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## Communicating for Equality: How Inclusive Communication Affects Political Participation within Local Communities

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Communicating for Equality: How Inclusive Communication Affects Political Participation  
within Local Communities

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Communication

by

Kyle C. Worley  
University of Alabama  
Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Information Sciences, 2016

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## Abstract

This study will examine the relationship among inclusive communication, sense of community belonging, and political participation within local communities. Communication from organizations such as local advocacy and local, mainstream media that contains content acknowledging relevant topics for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community members. I explore ways that Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) can be applied to organizational inclusive communication's influence on community marginalized members' sense of community belonging and political participation. CIT has been applied to the study of racial and economic minority communities in past research in the past, but this study applies CIT to the study of the marginalized LGBT community. The purpose of this research is to discover communication resources that strengthen the likelihood of pro-LGBT political participation in both LGBT community members and heterosexuals. Sense of belonging is a predictor of community members' active engagement in their communities in CIT and civic participation research. Communication from local organizations and media has not been described as a direct influencer of communication but as more of an influencer of sense of community belonging, which is then predicted to effect community engagement. Another purpose of my study is to see if CIT can be applied to political outcomes. I will also attempt to discover whether communication still has indirect effects on engagement when used in a political context.

*Keywords:* communication infrastructure theory, political communication, political participation, LGBT, sense of belonging, communication infrastructure, communication ecology

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

States have adopted discrimination protections that protect lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)<sup>1</sup> individuals. For instance, New York state passed the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act that declares it is to be “...unlawful for anyone in New York State to be discriminated against in employment, housing, credit, education and public accommodations because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation...” (New York State Office of the Attorney General, 2018). The United States has seen progress at the national level as well; for example, the famous Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage took place recently in 2015. Despite this progress, LGBT equality issues still persist throughout the country today. Many LGBT individuals experience discrimination in their workplaces (Fu, 2017), schools (“The Williams Institute, 2018), and in areas that provide public services (Rosky, 2018). States without LGBT discrimination protections in place, such as Arkansas, might put LGBT peoples at a higher risk of discrimination from employers, educators, and civil servants (Rosky, 2016).

Cities located in states without LGBT discrimination protections have begun to take action to include LGBT anti-discrimination ordinances. The city of Fayetteville, Arkansas is one such city where local leaders attempted to pass a city ordinance that prohibited LGBT discrimination. However, state officials such as the attorney general of the state of Arkansas, Leslie Rutledge, passed legislation prohibiting the enforcement of LGBT anti-discrimination city ordinances (Brantley, 2017; Crary, 2017; DeMillo, 2017). In February of 2017, the Arkansas Supreme Court upheld legislation that struck down a local city ordinance (Ordinance 5781), which extended the protections outlined in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Arkansas Civil

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation “LGBT” will reference to words *lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender* (Christian et al., 2014 p. 148). According to the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Defamation League (GLAAD), the preferred definition for people who are attracted to the same sex is “gay,” “lesbian,” or “bisexual” and the preferred definition of people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth is “trans” or “transgender”; therefore, those are the terms I will be using throughout this study (GLAAD, 2016).

Rights Act of 1993 from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex, religion, and disability to include sexual orientation and gender identity (Froelich, 2017). The Arkansas Supreme Court determined that Ordinance 5781 was unconstitutional under the Arkansas Constitution (The State of Arkansas Intervenor v. The City of Fayetteville, 2017). This case indicates that LGBT individuals and allies must continue to work toward creating inclusive communities for all residents, including LGBT residents.

Communication is central to mobilizing community members to advocate for LGBT equality (Dziengel, 2010). Past literature (Lehavot, Balsam, & Ibrahim-Wells, 2009; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Swank & Fahs, 2016; Swank, Woodford, & Lim, 2013) identified local advocacy organizations as effective community resources. Advocacy organizations helped marginalized people feel a sense of community belonging and political empowerment. Lehavot and colleagues (2009) found politically active LGBT women of color to have increased feelings of belonging and empowerment in their communities. Additionally, the women were politically active through an organization specific to LGBT women. The organization created a space for marginalized community members to gather and organize around LGBT issues. Community organizations may thus be the key to encouraging political mobilization among LGBT community members. Certainly, community organizations were just one example of potential communication resources that individuals could use to advocate for LGBT causes.

Scholars applied communication infrastructure theory to communication practices of community organizers dealing with other types of marginalized social groups within communities. For example, communication infrastructure theory focused on marginalized social groups such as low-income and immigrant community members (Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Montgomery & Hunt, 2011; Wilkin, Stringer, O'Quin). Communication infrastructure theory



(Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) is a lens through which scholars and practitioners alike might identify the role of local organizations and other communication resources within a community. Communication infrastructure is the system of communication resources a community has that can be utilized to address problems within a community. Communication resources exist in three different levels: micro-level storytellers (including interpersonal communication), meso-level storytellers (including local organizations), and macro-level storytellers (agents that disseminate communications at national and global levels) (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). A communication infrastructure approach would be useful to understand how residents utilize meso-level communication resources to cultivate a sense of community belonging and to encourage political mobilization. Specifically, a communication infrastructure approach would help ascertain the frequency of LGBT-focused communication occurring in a community. Communication infrastructure theory might also help identify what communication resources are sought and shared across the community to address LGBT concerns. Therefore, this study used a communication infrastructure approach to examine the relationship among LGBT-inclusive communication, sense of belonging, and political participation at multiple levels. This study covered the micro and meso-levels of communication.

This study examined inclusive communication from more formal organizational communication sources (e.g. newspapers, local television, advocacy organizations) influences sense of belonging and political participation in both LGBT members and allies of LGBT people in communities. In doing so, this research had both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research seeks to advance our understanding of communication infrastructures' role in addressing LGBT issues. Practically, this study seeks to provide initial

evidence of LGBT-inclusive communication scale that practitioners can use to assess a community's engagement relating to LGBT issues. The theoretical model guiding my study combines communication infrastructure theory research (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) and LGBT research related to sense of belonging (Lehavot, et al., 2009; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017) and political participation (Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank et al., 2013). My theoretical model posits that pro-LGBT inclusive meso-level communication is positively associated with individual community members, and a higher sense of community belonging is positively associated with political participation. Pro-LGBT inclusive meso-level communication will also be positively associated with more pro-LGBT political participation.

Following chapter one, this study will review literature related to communication infrastructure, LGBT studies, and political communication research. Chapter three will describe the study's methodology. Chapter four will present the results. Chapter five will describe the implications of these findings. This study built upon previous research about the relationship between community sense of belong and political participation.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

The following review of literature will first explain the basic assumptions of communication infrastructure theory. Next I will review ways in which communication infrastructure might identify the relationships among inclusive communication, sense of belonging, and political participation. Then, I will explain a local organization's role in cultivating community members' sense of community belonging and community members' political participation.

## **Communication Infrastructure Theory**

Communication infrastructure theory is the basic communication system that community members use in their day-to-day lives to create, learn, and share important information about their communities (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Wilkin et al., 2011). According to the communication infrastructure theoretical framework, the communication infrastructure is composed of two main components: a storytelling network and a communication action context (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001).

A storytelling network is a multi-level system that facilitates the sharing of communication. This system of shared communication provides meaning to individuals observing the world around them. Storytelling networks consist of the micro, meso and macro-level communication resources as discussed previously (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Storytelling networks occur within the community's communication action contexts (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Wilkin et al., 2011).

Communication action contexts are "... all of the features of people's residential environments (cultural, social, economic, physical, etc.) that affect the availability of different communication resources and the ease of access to them (Wilkin et al., 2011 p. 203)." For instance, communities with higher rates of poverty and crime are less likely to have usable communication action contexts because residents are less likely to utilize meeting spaces that are unsafe or in poor condition (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006).

Communication action contexts can either hinder or facilitate effective communication, in that an open context allowed for the free flow of communication across different storytellers. In contrast, a closed communication action context impedes communication resources' ability to transfer information across ecological levels (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Open context

communication action contexts would be a meeting space such as a local public, well-funded community center that residents or organizations utilized to engage in discourse with other community members. The same community center could also be used as an example of a closed context communication action context, especially if the community center is an underfunded space that residents avoid due to safety concerns. Neglected and unsafe community spaces normally deter community members from utilizing the space for discursive engagement (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006).

Communication action contexts consist of hot spots and comfort zones. Hot spots are places within the communication action context where community members engaged with each other in everyday interaction (Villanueva, Broad, Gonzalez, Ball-Rokeach, & Murphy, 2016). For instance, a local communication hot spot might be a coffee shop on campus where students frequently “hang out” together. Comfort zones are areas where community members are familiarized and have an affective connection to the space (Villanueva et al., 2016). A communication comfort zone might be a community library where residents have grown to become familiarized with during their time as residents in the community. Residents begin to develop an affective connection toward the library and identify the space as a hub for acquiring knowledge (Veil & Bishop, 2014). Furthermore, community libraries are spaces where programs are offered to connect residents and storytellers to one another (Veil & Bishop, 2014). In fact, Spialek and Worley’s study (2018) suggested community libraries to be ideal spaces for community members to articulate their personal narratives of the community. Personal narratives are stories that are another way of sharing information about the community through the storytellers’ experiences within the community (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Community libraries

would be a communication comfort zone, which are also a type of communication action context.

**Integrated storytelling networks.** An effective communication infrastructure should be integrated. A storytelling network becomes integrated when individuals are embedded in an open communication action context that facilitates communication across different ecological levels. Previous research found that an integrated storytelling network was positively associated with stronger feelings of belonging (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001, Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), more collective efficacy (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006), and higher levels of civic participation (Cohen et al., 2002; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Kim & Kang, 2010; Perkins & Long, 2002). Community members' senses of community is formed by each community members' perceptions of how well they feel they belong in the community. Whether or not they feel like salient community issues are being addressed, how well they feel they are treated by other community members, and perceived support (or lack thereof) from other community members influences these perceptions belonging.

Research provided additional insight on the importance of these exchanges of communication within the storytelling network and their importance to facilitating belonging. Scholars McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed that members of a community felt stronger feelings of belonging on the condition that they interacted positively and frequently with each other. These interactions included going through traumatic events together (experiencing a community crisis), expressing more intimate emotions with other community members, honoring members of the community, and forming a spiritual connection to others in the community. Beyond everyday interactions, engaging with local media in the local storytelling networks might facilitate belonging. Local mainstream media affected how residents understand their

communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In other words, local media can disseminate communication that might encourage residents to be more or less open to certain social changes. Community members who felt that their local media and fellow community members supported their own values were more likely to feel higher levels of community belonging.

