share many of the same beliefs and experiences as the participants regarding the supportive and inhibiting factors they experienced in their own coming out. To limit the influence my experiences had on how I interpreted the data, I kept a reflection journal of my involvements with the participants as well as constantly checked my interpretations against the independent coder's analyses. As my knowledge of LGB issues and coming out experiences can be considered a benefit to the study, it should also be considered a limitation.

Suggestions for Future Research

In this study, data were collected from conducting semi-structured interviews with cisgender gay men who chose to come out while in college. By design, this study targeted cisgender men to narrow the focus of the study to specifically address sexual orientation rather than gender. Kahn (1991) studied the coming out process of lesbians through the lens of Cass' (1979) model using quantitative measures rather than exploring the lived experience of coming out as lesbian. Rhodes (1997b) highlighted that individuals that identify as bisexual are often overlooked or their experience is lumped together with the gay or lesbian coming out experience. Lev (2004) and Bilodeau (2005) put forth that the coming out experiences of trans* individuals involves a complicated intertwining of gender and sexual identity. Therefore replicating this phenomenological study to explore the coming out process of lesbian, bisexual individuals, and trans* while in college would add to the body of research on coming out while in college.

"I always wondered what my life would have been like if I had came out in high school, as opposed to coming out in college, ... I don't think it would have gone particularly well for me in high school," sets the groundwork for a study that looks at the coming out experiences of gay men who came out while in high school. Using a similar methodological design, the lived experiences of gay high school students could be explored to study the experiences that inhibited and supported their coming out.

The individuals who self selected to participate in this research study all indicated that they were not actively involved in student led campus LGB organizations. Future research might focus on the coming out experiences of individuals who are active in these

types of organizations. Exploring if or how these organizations have supported members in their coming out would add another dimension to this study.

Finally, one of the participants indicated that he believed that exploring the coming out experiences of individuals who were actively using or addicted to substances when they came out would be a meaningful and worthwhile study. Conrad shared that his addiction to heroin acted as both an inhibiting and supportive factor in his coming out. Future research that focuses on individuals who were addicted to substances prior to and while coming out, possibly as a result of the internal processing of their nonheterosexual identity, would provide perspectives and responses within both the substances abuse and sexual identity development realms.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggested that gay men who come out while in college experience both supportive and inhibiting factors from the collegiate environment when deciding to come out. Supportive factors include but are not limited to experiencing a welcoming campus environment with the presence of other out students and LGB faculty members and feeling supported for displaying a masculine presence over a flamboyant one. Factors that inhibited coming out included perceiving the LGB population as hidden on campus, being in a same sex relationship without someone who had not come out, and finding security in the perceived heterosexual identity. Additionally, the findings indicated that gay men who came out while in college were not participating in campus LGB organizations as they did not feel as though they fit in with the current membership of the organization.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Hello,

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled A Phenomenological Study of Gay Men's Coming Out While in College. I (Adam Carter) am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Department at XXXX, and the principle researcher and Dr. Ed Wierzalis serves as the responsible faculty member for this study. Through this study I want to understand the experiences of men who came out as gay while attending college. The purpose of this study is to help gather information on both supportive and inhibitive factors of coming out while in college as well as explore any specific campus environmental/ programmatic factors that supported participants in coming out. Information gathered from this study has the potential to inform future training of mental health counselors, college administrators, and college faculty.

I am asking current undergraduates who meet the following criteria to participate in one 60 – 90 minute interview:

- Be a cisgender male (your self-identified gender matches the sex you were assigned at birth)
- Identify your sexual orientation as gay
- Came out as gay while in college
- Currently attend the college

The audio recorded interview would take place in a confidential space on campus. Upon completion of the interview, you will be sent the transcript of your interview for content approval prior to analysis of the data. You will be asked to confirm the transcription as is or submit changes to the primary researcher via the Word document if changes are needed; this process is expected to last 30 minutes. All information will be confidential and all identifying information will be removed; no one will be informed that you participated in the study and you will be provided with a pseudonym for reporting purposes in the text of the study. This study has been approved by the XXXXX Institutional Review Board.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to review and agree to an informed consent form. You may withdraw your consent for research participation at any time. If you are interested in participating in this study I ask that you contact me by e-mail at acarte82@uncc.edu or via phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx to inform me of your interest. I will contact you shortly thereafter to verify your eligibility in the study. I also invite you to forward this e-mail to individuals who you believe would be an eligible participant in this study who may not receive this notice otherwise.

