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Making Meaning of the Shared Experience of Participants in an Undergraduate LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program

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Making Meaning of the Shared Experience of Participants in an Undergraduate LGBTQ+
Mentorship Program

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the ways in which LGBTQ+ students at the University of Miami make meaning of their shared experiences in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program that the university offers, in order to explore ways in which higher education institutions might consider better supporting this key group of students. This study draws upon a variety of theories of sexual identity development, building on the work of Rosario et al. (2011) in looking at the ways that students make meaning of their sexual identity based on self-identification, association with the larger community, and engagement in a variety of LGBTQ+ activities. Drawing on a phenomenological approach pioneered at the University of Tennessee, as described by Thomson & Pollio (2002), this study offered participants in the mentorship program the opportunity to engage in semi-structured interviews and reflect on their experiences in the program and the ways in which that experience intersected with their lives as students and young professionals, and their identities as queer individuals. Through meaning unit analysis, the participants identified six themes: the overall importance and benefit of participation in the program to them as LGBTQ+ students, the challenges they face as LGBTQ+ students that the program helped them navigate, the importance of exposure to LGBTQ+ role models & elders in the program, a conversely reciprocal relationship between the centrality of the program with LGBTQ+ identity and the amount of time they have been out, the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ+ community and meeting other LGBTQ+ students in the program, and the importance of the Program Director to their experience in the program.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ students, mentorship, sexual identity, identity development

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To all Future Doctoral Students, if you're looking at this paper for research or inspiration… it sounds trite, but the only way to do it is just to DO IT! Set the time aside, hold yourself to deadlines, and get the writing done. You'll hit walls and get stuck in ruts, but you can finish this process. And if there's something in here that catches your eye, you know the old adage: Beg, Borrow, or Steal! Please reach out if anything in my writing can be of use.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

This study sought to explore the shared experience of LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in South Florida who chose to participate in their university's LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, and the phenomenon of how they made meaning of their experiences in the program. It was anticipated in selecting this topic that the knowledge and insights generated would shed light on students' experiences and inform practices that college and university campuses could adopt to support their LGBTQ+ students. This research employed phenomenological methodology to examine and elucidate the shared experience under examination. Participants in the study included a purposefully selected group of current undergraduate participants as well as alumni of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program being examined.

Chapter one begins with an overview of the context and background that frames the study. The overview is followed by the problem statement, the statement of purpose and accompanying research questions, and the theoretical framework. Also included in chapter one is discussion around the research approach, the researcher's perspective, and the researcher's assumptions. Finally, chapter one concludes with a discussion of the proposed rationale and significance of the research study, along with definitions of some of the key terminology used in the paper.

Background & Context

In 1968, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paolo Freire introduced the world to the idea of critical consciousness. He argues that oppressed persons can develop an awareness of the systems of oppression in which they operate. The concept explores the ways in which they can move through, and fight against, those systems. Since the initial introduction of this concept, it

has been used to explore the experiences of a number of oppressed groups; especially ethnic minorities. However, the concept has not often been applied to students with sexual minority identities or backgrounds. Despite this, LGBTQ+ students can benefit from similar constructs in college environments, as illustrated by Lindsey et al. (2013), and Rupp & Freeman (2015). To combat this lack of information, and begin to build frameworks for universities to use in better supporting LGBTQ+ students, further research was required. While these studies focused on critical consciousness as a theoretical framework, this is not the primary focus of this study, but it does point to a wider need to establish the types of programmatic support that can be beneficial for LGBTQ+ students.

Little research exists on the relationship between LGBTQ+-specific social education and LGBTQ+ students' identity development as LGBTQ+ individuals. This relationship has been well-explored in other minority groups that also experience oppression and discrimination, as illustrated by authors such as Crawford et al. (2002), but more LGBTQ+-specific exploration is needed. The research that currently exists focuses primarily on the LGBTQ+ students' experience and "campus climate" as they relate to "tolerance" and "acceptance" of LGBTQ+ folks. This frame is insufficient in that it adopts a deficit-focused approach, rather than an illuminating approach that potentially improves the quality of life for LGBTQ+ students in college.