Organizations use certain storytelling networks within communication infrastructures to further their own community-oriented goals (Broad et al., 2013). Organizations with a central focus on specific issues (especially ones related to marginalized groups) can be a valuable resource in mobilizing political participation within a desired target audience. Houston, Spialek, Cox, Greenwood & First (2015) specifically cited citizens, community leaders, and advocacy organizations as primary parts of the communication networks and resources that make up the communication ecology of a community. Broad and colleagues (2013) found that communication resources such as advocacy organizations and local media provided several benefits to a community and its people. These meso-level organizations constructed meaning making, facilitated interaction between community members and facilitated the exchange of information between community members. More importantly, the level of integration as a storytelling network was a direct indicator of participants' sense of community belonging. That study's (Broad et al., 2013) participants reported a stronger senses of belonging if they indicated their community as having a more integrated storytelling networks. The following section will further elaborate how meso-level organizations use communication to facilitate a sense of belonging.

### **Inclusive Communication and Sense of Belonging**

This thesis examines communication as a potential tool that local organizations can use to cultivate community members' senses of community belonging. Meso-level organizations

(advocacy organizations and local media) might be able to affect community members' feelings of connectedness, belonging, and participation in a community. However, a certain type of communication is needed to achieve this effect. Research related to communication infrastructures focused on the importance of measuring sense of community belonging. Houston and his colleagues (2017), for example, used the Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit (Pfefferbaum, R., Neas, Pfefferbaum, B., Norris, & Van Horn, 2013) to measure community members' senses of belonging. Perkins, Hughey, and Speer (2002) speculated that an individual's sense of belonging in a community originated from how well or how poorly communicators within a community attempted to solve problems that were salient to a particular group of individuals. Again, if groups of people within a community perceived their community to lack concern over salient issues, then that group would likely become disengaged from the community out of frustration and dissatisfaction (Perkins et al., 2002; Perkins & Long, 2002). For example, a study from Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' (2001) found local mainstream media did not increase feelings of belonging among Latino and Asian community members, increases were shown in Caucasian and African-American community members. They suggested local, mainstream media did not address salient problems related to the Latino and Asian immigrant residents. The lack of Asian and Latino inclusion in the community storytelling network resulted in lower levels of belonging within those marginalized groups. Ball-Rokeach and colleagues (2001) recommended that media address important topics relevant to specific social groups of people and recommended that advocacy organizations establish communication with local mainstream media in order to ensure inclusion of the social groups they advocate for within the storytelling network. In order to understand the meso-level communication that is inclusive to LGBT community members, I proposed the following research question:

RQ1: How might one measure the presence of pro-LGBT inclusive communication from local meso-level communicators?

There was some evidence from qualitative studies that organizations can increase an LGBT person's sense of belonging through the dissemination of pro-LGBT inclusive communication (Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank, Woodford & Lim, 2013; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Vaccaro and Newman (2017) found in a study of LGBT first-year university students that students who identified as LGBT had increased feelings of campus belonging if organizations on campus (both LGBT-specific and non-LGBT organizations) disseminated assuring messages. Types of communications included advertisements of pro-LGBT organizations on campus and programs specifically for LGBT students. Not only did the pro-LGBT messages increase belonging, but the presence of the campus's LGBT Center had a positive effect on those students' feelings of belonging. In other words, the presence of an LGBT center on campus was a message in itself that communicated to LGBT students that they belonged. Furthermore, both openly LGBT and more discrete LGBT students benefitted from the presence of those organizations (Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). LGBT students did not need to be particularly active in LGBT groups in order to feel like they belonged. Thus, given the important role that messages from community organizations play in facilitating feelings of belonging, the following hypothesis is posited:

H1: Participants' perceived exposure to inclusive LGBT communication from community organizations is positively associated with their senses of belonging in their respective communities.

Research on the relationship between sense of belonging and inclusive communication in LGBT individuals revealed several different findings. LGBT students' exposure to inclusive



communication and LGBT students' senses of belonging suggested LGBT students who were members of political organizations felt stronger feelings of community belonging because they were active members of those organizations, according to Swank and Fahs (2017). The students in Swank and Fahs study gained exposure to inclusive communication primarily because of their active involvement. In their view (Swank & Fahs, 2017), LGBT students' senses of community belonging resulted from how much or how little the students actively participated in an organization. Another pair of scholars observed a different phenomenon in LGBT students. Vaccaro and Newman's research (2017) found students' senses of belonging on campus resulted from the presence of on-campus advocacy organizations' outreach to LGBT students. The two scholars cited "pro-LGBT campus messaging" as critical to LGBT students' positive feelings of belonging (p.146). Along the same lines, communication infrastructure theory research (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001) envisioned outreach from meso-level organizations as an important part of increasing community members' feelings of community belonging. Ball-Rokeach and colleagues (2001) recommended that local advocacy organizations increase the awareness of their organizations if they wished to cultivate belonging among community members. Since greater awareness and political participation seems to be associated with a sense of belonging (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Swank & Fahs, 2017; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017) on the role of meso-level communicators in cultivating a sense of community belonging led me to ask the following research question:

RQ2: How does inclusive communication from local, meso-level organizations affect LGBT individuals' feelings of belonging within their respective communities?

Swank and his colleagues (2013) identified non-LGBT individuals as potential political allies to LGBT people. Furthermore, on campuses that accepted LGBT students and where

LGBT students were more likely to belong, non-LGBT students were more likely to sign a pro-LGBT petition. This positive association between LGBT inclusive contexts and non-LGBT individuals' pro-LGBT political participation shows a similarity to my overall theoretical model; however, the scholars didn't take into account the variable of sense of belonging (Swank et al., 2013). Therefore, I would like to examine whether perceived pro-LGBT inclusive communication has any association with non-LGBT participants' senses of community belonging.

RQ3: How does inclusive communication influence from local, meso-level organizations non-LGBT participants' senses of belonging within their respective communities?

### **Political Participation**

Research (Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Snapp et al., 2015; Swank et al., 2013) suggested communication might help increase LGBT awareness, which might be an effective strategy to encourage participation in political activities that promote LGBT causes. LGBT advocacy groups have seen positive results once they made outreach to members in a community that were related to the problems LGBT people face (Swank et al., 2013). For instance, Swank and colleagues (2013) found that non-LGBT students were more empathetic and understanding toward the problems LGBT individuals faced in their communities when students on campus had friendships or regular interactions with LGBT peers.

Scholars who focused their studies on political and civic engagement described the importance of active engagement in politics at the local level. Communication infrastructure scholars (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Villanueva et al., 2016; Wilkin et al., 2011) expressed the idea that community organizations are important parts of communication infrastructures and communication networks in addressing problems within a community.

Moreover, community organizations provided an organized process to tackle relevant issues ( Butterfoss, et al., 1993; Villanueva et al., 2016; Wilkin et al., 2011). Thus far, the literature indicated empowerment and belonging to predict political participation in community residents' respective communities (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Perkins et al., 2002).

More direct forms of civic participation are defined as the acts of participation that are often associated with the traditional forms of civic participation (i.e., protesting, attending rallies, writing to politicians). Ekman and Amna (2012) described civic participation as goal oriented, easily observable and clearly measurable. Instances of these actions included contacting a political figure, formally joining an active organization in a community, running for office, participating in a demonstration (legal or illegal), and voting in an election (Ekman & Amna, 2012). Pateman (1970) claimed actively working toward making changes in a community to be an important part of participating in a democracy. At the local level, citizens might learn the most about how to make changes in their communities (Pateman, 1970). Therefore, civic engagement in this paper is defined as the way through which individuals and organizations attempt to outwardly express their values as well as any political action at the local level. Additionally, participating in extra-parliamentary political activities such as demonstrations and protests (both legal and illegal) will be counted as civic engagement in this study (Ekman & Amna, 2012; Ognyanova et al., 2013).

### **The Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Political Participation**

Work from previous scholars emphasized the importance of belonging in order to solve problems facing a community. Bachrach and Zautra (1985) found that a strong sense of community belonging was a key component in encouraging individuals to exhibit problem-

solving behaviors. The ability to bring individuals with shared values together, which then reduced feelings of estrangement among marginalized people, was another important outcome of feeling connected or feeling a sense of belonging to one's community. In other words, when people (marginalized or not) with shared values, priorities, and goals come together, there was a better likelihood that they would be able to collectively reach those goals and meet the community's needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Chavis and Wandersman (1990) found that sense of community and participation in the community were two factors that had a cyclical relationship with each other. In other words, sense of community and community participation fed into one another; as individuals had a stronger sense of community, the individuals were more likely to participate in positive community building. Therefore, individuals' participation in the community was positively associated with sense of community belonging. (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). The more residents felt a stronger sense of belonging, the more likely those same residents participated and took action to build up their community (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). To promote sense of belonging and connectedness within interpersonal story telling networks, community organizations worked within a context that connected the organization to individual micro-level storytelling networks that then enabled more members of the community to be aware of certain problems within their communities (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Wilkin et al., 2011).

Chavis and Wanderman's research (1990) provided further support of the idea that sense of belonging was related to mobilizing action among associations of people in a community. They asserted sense of community to be a precursor of efficacy, which then encouraged community members to take part in collective action. Chavis and Wanderman (1990) suggested

that groups of community members began the process of changing their community according to their individual and group desires once the group engaged in collective action. I formulated my second hypothesis based on the previously mentioned scholars' findings regarding inclusive communication and political participation (Butterfoss, et al., 1993; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank et al., 2013; Ognyanova et al., 2013; Perkins et al., 2002; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017; Villanueva et al., 2016; Wilkin et al., 2011). For example, Swank and his colleagues found (2013) an association between environments that are openly LGBT-inclusive and participants engagement in pro-LGBT political participation.

H2: Participants' perceived exposure to inclusive LGBT communication from meso-level community organizations will be positively associated with their political participation regarding LGBT causes.

Moreover, research specific to LGBT individuals' feelings of belonging (Lehavot, et al., 2009; Swank & Fahs, 2017; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017) indicated a relationship between sense of belonging and political participation in LGBT individuals. When LGBT participants were compared to non-LGBT participants, scholars found that LGBT students were twice as likely than their non-LGBT counterparts to join political organizations and were more often involved in those organizations (Swank & Fahs, 2017). Chavis, McMillan, Wandersman, and Pretty's research (Chavis & Pretty, 1999; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; McMillan & Chavis, 1986) in addition to Vaccaro and Newman's research dealing with sense of community among LGBT individuals (2017) proposed a relationship between higher sense of belonging and civic engagement within the community. The scholars (Lehavot et al., 2009; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017) focused on the relationship between LGBT individuals' increased membership to political organizations and increased political engagement. LGBT people tended to feel an increased

sense of belonging within their local communities when communicating with groups consisting of like-minded people. Furthermore, could there be any differences between the relationship between perceived exposure to inclusive communication and pro-LGBT political participation in either non-LGBT and LGBT participants? The following research questions addressed this concern:

RQ4: How does pro-LGBT inclusive communication influence non-LGBT individuals' participation in pro-LGBT political participation activities within their respective communities?