Thank you.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT SCREENING

Information Collected Pre-Interview as Demographic Information

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Ethnicity:

I confirm that I:

4. Was identified as a male at birth and continue to identify as so: ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Identify as gay: ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. Came out while in college: ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. Am currently enrolled in college: ☐ Yes ☐ No

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about yourself. (e.g Where are you from originally? Hobbies, interests, major, etc.)

2. How did you choose to attend (name of University)?

3. "In as much detail as possible, please share your experience of coming out as gay while in college?"

   Follow up (if not addressed):

   a. Can you remember any specific thoughts, feelings, or events that you can identify as contributing to your coming out while in college?
   b. Can you remember any specific thoughts, feelings, or events that you can identify as inhibiting your coming out while in college earlier than you did?
   c. Since coming out, have you had a relationship with another man?

4. "What experiences would you say inhibited or kept you from coming out before college?"

   Follow up (in not addressed):

   a. What are things that that you think other people from coming out during before college?

5. "What experiences supported or contributed to you coming out while in college?"

6. "Were there any specific aspects of your college environment that supported or contributed to coming out?"

   Follow up (if not previously addressed):

   a. Discuss your involvement on campus before coming out.
   b. How did it change post coming out?
   c. Were there specific college faculty, staff, program, departments, classes, clubs, or organizations that supported your coming out?
   d. How would you describe the way technology has impacted the coming out process in college? Online forums, dating apps, hook up apps?
   e. Are you aware of a LGBT organization on your campus? Have you attended any organizational meetings or events?

7. "Were there any specific aspects of your college environment that inhibited or kept you from coming out sooner than you did?"

8. Have you observed a cultural change surrounding the concept of coming out in your lifetime?

9. Is there anything you think I should know that I have not asked or anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent for A Phenomenological Study of Gay Men's Coming Out While in College

Project Title and Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *A Phenomenological Study of Gay Men's Coming Out While in College*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the coming out experiences of gay men who came out while in college.

Researchers:

This study is being conducted by Adam Carter, MS, LPC-S, NCC, ACS, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling. Dr. Edward Wierzalis, Clinical Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Field Experience in the Department of Counseling, is serving as the chair of the dissertation committee and is the Responsible Faculty member for this study.

Description and Length of Participation:

You will be asked to participate in one audio recorded interview that is expected to last 60 - 90 minutes. Interviews will be conducted in a counseling lab in the Department of Counseling in the College of Education building; alternative arrangements can be made at the request of the research participant. Upon completion of the interview, you will be sent the transcript of your interview for content approval prior to analysis of the data. You will be asked to confirm the transcript as is or submit changes to the primary researcher via the Word document if changes are needed; this process is expected to last 30 minutes. If you decide to participate, you will be one of 5 - 7 participants in this study.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

The risks of participation in this study are minimal. It is possible that the negative thoughts, emotions, and experiences of coming out will resurface during the interview process. To prevent against the risk, the primary goal of researcher is for the participants to exit the interview at the same emotional level or better. This will be achieved by debriefing with each participant for as long as necessary. Contact information for the UNC Charlotte Counseling Center, 704.687.0311, in Atkins 158, will be provided to each participant.

This phenomenological study seeks to add to the research community by providing firsthand accounts of the factors that are associated with the process of coming out as a gay male in college and the coinciding experiences related to that process. The long-term implications will enhance the existing literature on coming out through a comprehensive understanding based on the rich descriptions of gay men who came out in college while currently in that college experience. Participants will be given a chance to share their story confidentially, which has the potential to be cathartic. Lastly, results gained have

the potential to provide information for Universities to review their protocols with the goal of increasing supportive campus environments for gay males.