In 2018, the Tyler Clementi Center at Rutgers released the largest study ever completed (up until that point) on LGBTQ+ students' experiences in a higher education setting. In this study, Greathouse et al. (2018) illustrates the myriad of struggles that LGBTQ+ students face in this setting. This exploration included both interpersonal experiences with other students and LGBTQ-specific academic struggles.

Per the Rutgers study, students who identify as LGBTQ+ experienced a higher likelihood of sexual abuse, harassment, and other negative life experiences. LGBTQ+ students also reported a higher rate of depression, suicide attempts, and other mental health challenges. Life challenges reportedly also negatively impacted LGBTQ+ students' academic lives. LGBTQ+ students were more likely to consider dropping out, to turn in assignments late, and to fail courses in comparison to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. This study disaggregated data by looking at queer-spectrum students and transgendered students separately, and alarmingly, noted that trans students were actually more than twice as likely as cisgender students to have considered dropping out of college altogether.

Problem Statement

For members of historically oppressed groups, challenges in life, and in higher education, abound as the result of various systems of oppression that complicate their ability to achieve success. Racism, classism, heterosexism, and many more create systematic barriers to entry for historically oppressed groups, both in terms of personal success and success in the classroom. As Cammarota & Fine (2010) note, a great deal of research exists into the impact of these challenges on the affected individuals for certain groups: primarily those based on ethnicity and economic class. This impact analysis has also been extended to assessing the ways that these individuals' awareness of these systemic issues has been increased by their experiences. But for LGBTQ+ students, as Ashe et al. (2019) noted, there remains a sense of uncertainty as to the impact of these issues.

The Rutgers (2018) study as well as Windmeyer et al. (2013), also noted that very limited work has been done at the higher education level to look more closely at the ability of institutions to retain and promote LGBTQ+ students. These studies also point out that little has

been done to qualitatively assess the impact of the campus environment on these students' quality of life. Both studies recommended that more in-depth work be done in this area. For these reasons, further research is needed to understand the way in which students make meaning of their experience in LGBTQ+-specific projects such as the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami.

Statement of Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to center and to begin to shed light on the ways in which members of a currently under-examined population (LGBTQ+ higher education students) make meaning of their experience in LGBTQ-specific mentorship programs. Currently, peer-reviewed research into the experiences of other marginalized groups suggests that this type of program is supportive to the ability of minorities to experience academic and social success. Keeping in mind the fact that Freire (1968) posits that effective support is rooted in how minorities make meaning of their identity, it is likely strategic to start by examining the ways in which the members of this group experience that education in order to make meaningful strides in understanding how to better serve the LGBTQ+ community in higher education.

This study seeks to help close this gap by adding the missing LGBTQ+ voices to the canon of literature in the field of adult education. This research will potentially help build a strong case for further examination of LGBTQ+ students' experiences, in order to inform better practices on college campuses. Therefore, higher education can continue to build on itself as an intersectional and inclusive space with shared opportunities for success that reach all individuals on campus, regardless of identity.

This study was primarily driven by research questions that will help to frame the information needed to conceptualize students' shared experiences. The questions are:

- How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?

- How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?

- How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?

- How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?