RQ5: How does pro-LGBT inclusive communication influence LGBT individuals' participation in pro-LGBT political participation activities within their respective communities?

To increase community members' sense of community belonging the studies suggested that groups of LGBT individuals must have a formal and active system of support (i.e., advocacy organization or political organization) consisting of other LGBT people and/or people with pro-LGBT views in order to foster a sense of overall community belonging in LGBT individuals.

The studies from Vaccaro and Newman (2017) and Lehavot and colleagues (2009) described the communities in a way that resembled Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' description (2001) of meso-level storytelling agents. Lehavot and colleagues' study (2009) described LGBT communities that arose out of formal political organizations on a university campus. These political organizations were meso-level storytellers. Vaccaro and Newman's study (2017) found a similar phenomenon where LGBT connected social groups arose within a larger community based out of a college campus. Vaccaro and Newman also found that the LGBT community arose from a formal campus-based political organization. Belonging to such an organization that

communicated a willingness to provide support allowed these marginalized people to access resources, which then empowered them to take collective action in their community's political activities (Lehavot, et al., 2009; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Hypothesis three seeks to analyze the proposed relationship between the participants' senses of community belonging and political participation within the local community:

H3: Participants who have a stronger sense of community belonging will exhibit higher levels of political participation in their communities.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

This research used a quantitative survey method to initially develop and test the reliability of several inclusive LGBT communication scales. The inclusive communication scales measured frequency of LGBT-focused communication occurring within communication infrastructures. Additionally, the quantitative survey method examined the relationship among the frequency of inclusive LGBT communication, sense of belonging, and perceived political participation. In the following chapter, I will describe the sampling methods, procedures, and data analysis used to develop my inclusive communication measures and test my hypotheses.

#### **Participants**

Data were collected in April 2018. Participants ( $N= 203$ ) used an online link to access the survey. I used a convenience sample. I recruited participants through the University of Arkansas's COMM 1313 course sections. COMM 1313 instructors were asked to send an email with a brief description of my study and its purpose. The email contained a link where COMM 1313 students could click to access the survey. There was a total of 361 individuals who began the survey, however the data from 203 participants were used. Data sets of participants who did not complete large portions of a variable were deleted. More specifically, if a participant did not

answer more than half of a measure, their data set was thrown out. Also, participants who indicated the same response for all or almost all items had their responses deleted.

A majority ( $n = 129$ ) of the participants identified as cis-female (63.55%) and 64 were cis-male (31.53%). One individual identified as trans-female (0.49%), seven individuals (3.45%) identified as “other,” and two people declined to identify their gender (0.99%). Participant mean age was 19.81 years ( $SD = 2.113$ ). The majority ( $n = 165$ , 81.28%) identified as White (non-Hispanic), followed by Black or African American ( $n = 16$ , 7.88%), then Hispanic/Latin0 ( $n = 10$ , 4.93%), Asian ( $n = 6$ , 2.96%), American Indian or Alaskan Native ( $n = 3$ , 1.47%), and three participants identified as “other” ( $n = 3$ , 1.48%). Most participants ( $n = 176$ , 86.70%) identified as Heterosexual, followed by Bisexual ( $n = 18$ , 8.87%), and Homosexual ( $n = 9$ , 4.43%).

## **Procedures**

**Scale development.** Prior to disseminating my survey, I generated an initial set of 48 items to potentially be included in an inclusive LGBT communication scale. Communication practices discussed in previous communication infrastructure theory studies (Ball-Rokeach, et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Ognyanova et al., 2013; Wilkin et al., 2011) helped form the initial set of items. They cited using tactics such as working with other meso-level communicators, utilizing local, mainstream media, initiating discussion with community members in their community outreach efforts, and bringing awareness to the community organizers’ goals (both online and offline).

**Survey administration.** After clicking on a link to the survey, participants were directed to the survey hosted on Qualtrics. Participants read a consent form that stated participants’ participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous.



After consenting to the study, participants responded to a series of items measuring pro-LGBT inclusive communication, sense of belonging, and political participation. At the end of the survey, participants responded to questions about their age, race, income, level of education, gender, and sexual orientation. Upon completion, participants were able to click on a separate link in order to receive extra credit points. By having a separate survey link to enter personal information for extra credit, the participants' identity was not linked to the survey data.

### **Measures**

The survey measured demographic information as well as the three variables formulated from this study's hypotheses and research questions—LGBT inclusive communication; perceived sense of belonging within one's community; and self-reported levels of political participation within one's community.

**Inclusive LGBT communication.** Inclusive LGBT communication was measured using three scales developed for the purposes of this study. The three scales corresponded to three different types of meso-level communication resources. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to statements about the communication practices of LGBT organizations, non-LGBT organizations, and local mainstream media. Despite the fact that the two meso-level communicators are not LGBT-centered organizations, I examined LGBT inclusive communication from non-LGBT organizations and local media in addition to LGBT organizations because non-LGBT organizations and media could still be possible sources of LGBT inclusive communication. These three variations in types of measurement items became the three separate inclusive communication scales. Items were written in a declarative statement format. Responses to the items ranged on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

In order to develop a scale, an initial set of 48 items (Table 1) was generated and examined; however, the final inclusive LGBT communication scales were reduced to a smaller set of items through an exploratory factor analysis. The details of the exploratory factor analysis and details of the factors are discussed in more detail in the Results section.

***RQ1: How might one measure the presence of pro-LGBT inclusive communication from local meso-level communicators?*** I used an exploratory factor analysis to determine the factors of the LGBT inclusive communication scales. Items in the inclusive communication scale measured the presence of inclusive communication in participants' respective communities in three ways: examining the sources of messages relating to LGBT topics, examining the tone of communication, and examining the channels through which LGBT-focused communication is disseminated. The initial scale (Table 1) asked participants to respond to statements regarding their own perceptions of three types of meso-level communication resources: non-LGBT organizations, LGBT organizations, and local mainstream media. Meso-level communication resources include locally based community organizations targeted toward residents as well as locally based community media (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001).

The inclusive communication scale separated "community organizations" into two categories and asked respondents to think about the communication practices of LGBT organizations and non-LGBT organizations. This way, I was able to examine the producers of inclusive communication. There were two reasons for categorizing the organizations. Firstly, there might be participants who resided in communities without any formal community organizations focused on LGBT topics, but other community organizations not necessarily associated with LGBT advocacy might have still produced communication targeted toward LGBT residents. Secondly, the items in my scale aim to measure the tone of communication

derived from non-LGBT organizations and mainstream media within the participants' communities. Meso-level storytelling network agents in a participant's community might frequently produce communication relating to LGBT topics, but the messages might be unhelpful or even harmful for LGBT residents.

Lastly, my inclusive communication scale considered the various channels of communication that locally based organizations might use. I then divided the scale into three separate inclusive communication scales based upon the scree plot interpretation and factor rotation. The items measured uses of social media, print media, televised media, broadcasted media, web-based media and interpersonal communication.

The exploratory factor analysis conducted of the inclusive communication scales determined the dimensionality of the items in each of the inclusive communication scales (Table 2). The first scale (Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale) measured inclusive communication originating from local advocacy organizations that *are not* affiliated with an LGBT cause. The second scale (LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale) measured inclusive communication originating from local advocacy organizations affiliated with an LGBT cause. The third scale (Media Inclusive Communication Scale) measured inclusive communication originating from local, mainstream media.

The Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale consisted of three factors. The LGBTOrgs Inclusive Communication Scale consisted of three factors. The Media Inclusive Communication Scale was a unidimensional construct. Factors in the two, multi-dimensional constructs remained if their Eigenvalues were more than 1.00 (DeVellis, 2017). I employed an oblique rotation varimax in conjunction with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to help determine which items to include in the LGBTOrg Inclusive

Communication and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication constructs (Devellis, 2017 p.180-182). Items with a primary loading of .60 in one factor and a primary loading of .40 or less in the other two factors were retained in the factors (McCroskey & Young, 1979).

I ran an exploratory factor analysis multiple times for the Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale and the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale. A total of five and seven iterations were run respectively in order to reach a valid set of items in each construct. After each iteration, items that did not meet the .60/.40 criterion (McCroskey & Young, 1979) were removed and subsequent exploratory factor analyses were run until all of the items reached acceptable loading scores. Names of the factors were determined after a common theme was identified per factor.

**Sense of belonging.** I used five items from the Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit (CART; Pfefferbaum et al., 2013) to measure participants' perceived sense of belonging in the geographical communities where they currently resided. Possible responses to the five-point Likert-type items ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For example, "People in this community feel like they belong to the community;" "People in this community are committed to the well-being of the community;" "People in this community have hope about the future;" "People in this community help each other;" "This community treats people fairly no matter what their background is." The CART Scale had an acceptable reliability rating ( $\alpha = 0.791$ ;  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ).

**Political participation.** I measured political participation with the use of an adapted version of Sweetser's four-factor, 27-item scale (2014). Items were adapted in two ways. First, unlike Sweetser's (2014) original scale measuring the perceived level of importance for each form of political participation, I revised the items from the original scale to address frequency of

political participation. Some items included political participation activities specifically for LGBT causes. Second, participants recorded how often they engaged in that specific form of political participation. Responses ranged from 1 (*never do at all*) to 5 (*very often*).

The overall scale had an acceptable reliability score ( $\alpha = 0.942$ ). All factors yielded acceptable alpha scores: The first factor, Public Participation Actions ( $\alpha = .940$ ) consisted of 16 items. Sample Public Participation Action items included: “Raise funds for a pro-LGBT candidate,” and “Sign a petition relating to an LGBT cause (not e-petition).” Private Participation Actions ( $\alpha = .815$ ) consisted of five items. Sample Private Participation Actions included: “Watch LGBT-issue oriented political videos on sites like YouTube,” and “Vote.” Public Political Identification Actions consisted of three items ( $\alpha = .718$ ). Sample Public Political Identification Actions included: “Join a pro-LGBT political Facebook group,” and “Wear a political T-shirt advocating for LGBT rights.” Private Surveillance Actions ( $\alpha = .865$ ) consisted of three items. Sample Private Surveillance Actions included: “Read a pro-LGBT candidate's blog,” and “Follow a pro-LGBT candidate on Twitter”(Sweetser, 2014 p.73).