Volunteer Statement:

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you and you may withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality:

Any information about your participation, including your identity, will be kept confidential to the extent possible. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: To prevent against identity disclosure, participants will be given pseudonyms and other potentially identifiable information will not be disclosed. It is possible that a transcription service will be used to transcribe the recorded interview. Whereas no identifying information will be provided by the researcher to the service, it is possible that other identifying information may be relayed in the interview. A confidentiality agreement will be signed with any transpiration service prior to transcription occurring. The digital audio files from the interviews will be deleted once transcription has been completed and verified by you the participant. The transcribed data will only be identified with your study pseudonym and will be stored on a password protected flash drive. It is possible that results gained from this study will be published or presented at a conference but your identifying information will not be used.

After you have completed your interview and it has been transcribed, the interview verification and feedback process will take place via e-mail. Please note that although the transcript will be de-identified and your name will not be on it, e-mail is not considered a confidential means of communication. The primary researcher will send you a transcription verification file that will read like a script of the interview. The verification file will not contain any identifying information about you as the participant and this file will not your pseudonym either, rather it will be identified as Speaker 1 and Speaker 2. You will either confirm the transcription is accurate or indicate the need for correction to the primary researcher by returning the de-identified verification file with the needed corrections.

If you have any questions at this point in time or at a later point in this study, please do not hesitate to ask them.

Fair Treatment and Respect:

XXXXX wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office at XXXXX if you have any questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the project, please contact Adam Carter (Principal Researcher) at XXXXX or Dr. Edward Wierzalis (Responsible Faculty) at XXXXX.

This form was approved for use on *June 17, 2014* for a period of one (1) year.

Participant Consent:

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after the Principal Researcher and I have signed it.

_____	_____
Participant's Name (PRINT)	DATE
_____	_____
Participant's Signature	DATE
_____	_____
Researcher's Signature	DATE

APPENDIX E: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNC CHARLOTTE

Research and Economic Development

Office of Research Compliance

9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
t/ 704.687.1876 f/ 704.687.0980 http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects

Certificate of Approval

Protocol #	**14-05-33**
Protocol Type:	**Expedited** 7
Title:	**A Phenomenological Study of Gay Men's Coming Out While in College**
Initial Approval:	**6/17/2014**

Responsible Faculty	**Dr. Ed**	**Wierzalis**	**Counseling**
Investigator	**Mr. Adam**	**Carter**	**Counseling**
Co-investigator	**Mr. Aaron**	**Hymes**	**Counseling**

After careful review, the protocol listed above was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects under 45 CFR 46.111. This approval will expire one year from the date of this letter. In order to continue conducting research under this protocol after one year, the "Annual Protocol Renewal Form" must be submitted to the IRB. This form can be obtained from the Office of Research Compliance web page http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics/human-subjects.

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to promptly inform the committee of any changes in the proposed research prior to implementing the changes, and of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to subjects or others.

Amendment and Event Reporting forms are available on our web page at: http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics/human-subjects/amending-your-protocol.

Lisa Walker 6/17/14

Dr. Lisa Walker, IRB Vice Chair Date

APPENDIX F: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ADDENDUM

UNC CHARLOTTE

Research and Economic Development

Office of Research Compliance

9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
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Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Approval of Amendment

Protocol #	**14-05-33**		
Title:	**A Phenomenological Study of Gay Men's Coming Out While in College**		
Date:	**3/11/2015**		
Co-investigator	**Mr. Aaron**	**Hymes**	**Counseling**
Investigator	**Mr. Adam**	**Carter**	**Counseling**
Responsible Faculty	**Dr. Ed**	**Wierzalis**	**Counseling**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the amendment of the protocol listed above for Research with Human Subjects.

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to promptly inform the committee of any changes in the proposed research, as well as any unanticipated problems that may arise involving risks to subjects.

Amendment Details: Recruitment procedures expanded to include posting of the currently approved recruitment script on counseling and LGBT listservs. The Investigator's membership on the listservs allows for use to the listservs in this way.

M. Lyn Exum — 3/17/15

Dr. M. Lyn Exum, IRB Chair — Date