**Demographics.** The last part of the survey measured participants’ demographic information. *Age* was measured at the ratio level. Participants entered a numerical value for their age in a blank box. *Race* was measured as a nominal-level variable where participants answered which race best describes their self (Black, Caucasian, Latino/Latina, Asian, Native-American, Mixed/Other, decline to answer). I transformed participants’ responses to the race measure to a nominal variable—either white or non-white. *Gender* was measured as a nominal level variable (cis-male, cis-female, trans-male, trans-female, and decline to answer/other). *Education* was measured on a seven-point interval level item (1; some high school, 2; high school, 3; some college, 4; associate’s degree, 5; bachelor’s degree, 6; master’s degree/ professional degree, and

7; doctorate). *Income* was measured as a nominal level item (1; \$0-\$20,000, 2;\$20,001-\$50,000, 3;\$50,001-\$80,000, and 4; \$80,001+). Sexual orientation was measured as a three-point nominal-level variable (1; homosexual, 2;bisexual, and 3; heterosexual). I then transformed participants' responses to the sexual orientation measure to a nominal variable; I recoded homosexual and bisexual participants as "LGBT," and I recoded heterosexual participants as "non-LGBT."

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for my research study consisted of an (a) exploratory factor analysis and (b) hierarchical regressions. I ran an exploratory factor analysis to identify three measures of LGBT-inclusive communication. I then ran a series of hierarchical regression to test hypotheses one and two. In hypotheses one and two, demographic variables were entered in block one, while independent variables were entered in block two.

Research questions two through five are hierarchical regressions of a subset of participants. Research questions two and four examined data of only LGBT participants. Research questions three and five examined only the data of non-LGBT participants. For research question two, I ran a hierarchical regression examining the relationship between sense of community belonging and meso-level inclusive communication in LGBT participants. Sense of community belonging was the dependent variable, whereas participants' scores from the inclusive communication variables were the independent variables in block two. For research question three, I looked for an association between sense of community belonging and meso-level inclusive communication in non-LGBT participants. Sense of community belonging was the dependent variable, whereas participants scores from the inclusive communication variables were the independent variables in block two.

**Testing research questions and hypotheses.** Once the exploratory factor analysis identified the factors of inclusive communication of the initial inclusive communication scale, I ran several hierarchical regressions on SPSS 25 in order to examine the relationship among the self-reported perceptions of local inclusive communication, sense of community belonging, and political participation behaviors.

*Hypothesis one.* First, I ran a hierarchical regression with sense of belonging as the dependent variable. The independent variables were demographic variables along with participants' overall scores on the three inclusive communication variables (a.) Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication (b.) LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication and (c.) Media inclusive communication. The demographic variables of age, race, sexual orientation, income, years of residence, and gender were entered into block one. NonLGBTOrg Inclusive Communication, LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication, and Media inclusive communication were independent variables entered into block two. Dividing the independent variables into different blocks ensured that demographic variables were being controlled for and helped to examine significant relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable in block two.

Because the hierarchical regression used to answer hypothesis one indicated that the overall LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication variable was significant, I ran a hierarchical regression to examine the relationship between the three individual subscales of the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication scale and the participants' sense of belonging. Participants' scores from the sense of belonging remained the dependent variable, and the demographic variables from the initial regression remained the same as well. However, in block two I removed the Media IC and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication variables. The three subscales from the

LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication scale (i.e., initiate discussion, organizational outreach, and organizational presence) were entered in their place in block two.

*Hypothesis two.* The next hierarchical regression was executed in SPSS 25. My second hypothesis looked for an association between perceived exposure to pro-LGBT inclusive communication and participants' pro-LGBT political participation. In this regression, participants' overall scores from the political participation variable were entered in as the dependent variable. Again, the independent demographic variables of age, race, sexual orientation, income, years of residence, and gender were entered in block one, and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication, LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication, and Media inclusive communication were independent variables run in block two.

I then ran two more hierarchical regressions to test hypothesis two. The demographic variables remained the same as independent variables entered block one, and political participation remained the dependent variable. However, in this hierarchical regression, the three subscales from LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale, and the three subscales from Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale were individually analyzed as the independent variable in block two for the other hierarchical regression.

*Hypothesis three.* I conducted a hierarchical regression to identify an association between participants' feelings of community belonging and their political participation. Political participation was the dependent variable, and the variables of age, race, sexual orientation, income, education, residential tenure, and gender were entered in block one. Participants' sense of community belonging was the independent variable run in block two.

Certain select cases of data sets were examined together as well as separately to test for significant relationships among the variables during the execution of the hierarchical regressions.



First, the hierarchical regressions were executed using all participants' data; secondly, the subsequent hierarchical regressions only used non-LGBT participants' data; third, the next hierarchical regressions were executed using only LGBT participants' data.

**Research question two.** I ran a hierarchical regression analyzing data from select cases of participants who self-identified as LGBT to answer research question two. The independent demographic variables (i.e., age, race, gender, residential tenure, education, and income) were controlled for in block two and were entered in block one. The three independent inclusive communication variables (Non-LGBT inclusive communication, LGBT inclusive communication, and media inclusive communication) were entered in block two. Sense of community belonging was the dependent variable.

I then ran two other hierarchical regression with the same dependent variables and independent variables in block one. The only change was that the three subscales from Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication and LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication were entered in block two independently.

**Research question three.** For research question three, I conducted a hierarchical regression on select cases of non-LGBT participants using SPSS 25. This hierarchical regression only examined non-LGBT participants. In block one, I entered the age, race, sexual orientation, income, education, residential tenure, and gender variables. In block two, I entered the three inclusive communication variables as independent variables in block two. Sense of community belonging was the dependent variable.

**Research question four.** For research question four, I ran another hierarchical regression of select cases. Only data from participants who identified as heterosexual in order to test for a relationship between non-LGBT participants' inclusive communication scores and their

engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. Participants' responses on the political participation measure was run as the dependent variable. Again, the independent demographic variables (i.e., age, race, gender, education, residential tenure, and income) were controlled for in block one, and the three inclusive variables (Non-LGBT inclusive communication, LGBT inclusive communication, and media inclusive communication) were entered in block two as the independent variables in block two.

Again, I then ran two other hierarchical regression with the same dependent variables and independent variables in block one. The only change was that the three subscales from Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication and LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication were entered in block two as independent variables separately.

*Research question five.* In order to answer research question five, I examined data from only LGBT participants. More specifically, I ran a hierarchical regression of select cases of participants who identified as LGBT. I entered demographic variables in block one to control for their significance in the overall model in block two. Demographic variables (i.e., age, race, residential tenure, and income) were entered in block one as independent variables. Next, the three inclusive variables (non-LGBT inclusive communication, LGBT inclusive communication, and media inclusive communication) were entered in as the independent variables in block two. The LGBT participants' scores from the political participation scale were entered in the regression as the dependent variable.

#### **Chapter 4: Results**

I will discuss the findings from my exploratory factor analysis in the first part of this chapter. I conducted an exploratory factor analysis for each of the three inclusive communication scales. Firstly, there will be discussion of the results from the Non-LGBT Inclusive

Communication Scale exploratory factor analysis. Secondly, there will be discussion of the results from the LGBT Inclusive Communication Scale exploratory factor analysis. Thirdly, there will be discussion of the results from the Media Inclusive Communication Scale exploratory factor analysis. Following my discussion of the results from the exploratory factor analyses, I will discuss the demographic characteristics of my overall sample. Lastly, I will discuss the significant findings from the hypotheses and research questions.

### **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

According to DeVellis (2017) the acceptable criteria for factor retention according to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling is above .60, and the other factorial loadings of the item cannot be more than .40. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling was above .60 for the items in all three LGBT inclusive communication scales (i.e., The non-LGBT Org Inclusive Communication Scale: 0.769, The LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale: 0.832, Local Media Inclusive Communication: 0.843). Bartlett's test for sphericity was also significant for The Non-LGBT Org Inclusive Communication Scale ( $R^2(55) = 894.987$ ,  $p < .001$ ) the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale ( $R^2(36) = 798.889$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the Local Media Inclusive Communication Scale ( $R^2(15) = 576.367$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Eigenvalues were greater than 1.00 for all three scales.

**Non-LGBTOrg inclusive communication.** The first inclusive communication scale (Table 2) consisted of a total of 11 items with three subscales, which accounted for 66.75% variance for inclusive communication from local non-LGBT focused advocacy organizations. The first subscale, LGBT Events, was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.863$ ). It included four items such as "I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers) through a non-LGBT organization's print advertisement (flyers, pamphlets, banners, posters, and

social events)” and “I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through a non-LGBT organization’s television advertisement.”

The second subscale, LGBT Issue Awareness, was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.752$ ). It included four items such as “Non-LGBT organizations within my community have distributed information about issues regarding LGBT topics,” and “Non-LGBT organizations within my community have encouraged people who I know to learn more about LGBT-related issues.”

The third subscale, organizational outreach, was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.767$ ). It included three items such as “Overall, non-LGBT organizations in my community send out information on a consistent basis,” and “I have received a newsletter from a local non-LGBT organization.” The overall Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication scale was reliable ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ,  $\alpha = 0.813$ ).

After five iterations, the Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above .60 (KMO = 0.787). In addition, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $R^2(199) = 942.062$ ,  $p < .001$ ). (Table 2).

**LGBTOrg inclusive communication.** The LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale consisted of nine items total with three subscales. After five iterations, the Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above .60 (KMO = 0.832). In addition, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $R^2(201) = 798.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and accounted for a cumulative variance of 73.88% (Table 3). The overall LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale was reliable ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ,  $\alpha = 0.778$ ). The second inclusive communication scale appeared to have three factors after running an exploratory factor analysis. The first factor, initiate discussion, was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.834$ ).

It included three items such as “Members of my community’s LGBT organizations have initiated discussion directly with me that is related to LGBT issues,” and “Members of my community’s LGBT organizations have initiated discussion of LGBT-related issues with me on campus.” The second factor, LGBT organizational outreach, was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.719$ ). It included three items such as “Overall, LGBT organizations in my community often engage in communication,” and “Overall, LGBT organizations in my community communicate frequently.” The third factor, LGBT organizational presence, was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.767$ ). It included three items such as “I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through an LGBT organization’s television advertisements,” and “I am aware of LGBT-owned businesses in my community.” The overall LGBT Org Inclusive Communication Scale was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.778$ ).

**Media inclusive communication.** The Local Media Inclusive Communication scale was a six-item unidimensional construct, which accounted for 60.55% variance of inclusive communication from local mainstream media organizations. The scale had acceptable reliability ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ,  $\alpha = 0.867$ ). The scale consisted of items such as “My community’s local mainstream media presents LGBT focused information fairly,” and “I have come across LGBT-focused news stories that feature local LGBT organizations on my community’s mainstream television news outlet.”

There were no additional iterations, which means this scale was a unidimensional construct. The Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above .60 ( $KMO = 0.843$ ). In addition, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $R^2(202) = 576.367$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and accounted for a cumulative variance of 60.57% (Table 4).

## Demographics

The demographic variable of race was significantly related to sense of belonging ( $\beta = -0.202, p = .007$ ; Table 5). These findings suggested that white participants ( $M = 3.79, SD = 0.55$ ) were more likely to feel a stronger sense of belonging in their communities juxtaposed to non-white participants ( $M = 3.56, SD = 0.71$ ), who were less likely to report stronger feelings of belonging in their communities. Also, the demographic variable of sexual orientation was significantly associated with political participation ( $\beta = 0.205, p = .005$ ; Table 6). LGBT participants were more likely ( $M = 2.36, SD = 0.92$ ) than non-LGBT participants ( $M = 1.86, SD = 0.64$ ) to engage in pro-LGBT political participation.

## Hypotheses and Research Questions

The results from this study provided insight regarding my hypotheses and helped answer my research questions. Hypothesis one was not supported. Inclusive communication from LGBT organizations was negatively associated with participants' sense of community belonging. Hypothesis two was somewhat supported. Only inclusive communication from LGBT organizations had a positive correlation to participants' engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. Hypothesis three was not supported. There was no positive association found between a participants having a stronger sense of belonging and an increase in pro-LGBT political participation.

**H1: Exposure to inclusive communication and sense of community belonging.** In hypothesis one, I ran a hierarchical regression to identify a relationship between participants' perceived exposure to meso-level pro-LGBT inclusive communication and participants' reported sense of community belonging. I entered demographic variables (age, race, gender, sexual orientation, education, residential tenure, and income) into block one and participants' responses

to the three inclusive communication variables (Media Inclusive Communication, Non-LGBTOrg inclusive Communication, and LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication) in block two as independent variables. Race was a significant demographic variable in block two ( $\beta = -0.178, p = .017$ ). This means that white participants indicated a stronger sense of community belonging compared to non-white participants.

The overall model to test hypothesis one (Table 5) was significant ( $F = 2.106, p = 0.026$ ). One inclusive communication scale was found to be significantly related to participants' sense of belonging. Participants' scores on the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication variable were significantly related to their sense of community belonging ( $\beta = -0.275, p = .005$ ). Furthermore, this significant relationship is a negative correlation, which indicates that participants who perceived more inclusive communication from LGBT organizations were less likely to feel a stronger sense of community belonging. Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication was not related to participants' self-reported sense of community belonging ( $\beta = .129, p = .132$ ). The Media Inclusive Communication variable was not related participants' self-reported sense of community belonging ( $\beta = .160, p = .067$ ). The addition of the media inclusive communication, non-LGBTOrg inclusive communication, and LGBTOrg inclusive communication measures accounted for an additional 57% of the variance.

**H2: Exposure to inclusive communication and political participation.** Hypothesis two posited that participants who perceived more pro-LGBT inclusive communication were more likely to engage in pro-LGBT political participation. Demographic variables such as sexual orientation, race, gender, education, income, and age were entered in block one. Participants' responses to the Media inclusive communication, LGBTOrg inclusive communication, and Non-LGBTOrg inclusive communication variables were entered in block two as independent

variables (Table 6). The overall model was significant ( $F = 4.338, p < 0.001$ ). The inclusion of LGBT inclusive communication variables accounted for an additional 16% of the variance explained in the model beyond sociodemographics.

The LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication variable was the only inclusive communication variable of the three to have a positive, significant relationship to participants' responses on the political participation measure ( $\beta = 0.22, p = .015$ ). This finding indicated that individuals who were exposed to more inclusive communication from LGBT organizations were more likely to engage in political participation that supported an LGBT cause.

To further probe the relationship between inclusive communication from LGBT organizations and LGBT political participation, I ran a hierarchical regression with the three individual subscales of the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale (i.e., initiate discussion, organizational outreach, and organizational presence; Table 6). Demographic variables were entered in block one. And the three LGBTOrg inclusive communication subscales were entered as independent variables in block two. The overall model was significant ( $F = 4.305, p < .001$ ). The addition of the three subscales in block two accounted for an additional 15.5% of the variance.

The initiate discussion subscale was the only subscale that had a significant, positive correlation to participants' engagement in pro-LGBT political participation ( $\beta = 0.359, p < .001$ ). This finding suggested that there is a positive relationship between initiating discussion and engagement in political participation (Table 6). Organizers working for LGBT organizations were likely having success in encouraging community members to engage in pro-LGBT political participation when they were initiating communicating with community members through direct



communication. For instance, face-to-face interaction and talking on the phone would be forms of direct communication.

**H3: Strength of community belonging and political participation.** Hypothesis three used a hierarchical regression to identify a relationship between participants' sense of community belonging and pro-LGBT political participation (Table 7). More specifically, hypothesis three posited that participants with a stronger sense of community belonging will be more likely to participate in pro-LGBT political activities. Demographic variables such as sexual orientation, race, gender, education, income, and age were entered in block one. Sexual orientation was the only demographic variable significantly related to participants' likelihood of engagement in pro-LGBT political participation ( $\beta = 0.444, p < .001$ ). The beta weight indicated that LGBT participants ( $M = 1.80, SD = .57$ ) were more likely to engage in pro-LGBT political participation compared to non-LGBT ( $M = 2.656, SD = .87$ ) participants.

Participants' responses to the sense of belonging measure were entered in block two as the independent variable. The overall model was significant ( $F = 2.975, p = 0.006$ ). The addition of sense of belonging accounted for an additional 17% of the variance beyond sociodemographics (Table 7). There was no significant relationship between participants' sense of community belonging and their participation in political participation that supports an LGBT cause ( $\beta = -0.082, p = .461$ ).

**RQ2: Inclusive communication's influence on sense of belonging in LGBT participants.** Research question two asked whether pro-LGBT inclusive communication relates to LGBT participants' sense of community belonging. Research question two looked only at data from participants who identified as LGBT ( $n = 25$ ). I ran a hierarchical regression in order to identify a relationship between participants' perceived exposure to inclusive communication and

sense of community belonging (Table 8). The independent demographic variables (i.e., age, race, residential tenure, education, and income) were entered in block one. Participants' responses to the Media Inclusive Communication Scale, LGBTQOrg Inclusive Communication Scale, and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale measures were entered in block two as independent variables. The overall model was not significant ( $F = 1.221, p = .352$ ).

**RQ 3: Inclusive communication's influence on sense of belonging in non-LGBT participants.** Research question three asked whether pro-LGBT inclusive communication relates to non-LGBT participants' sense of community belonging. A hierarchical regression of only non-LGBT participants found several significant relationships between participants' perceived exposure to inclusive communication and their self-reported feelings of sense of community belonging (Table 9). The purpose of conducting a hierarchical regression on only non-LGBT participants was to find whether a relationship differed between pro-LGBT inclusive communication and sense of community belonging based on participants' sexual orientation.

Demographic variables such as sexual orientation, race, gender, education, income, and age were entered in block one. Participants' responses to the Media Inclusive Communication, LGBTQOrg Inclusive Communication, and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication measures were entered in block two as independent variables. The overall model was significant ( $F = 2.387, p = 0.015$ ). The addition of the Media Inclusive Communication, LGBTQOrg Inclusive Communication, and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication variables accounted for an additional 7.3% in variance.

Race was the only demographic variable significantly related to non-LGBT participants' reported sense of community belonging ( $\beta = -0.182, p = .024$ ), which meant that white, non-LGBT participants ( $n = 143; M = 3.79, SD = .56$ ) were more likely to feel a stronger sense of

belonging in their communities compared to non-white, non LGBT participants ( $n = 31$ ;  $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .72$ ).

The relationship between LGBT participants' scores on the Media Inclusive Communication variable and the LGBOrg Inclusive Communication variable were significant. Non-LGBT participants' sense of community belonging had a positive relationship with exposure to pro-LGBT inclusive communication from local mainstream media ( $\beta = 0.191$ ,  $p = .043$ ), but non-LGBT participants' sense of community belonging had a negative relationship with exposure to pro-LGBT inclusive communication from LGBT organizations ( $\beta = -.344$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This association suggested that non-LGBT participants who were exposed to more inclusive communication from LGBT-related organizations in their communities were less likely to report higher feelings of sense of community belonging, but there was a significant and positive association between participants' reported sense of community belonging and participants' exposure to pro-LGBT content in the local mainstream media (Table 9).

**RQ4: Inclusive communication and political participation in non-LGBT participants.** Research question four asked whether pro-LGBT inclusive communication related to non-LGBT participants' engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. I conducted a hierarchical regression on only non-LGBT participants in order to find whether there was a difference in the relationship between pro-LGBT inclusive communication and pro-LGBT political participation based on participants' sexual orientation (Table 10). The hierarchical regression of only non-LGBT participants ( $n = 154$ ) revealed several significant findings. The overall model was significant ( $F = 2.551$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Only one of the three inclusive communication variables were significantly related to non-LGBT participants' engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. Participants' scores on the Non-LGBT Inclusive

Communication variable were significantly and positively related to non-LGBT participants' engagement in pro-LGBT political participation ( $\beta = 0.191, p = .04$ ). The addition of the Media Inclusive Communication, LGBTQOrg Inclusive Communication, and Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication variables accounted for an additional 8.4% in variance.

I then ran a hierarchical regression that examined only the three individual factors of the Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale (Table 10). The independent demographic variables (i.e., age, race, residential tenure, education, and income) were entered in block one. Participants' responses to the issue awareness, organizational outreach, and event promotion factors of the Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale measure were entered in block two as independent variables. The overall model was significant ( $F = 2.119, p = .031$ ). There was a positive, significant correlation between non-LGBT participants' scores on the organizational outreach ( $\beta = .214, p = .009$ ) and event promotion ( $\beta = .237, p = .008$ ) subscales. In other words, non-LGBT participants who reported perceiving more exposure to pro-LGBT inclusive communication in the organizational outreach and event promotion subscales also indicated more engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. The addition of the issue awareness, organizational outreach, and event promotion factors accounted for an additional 6.1% in variance.

I ran a hierarchical regression that examined the three individual factors of the LGBTQOrg Inclusive Communication Scale (Table 10). The independent demographic variables (i.e., age, race, residential tenure, education, and income) were entered in block one. Participants' responses to the organizational outreach, organization presence, and initiate discussion factors of the LGBTQOrg Inclusive Communication Scale were entered in block two as independent variables. The overall model was significant ( $F = 2.434, p = .013$ ). There was a positive,

significant correlation between non-LGBT participants' scores on the initiate discussion ( $\beta = .338, p < .001$ ). This indicated that non-LGBT participants who reported perceiving more pro-LGBT inclusive communication from LGBT organizations in the initiate discussion subscale were more likely to report engaging in pro-LGBT political participation. The addition of the organizational outreach, organization presence, and initiate discussion factors accounted for an additional 8.1% variance.

I ran another hierarchical regression which examined the relationship between non-LGBT participants' perceived exposure to pro-LGBT inclusive communication from local mainstream media and their engagement in pro-LGBT political participation (Table 11). The independent demographic variables (i.e., age, race, residential tenure, education, and income) were entered in block one. Participants' responses to the Media Inclusive Communication variable were entered in block two as the independent variable. The overall model was not significant ( $F = 1.867, p = .079$ ).

**RQ5: Exposure to inclusive communication and political participation in LGBT participants.** Research question five asked whether pro-LGBT inclusive communication related to LGBT participants' engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. The overall model was not significant ( $F = 1.161, p = .396$ ), and the hierarchical regression found no significant correlations between LGBT participants' ( $n = 22$ ) perceived exposure to inclusive communication and their engagement in pro-LGBT political participation in block two (Table 12).

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to develop the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale, Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale, and Media Inclusive Communication

Scale. These three scales measured participants' exposure to inclusive communication from local advocacy organizations and mainstream media through participants' self-reported perceived experiences with such forms of communication. The second goal of this study was to examine how inclusive LGBT communication at the local-level affected residents' sense of community belonging and engagement in pro-LGBT political participation. My study produced several findings that suggested how communication at the local level might affect community members' feelings of sense of community belonging and suggested how communication might affect residents' engagement in political participation within the community. In the following section I will explain the theoretical and practical implications before discussing the limitations and directions for future research.

### **Measurements of Inclusive Communication**

The LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale, Non-LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale, and Media Inclusive Communication Scale could be helpful tools in quantitatively measuring ways that local, meso-level communicators disseminate communication that includes marginalized community members in the community's overall storytelling network. Most communication infrastructure scholars (Ball-Rokeach, et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Wilkin et al., 2011) focused on implementing strategic communication campaigns and then measured the outcomes after implementation. The inclusive communication and political participation measurements were effective and specifically measured pro-LGBT inclusive communication and pro-LGBT political participation. Previous LGBT research used qualitative methods to measure inclusive communication (Lehavot et al., 2009; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017). Additionally, previous LGBT political studies only measured one type of political action, such as petition signing (Swank & Fahs, 2013), or previous research did not identify whether or not the

political participation was specifically for a pro-LGBT cause (Swank et al., 2016). My inclusive communication scales measured inclusive communication quantitatively, and my adapted political participation (Sweetser, 2014) scale measured a variety of political activities that were specifically related to pro-LGBT political participation.

There are some threats to validity that are worth acknowledging. My measurements were only used in a sample that consisted of mostly non-LGBT undergraduate university students. The measurement of their sense of community belonging could have some flaws. I intended for participants to refer to their sense of community belonging in the city that the campus is located; however, participants might have indicated their sense of belonging within the campus. For example, the undergraduate students may be referring to their sense of belonging on campus, instead of indicating their sense of community belonging in the surrounding small city that where the campus is located. My measurement should have specifically asked participants to think of the actual geographical community in the city and not the community located on campus.

Other scholars (Lehavot et al., 2009; Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank et al., 2013; Renn, 2011; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017) who studied LGBT political participation and/or sense of community belonging have predominantly relied on qualitative methods for gathering their data. Interviews can be great tools for gathering data, but questionnaires can gather larger amounts of data for research studies. The inclusive communication scales that I have developed can be used to gather large amounts of data about pro-LGBT inclusive communication from local meso-level storytellers across communities throughout the country. Online questionnaires are also useful because researchers are able to save time and resources needed to collect large amounts of data compared to qualitative methods. A questionnaire relieves the researcher of the need to arrange meeting spaces as well as reserving the time needed to interview participants. With an online

survey participants might complete the survey on their own time in almost any location with internet access—participants can even complete the survey on their mobile phone.

### **Implications**

**Sense of community belonging.** My study suggested a significant relationship between participants' responses on the LGBTOrg Inclusive Communication Scale and participants' responses on the sense of community belonging measure; however, the relationship I found was a negative correlation. As participants' perceived exposure to inclusive communication from LGBT organizations increased, the participants' reported sense of community belonging decreased. The overall sample of participants (mostly non-LGBT and cis-gender) were actually more likely to feel less community belonging in communities with LGBT organizations that communicated more. Previous research provides insight for this finding. Kim and Ball-Rokeach's study (2006) found that lower sense of community belonging indicated a less integrated storytelling network. A lack of relationships among key meso-level communicators meant that community organizations were not sharing their stories with each other. Similarly, the negative association between participants' perceived exposure to inclusive communication from LGBT organizations and their sense of community belonging might indicate a lack of integration regarding local LGBT organizations.

Other research offers another explanation for the negative association. According to other scholars (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), community members felt a stronger sense of community belonging when community organizers positively interacted with community members. Perhaps non-LGBT community members do not feel that the pro-LGBT inclusive communication from LGBT organizations benefits them, or perhaps non-LGBT participants do not feel LGBT organizations interact with them enough. For instance, openly welcoming non-LGBT community



members' engagement with their organization might facilitate positive interactions between LGBT organizations and non-LGBT community members.

On the other hand, non-LGBT participants felt stronger feelings of community belonging when the pro-LGBT inclusive communication came from local mainstream media. Like Ball-Rokeach and colleagues' study (2001) stated in past research, local mainstream media can be an effective tool for increasing sense of community belonging among marginalized social groups. They posited that community members who know more about the problems facing others within their community are more likely to feel connected and belonged in their communities. Sharing the stories of marginalized social groups brings awareness to the problems the group faces, and their stories become the community's stories. By including LGBT individuals' stories in the community's storytelling network (particularly through mainstream media), perhaps non-LGBT participants were able to feel more connected to LGBT community members. Kim and Ball-Rokeach suggested media can frame issues as important to the well-being of the community. LGBT inclusive communication from local, mainstream media could be framing LGBT issues as important to the overall well-being of the participants' community, thus cultivating a feeling of connection among non-LGBT and LGBT residents.

Based on findings from previous research (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) as well as my own research, local media appeared to be a crucial meso-level storytelling organization within a community's communication infrastructure. Meso-level communicators might want to evaluate their relationships with other meso-level communicators such as media and advocacy organizations. LGBT community organizers ought to focus on building and maintaining relationships with the community's local, mainstream media to ensure the overall community is aware of local LGBT issues. Consistent communication helps local

organizations and mainstream media stay aware of the LGBT organization's presence and might lead to news coverage of the information LGBT organizations wish to share throughout the community. LGBT organizations should also build relationships with other local non-LGBT organizations to become more integrated within the community's overall storytelling network. As LGBT organizations become more integrated they are able to share stories with other meso-level storytellers. As more meso-level storytellers throughout the community have information about relevant LGBT information and stories, the LGBT information is shared with more members of the community throughout the overall storytelling network.

### **Political Participation**

My results suggested that inclusive communication from LGBT organizations was positively related to pro-LGBT political participation. As participants reported more experiences with inclusive communication from LGBT organizations they were more likely to report engagement in political participation that supported an LGBT cause. According to communication infrastructure research, sense of belonging is supposed to mediate the relationship between communication and civic participation (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). My findings suggest some evidence of this relationship in hypothesis three. In the hierarchical regression of participants indicating stronger feelings of belong, LGBT participants were more likely to engage in pro-LGBT political participation.

My study instead found that participants' increased perceived exposure to inclusive communication (specifically focused on LGBT matters) was related to participants' likelihood of taking part in pro-LGBT political participation. Upon further review, participants who reported receiving direct, informational communication from organizers at LGBT organizations were also significantly more likely to report participation in pro-LGBT political activities (Table 6). More

specifically, direct communication measured in this study described interpersonal interactions between community members and LGBT organizers that occurred directly. The items of the LGBT organization outreach factor in the LGBTQ Inclusive Communication Scale (Table 6) mostly addressed interpersonal communication practices, which suggested that LGBT organizers informed the community members about important information related to LGBT issues directly and interpersonally. This happened through meso-level communicators whose members and organizers engaged in interpersonal communication.

Perkins and Long (2002) claimed interpersonal interaction among community members can boost community engagement. Community members who interacted more with each other in interpersonal settings had a higher likelihood of engaging in civic activities that helped improve their community (Perkins & Long, 2002). Another study (Perkins, Hughey, and Speer, 2002) suggested scholars should focus on interaction between residents and community organizers rather than interactions among residents. The interaction between community organizers and residents acted as a bridge between local organizations and individual residents. This bridging among individual residents and community organizers encouraged residents to participate in community development efforts (Perkins et al., 2002).

Findings produced from non-LGBT participants' data suggested an increased likelihood of engagement in pro-LGBT political participation when a participant was exposed to more pro-LGBT inclusive communication from non-LGBT organizations. Put differently, non-LGBT participants reported more pro-LGBT political participation when they perceived more exposure to communication from LGBT and non-LGBT organizational coalitions. For instance, non-LGBT organizations might host or promote an event with LGBT organizations. This finding suggested the importance of LGBT organizations building coalitions with other local

organizations. Previous communication infrastructure theory research claimed to support the importance of connectedness. Wilkin and colleagues (2011) claimed that successful organizations cannot work in isolation in the community; they must build connections with other organizations. This claim can be applied to the current study in that LGBT advocacy organizations should team with local non-LGBT organizations in order to increase awareness. This tactic might help non-LGBT residents or residents who are unfamiliar with local LGBT issues become more understanding and connected to LGBT community members. For example, an annual LGBT pride parade where well-known local businesses become involved with LGBT advocacy organizations' parade events helps to spread awareness of LGBT information to more community members. Thus, the local businesses' well-known reputation among community members (including non-LGBT community members) might be helping bring recognition to the LGBT organizations and those organizations' causes.

Similarly, pro-LGBT inclusive communication coming from local, mainstream media was positively associated with non-LGBT participants' sense of community belonging. Again, this positive association might be related to the fact that communication infrastructure theory research (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) claims that media has a way of framing issues salient to a specific social group of community members (i.e., marginalized community members) in such a way that community members overall perceive the issue to be a problem that affects the well-being of the entire community. Framing community issues and problems in such a way tends to encourage other community members to care about the issue as well as take action to solve the problem. Community members felt more connected to their community because they were more knowledgeable of these community concerns even if those concerns did not directly affect themselves (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006). In addition, Chavis and Wandersman (1990) claimed

that connectedness was important to community engagement for community members. Residents who were more connected to other community members and groups (informal or formal) were better able to address issues within the community (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As with all research, there were several limitations. First, I utilized a convenience sample, which means the results were not generalizable to the entire population. While the sample had a higher percentage of LGBT participants (13.3%) compared to the estimated percentage of LGBT individuals in the population as a whole (3.5%; Gates, 2011), given the study's focus on LGBT issues, the study's sample might have benefited from more LGBT participants. Only 27 participants out of the 203 total identified as LGBT. My sample also consisted predominantly of white, cis-gender students enrolled in a large flagship public university located in the mid-south region of the United States. Future research should examine the data from a more diverse sample consisting of participants located across the United States. These participants may refer to their college campus as their community rather than the city where their college campus is located. The college campus is a microcosm within the overall geographical community of the city. Future studies should specify the exact geographical communities that it wishes for participants to refer to when indicating their feelings of community belonging— especially when measuring university students' sense of community belonging.

Second, the current study addressed the frequency of communication about LGBT issues in a communication infrastructure. While an exploratory factor analysis revealed several factors that reflected the type of communication emanating from LGBT organizations, non-LGBT organizations, and local media, the study did not examine the specific messages being shared. Future research should not only study *if* local organizations are communicating information

related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender topics with other meso-level storytellers but should also study *how* those organizations are communicating their messages. For instance, I would like to have known how LGBT organizations framed their communication messages about LGBT issues within the community. This information might have provided more insight into why non-LGBT participants had a negative correlation with sense of belonging when LGBT organizations communicated more. Future scholars might find the content of messages from LGBT organizations to include language that results in non-LGBT individuals feeling excluded.

The theoretical model I proposed was based on Kim and Ball-Rokeach's (2006) theoretical model. In my model, pro-LGBT inclusive meso-level communication is positively associated with a sense of community belonging, and this higher sense of belonging is positively associated with more pro-LGBT political participation. Furthermore, Kim and Ball-Rokeach's (2006) theoretical model suggested that integration of meso-level communicators was important to the relationship between meso-level communication and sense of community belonging. My study did not measure the integration levels of local meso-level LGBT organizations. Future research should attempt to quantitatively measure meso-level LGBT organizations' integration within the local storytelling network. Once the level of integration is identified, I think that future research might find my theoretical model useful when studying inclusive communication in communities where meso-level LGBT organizations are more integrated within the overall storytelling network.

### **Conclusion**

My hope is that this research encourages the further use of quantitative methods in studying topics related to LGBT peoples. The LGBT Inclusive Communication Scale, Non-LGBT Inclusive Communication Scale, and Media Inclusive Communication Scale could be

useful tools for scholars interested in measuring the dissemination of pro-LGBT inclusive communication across local communities. Communication practitioners might take my findings and apply them to their own communication strategies. For instance, practitioners working for LGBT organizations might find success in cooperating with other local organizations that are not normally associated with LGBT causes. Finally, I hope my findings encourage LGBT community organizers to carefully evaluate the content of their communication in order to prevent the exclusion of potential allies. The significant negative association between increased awareness of LGBT organizations' inclusive communication and a decrease in sense of community belonging among participants is concerning. LGBT community organizers should strive to communicate with all community members instead of communicating exclusively to their targets.

As more LGBT people and their allies become involved in local political participation for equality, communities will positively change if enough people take action: "Self-identified queers seem to be complex and subtle in their politics and unwilling to reject existing American institutions; they seem to recognize the radical possibilities reflected by their presence in those institutions (Rollins & Hirsch, 2003 p.308)." Radical changes can still be achieved through working within the system. Advocates for LGBT equality do not necessarily have to work outside hegemonic institutions in order to promote revolutionary social changes. Advocates might instead focus on the existing system of communication networks within a community's communication infrastructure in order to promote political participation in progressive social causes.

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## Appendices



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**To:** Kyle C Worley  
BELL 4188

**From:** Douglas James Adams, Chair  
IRB Committee

**Date:** 04/03/2018

**Action:** **Exemption Granted**

**Action Date:** 04/03/2018

**Protocol #:** 1802100419

**Study Title:** Communicating for Equality: How Inclusive Communication Effects Political Participation within Communication Ecologies

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

cc: Matthew L Spialek, Investigator

Table 1

*Initial Items Submitted to Exploratory Factor Analysis*

- 
1. I have been informed on the different political activities I can take part in within my community.
  2. Organizations within my community have distributed information about issues regarding LGBT topics.
  3. Organizations within my community have contacted me directly to bring awareness to information on matters relating to LGBT issues.
  4. Organizations within my community have encouraged people who I know to learn more about LGBT-related issues.
  5. I have received a newsletter from a local organization.
  6. Most of the LGBT organizations in my community have social media accounts (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).
  7. Most organizations within my community have social media accounts (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).
  8. My community has LGBT-focused media (i.e., gay newspapers, gay magazines, gay periodicals).
  9. I receive print material (i.e., newsletters, magazines, pamphlets, postcards) from LGBT organizations within my community.
  10. My community's LGBT organizations rarely distribute print material (newsletters, magazines, pamphlets, postcards).
  11. I have come across LGBT-focused social media posts from local media outlets in my community.
  12. I have not come across LGBT-focused social media posts from organizations in my community.
  13. I have come across LGBT-focused news stories that feature local LGBT organizations on my community's mainstream television news outlet.
  14. I have come across LGBT-focused news stories that feature local LGBT organizations in my community's mainstream newspapers.
  15. My community's mainstream newspapers have worked with local LGBT organizations in the past to cover LGBT-focused stories (i.e., interviewed a member/leader from a LGBT organization, quoted a press release from LGBT organizations, quoted statement from leader or member).
  16. My community's mainstream television media have worked with local LGBT organizations in the past to cover LGBT focused stories (i.e., interviewed a member/leader from a LGBT organization, quoted a press release from LGBT org, quoted statement from leader or member).
  17. My community's local mainstream media presents LGBT focused information fairly.
  18. My community's LGBT organizations have a noticeable presence in my community.
  19. Members of my community's LGBT organizations have initiated discussion directly with me that is related to LGBT issues.

Table 1 (cont.)

*Initial Items Submitted to Exploratory Factor Analysis*

- 
20. Members of my community's LGBT organizations have initiated discussion of LGBT-related issues with me on campus.
  21. Members of LGBT organizations within my community have initiated discussion of LGBT-related issues with me at community gatherings (i.e., renaissance fair, farmer's market, block party).
  22. My community's LGBT organizations often reply to comments on their social media pages.
  23. I am aware of LGBT organizations' campaigns involvement in my community.
  24. I am aware of LGBT-owned businesses in my community.
  25. I have acquired information that would be of value to gay and transgender people from an LGBT organization in my community.
  26. Social media posts from LGBT organizations provide useful information.
  27. LGBT organizations in my community disseminate communicative messages on a consistent basis.
  28. Organizations within my community disseminate reliable LGBT-focused information.
  29. I can easily find LGBT-focused information from organizations in my community.
  30. Organizations within my community have corrected information about an LGBT-related issue that turned out to be false or inaccurate.
  31. I am aware of instances where non-LGBT organizations have worked in collaboration with LGBT organizations in my community (i.e., joint campaigns, teaming up to tackle similar issues, forming partnerships).
  32. I have learned about important LGBT-focused events (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through an organization's social media posts.
  33. Attending events related to an LGBT cause has helped me become more aware of LGBT issues affecting my community.
  34. I am aware of my community's LGBT organizations working with each other to host a community event.
  35. I am aware of my community's LGBT organizations working with local non-LGBT organizations at a political rally or demonstration.
  36. I am aware of local businesses and companies being involved with my community's LGBT organizations.
  37. Overall, LGBT organizations in my community often engage in communication.
  38. Overall, LGBT organizations in my community send out information on a consistent basis.
  39. Overall, LGBT organizations in my community communicate frequently.
  40. Overall, organizations in my community often engage in communication.
  41. Overall, organizations in my community send out information on a consistent basis.
  42. Overall, organizations in my community communicate frequently.
  43. My community's LGBT organizations work with private businesses and companies (i.e., P&G, Wal-Mart, Tyson, Simmons) in my community.

Table 1 (cont.)

*Initial Items Submitted to Exploratory Factor Analysis*

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44. Organizations within my community work with private businesses and companies (i.e., P&G, Wal-Mart, Tyson, Simmons) to bring awareness to LGBT issues.
  45. I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through an organization's television advertisements.
  46. I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through an organization's radio announcements.
  47. I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers) through an organization's print advertisements (flyers, pamphlets, banners, posters, and social events).
  48. I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through an organization's web advertisements.



Table 2

*EFA Loadings for Non-LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication*

Item	Factor		
	Non-LGBT Org. Promoting LGBT Events	Non-LGBT Org. Issue Awareness about LGBT issues	Non-LGBT Org. Outreach
I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through a non-LGBT organization's television advertisements.	<b>.793</b>	.163	.022
I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through a non-LGBT organization's radio announcements.	<b>.870</b>	.070	.040
I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers) through a non-LGBT organization's print advertisements (flyers, pamphlets, banners, posters, and social events).	<b>.771</b>	.226	.164
I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through a non-LGBT organization's web advertisements.	<b>.836</b>	.245	.110
Non-LGBT organizations within my community have distributed information about issues regarding LGBT topics.	.170	<b>.790</b>	.134
Non-LGBT organizations within my community have contacted me directly to bring awareness to information on matters relating to LGBT issues.	.203	<b>.656</b>	.062
Non-LGBT organizations within my community have encouraged people who I know to learn more about LGBT-related issues.	.273	<b>.786</b>	.051
Non-LGBT organizations within my community disseminate reliable LGBT-focused information.	.028	<b>.700</b>	.029

Table 2 (cont.)

*EFA Loadings for Non-LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication*

Item	Factor		
	Non-LGBT Org. Promoting LGBT Events	Non-LGBT Org. Issue Awareness about LGBT issues	Non-LGBT Org. Outreach
Overall, non-LGBT organizations in my community send out information on a consistent basis.	.045	.007	<b>.901</b>
Overall, non-LGBT organizations in my community communicate frequently.	.115	-.010	<b>.898</b>
Eigenvalue	2.847	2.369	2.127
% Variance Explained	25.879	21.535	19.332

Table 3

*EFA Loadings for LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication*

Item	Factor		
	LGBT Org. Initiating Discussion	LGBT Org. Outreach	LGBT Org. Presence
LGBT organizations have initiated discussion directly with me that is related to LGBT issues.	<b>.867</b>	.202	.152
Members of my community's LGBT organizations have initiated discussion of LGBT-related issues with me on campus.	<b>.779</b>	.178	.274
Members of LGBT organizations within my community have initiated discussion of LGBT-related issues with me at community gatherings (i.e., renaissance fair, farmer's market, block party).	<b>.803</b>	.151	.248
Overall, LGBT organizations in my community often engage in communication.	.286	<b>.754</b>	.244
Overall, LGBT organizations in my community send out information very rarely.	-.036	<b>-.857</b>	-.134
Overall, LGBT organizations in my community communicate frequently.	.255	<b>.843</b>	.131
I am aware of LGBT-owned businesses in my community.	.256	.229	<b>.672</b>
I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, and social events) through an LGBT organization's television advertisements.	.237	.085	<b>.841</b>
Table 3 (cont.)			
Eigenvalue	4.273	1.315	1.061
% Variance Explained	47.474	14.609	11.792

Table 4

*EFA Loadings for Local Media Inclusive Communication*

Item	Factor
I have come across LGBT-focused news stories that feature local LGBT organizations on my community's mainstream television news outlet.	<b>.824</b>
I have come across LGBT-focused news stories that feature local LGBT organizations in my community's mainstream newspapers.	<b>.848</b>
My community's mainstream newspapers have worked with local LGBT organizations in the past to cover LGBT-focused stories (i.e., interviewed a member/leader from a LGBT organization, quoted a press release from LGBT organizations, quoted statement from leader or member).	<b>.818</b>
My community's mainstream television media have worked with local LGBT organizations in the past to cover LGBT focused stories (i.e., interviewed a member/leader from a LGBT organization, quoted a press release from LGBT org, quoted statement from leader or member).	<b>.798</b>
My community's local mainstream media presents LGBT focused information fairly.	<b>.626</b>
I have learned about important events focused on LGBT issues (rallies, demonstrations, speakers, social events, and pride parades) through my community's mainstream media.	<b>.733</b>
Eigenvalues	3.634
% Variance Explained	60.565

Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression Results for Participant Exposure to Meso-Level Inclusive Communication and Sense of Belonging*

Variables	Sense of Belonging
<u>H1</u>	
Step 1	
Sexual Orientation	0.014
Race	-.202**
Gender	-0.07
Residential Tenure	-0.118
Education	0.077
Income	-0.027
Age	-0.026
R <sup>2</sup>	.025
F	1.671
Step 2	
Race	-.178*
Media Inclusive Communication	0.16
LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication	-.275**
Non-LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication	0.129
R <sup>2</sup>	.057
F	2.106*

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 6  
Table 7

*Hierarchical Regression Results for Participant Exposure to Meso-Level Inclusive Communication and Participant Political Participation*

	Variables	Political Participation	Variables	Political Participation
<u>H2</u>			(Subscales of LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication)	
Step 1				
	Sexual Orientation	0.270***	Sexual Orientation	.241**
	Race	-0.06	Race	-0.059
	Gender	-0.01	Gender	-0.007
	Residential Tenure	0.025	Residential Tenure	0.032
	Education	-0.048	Education	-0.055
	Income	0.004	Income	0.004
	Age	0.012	Age	0.011
	R <sup>2</sup>	.043	R <sup>2</sup>	.029
	F	2.112*	F	1.777
Step 2				
	Sexual Orientation	0.205**	LGBT Organizational Outreach	0.091
	Local Media	0.068	LGBT Organizational Presence	-0.038
	LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	.220*	LGBT Organizations Initiate Discussion	.359***
	Non-LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	0.146	R <sup>2</sup>	.155
	R <sup>2</sup>	.160	F	4.305***
	F	4.338***		

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

*Hierarchical Regression Results for Participant with Stronger Sense of Community Belonging and Political Participation*

Variables	Political Participation	Variables	Political Participation	Variables	Political Participation
<u>H3</u>		(Non-LGBT Participants with Strong Sense of Belonging)		(LGBT Participants with Strong Sense of Belonging)	
Step 1					
Sexual Orientation	.442***	Sexual Orientation	N/A	Sexual Orientation	N/A
Race	-0.045	Race	-0.006	Race	-0.078
Gender	1.594	Gender	0.207	Gender	N/A
Residential Tenure	0.125	Residential Tenure	0.099	Residential Tenure	0.398
Education	-0.071	Education	0.006	Education	-0.893
Income	-0.012	Income	-0.023	Income	N/A
Age	-0.062	Age	-0.082	Age	.367
R <sup>2</sup>	.176	R <sup>2</sup>	-.051	R <sup>2</sup>	.001
F	3.343**	F	0.446	F	1.003
Step 2					
Sense of Belonging	-0.082	Sense of Belonging	-0.071	Sense of Belonging	-.456
R <sup>2</sup>	.170	R <sup>2</sup>	-.064	R <sup>2</sup>	-.132
F	2.975**	F	0.419	F	0.813

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 8

*Hierarchical Regression Results for LGBT Participant Exposure to Meso-Level Inclusive Communication and Sense of Belonging*

	Variables	Sense of Belonging
<u>RQ2</u>		
Step		
1		
	Sexual Orientation	N/A
	Race	-2.39
	Gender	-0.113
	Residential Tenure	-0.018
	Education	-0.156
	Income	-0.141
	Age	-.473*
	R <sup>2</sup>	.115
	F	1.519
Step		
2		
	Local Media	0.105
	LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	-0.007
	Non-LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	0.362
	R <sup>2</sup>	.077
	F	1.221

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001



Table 9

*Hierarchical Regression Results for Only Non-LGBT Participant Exposure to Meso-Level Inclusive Communication and Sense of Community Belonging*

Sense of Belonging		Variables	Sense of Belonging	
			<u>(Subscales of LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication)</u>	
<u>RQ3</u>				
Step 1				
	Sexual Orientation	N/A	Sexual Orientation	N/A
	Race	-.182*	Race	-.185*
	Gender	-0.076	Gender	-0.075
	Residential Tenure	-0.131	Residential Tenure	-0.135
	Education	0.076	Education	.055
	Income	-0.023	Income	-0.026
	Age	0.004	Age	0.009
	R <sup>2</sup>	.023	R <sup>2</sup>	.024
	F	1.62	F	1.655
Step 2				
	Local Media	.191*	LGBT Organizational Outreach	-.062
	LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	-.344**	Initiate Discussion	-.020
	Non-LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	0.096	LGBT Organizational Presence	-.159
	R <sup>2</sup>	.073	R <sup>2</sup>	.048
	F	2.387*	F	1.904

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 10

*Hierarchical Regression Results for Non-LGBT Participant Exposure to Meso-Level Inclusive Communication and Participant Political Participation*

Variables	Political Participation	Variables	Political Participation	Variables	Political Participation
		(Subscales of Non-LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication)		Subscales of LGBT Organization Inclusive Communication	
<b>RQ4</b>					
Step 1					
Sexual Orientation	N/A	Sexual Orientation	N/A	Sexual Orientation	N/A
Race	-0.034	Race	-0.025	Race	-0.042
Gender	-0.018	Gender	-0.017	Gender	-0.018
Residential Tenure	-0.053	Residential Tenure	-0.049	Residential Tenure	-0.054
Education	-0.041	Education	-0.042	Education	-0.046
Income	-0.01	Income	-0.007	Income	-0.01
Age	0.015	Age	0.019	Age	0.019
R <sup>2</sup>	-.035	R <sup>2</sup>	-.035	R <sup>2</sup>	-.033
F	0.143	F	0.122	F	0.172
Step 2					
Non-LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	.191*	Non-LGBT Organizational Issue Awareness	-0.028	LGBT Organizational Outreach	0.081
Local Media	0.122	Non-LGBT Organizational Outreach	.214**	LGBT Organizational Presence	-0.035
LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	0.149	Non-LGBT Organizations Event Promotion	.237**	LGBT Organization Initiate Discussion	.338***
R <sup>2</sup>	.084	R <sup>2</sup>	.061	R <sup>2</sup>	.081
F	2.551**	F	2.119*	F	2.434*

Table 11

*Hierarchical Regression Results for Participants' Exposure to Media and Political Participation*

	Variables	Political Participation	Variables	
	<u>Non-LGBT</u>		<u>LGBT</u>	
Step 1				
	Sexual Orientation	N/A	Sexual Orientation	N/A
	Race	-0.041	Race	-.072
	Gender	-0.019	Gender	.110
	Residential Tenure	-0.058	Residential Tenure	.390
	Education	-0.042	Education	-.263
	Income	-0.014	Income	.180
	Age	0.017	Age	-.186
	R <sup>2</sup>	-.032	R <sup>2</sup>	.055
	F	0.18	F	1.214
Step 2				
	Media	.272**	Media	-.232
	R <sup>2</sup>	.037	R <sup>2</sup>	.038
	F	1.867	F	1.124

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table 12

*Hierarchical Regression Results for LGBT Participant Exposure to Meso-Level Inclusive Communication and Participant Political Participation*

	Variables	Sense of Belonging
<u>RQ5</u>		
Step 1		
	Sexual Orientation	N/A
	Race	-0.118
	Gender	0.103
	Residential Tenure	0.361
	Education	-0.241
	Income	0.178
	Age	-0.15
	R <sup>2</sup>	.002
	F	1.008
Step 2		
	Sexual Orientation	N/A
	Local Media	-0.244
	LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	1.636
	Non-LGBT Organizational Inclusive Communication	-0.181
	R <sup>2</sup>	.064
	F	1.161

Note. Variable entries are standardized beta coefficients.

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001