Theoretical Framework

Sexual identity and theories related to its development are, in the history of the study of sex and sexuality, relatively new areas of study, and are challenging to theorize in a cogent way, as Rosario et al. (2011) note. One reason this challenge exists is that many different factors can be considered, both in terms of an individual's self-conceptualization (Erikson, 1968; 1980) and their sexual experiences (Troiden, 1989). Initially, theorists focused very specifically on sexual activity as the "hallmark" of identity development (because sexual identity and sexual activity were considered highly intertwined). As time has gone on, as evidenced in Troiden's (1989) work, the focus of theorists has shifted away from sexual activity as the concept of LGBTQ+ "identity" has emerged in the literature. The idea that one could exist with an LGBTQ+ identity regardless of having acted upon sexual desire is what drove Rosario et al. (2011) to reject a conceptualization rooted so heavily in sexual action and bring in concepts of self-awareness of attraction and desire, as well as a more tentative "identity." They did this by shifting to measures (in their quantitative studies) that ask more about how participants identify and conceptualize their sexual orientation and identity, and what and whom they desire, as opposed to focusing on sexual acts.

These varying perspectives and differences in definition exist heavily within the literature. For example, Worthington & Mohr (2002) consider sexual identity as "the ways in

which individuals understand and enact their sexual needs, sexual values, and sexual expectations; individuals' modes of romantic and sexual expression; and their methods of expressing intimacy (p. 491)" (which remains rooted in physical sex as the expression of identity). Brady and Busse (1994) focus singularly on self-reported identity formation based on actions. Mohr and Fassinger (2000) and Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000) focus solely on actions to conceptualize identity development.

Over time, theories of sexual identity development evolved beyond the initial focus on sexual activity (and focus on homosexuality as a disorder). Concurrently, theorists began to move to a staged identity development model. Troiden (1989) was one of the most influential theorists in the field, presenting a staged-development theory in which LGBTQ+ people begin in the initial stage of Sensitization (initial awareness of sexual attraction). After moving out of Sensitization, individuals progress to Identity Confusion (awareness of incongruence between internal homosexual attractions and external heterosexual expectations), followed by Identity Assumption (acceptance of self and initial sexual experiences). Troiden's model concludes with individuals ultimately ending at the stage of Commitment (positive identity and long-term same-sex relationships). As Rosario et al. (2011) note, Troiden's theories from the late 1970s have been challenged over the years with more current theorists following in the footsteps of Erickson (1980), who posited a more developmental theory of parallel processes of identity formation and integration.

Cass (1979) and Troiden (1979) were among the first to describe homosexual identity and its development in positive terms, rather than treating it as abnormal or deviant behavior. Savin-Williams, in earlier works (1998) focused on the identity development and trajectory of gay men. Each of these authors used a developmental, staged model in order to understand how

sexual identity begins with awareness and moves ultimately into integration and assimilation. These models mirror other staged models of development in that they are very linear, rooted in concrete experiences and coalesce around the idea of individuals "moving" through the stages, from start to finish, to "land" on a concrete, well-delineated identity.

Other researchers have argued against the use of staged development as a framework for sexual identity development research. Rhoads (1997) argued that treating sexual identity from the standpoint of developmental theory ignores the complexity of lived experiences in favor of "universal explanations" of sexual identity. This argument was rooted in the idea that phased development theories of sexual identity development treat all individuals as following a "preset" model of development in stages that are the same for everyone, rather than accounting for the fact that each individual may develop in differing orders and speeds. Similarly, according to Renn (2015) many developmental models fail to account for intersections of identities (for example, race, gender, ability, class) in relationship to sexual identity. As can be seen even in the dates of the references here, much of the research referenced today is dated, with questionable relevance to our current historical context. These theories and models therefore may not incorporate the cultural and social shifts that have occurred around constructions and understandings of sexual identity in the years that have passed (Abes, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007).

Other authors such as D'Augelli (1994) and Rhoads (1997) began to reconceptualize sexual identity development by shifting the focus of the process to include cultural contexts and dynamics, and the ways in which these factors impact identity development. The author focused on how the cultural context and dynamics within which an individual grows up may impact their sexual identity development due to the norms and expectations within that culture around sex

and sexual orientation. This work foreshadowed later developments where the focus of sexual identity development theory shifted to include intersectionality and the relationship of LGBTQ+ identity to race, ethnicity, class, and other identity markers. Other more recent work also deviated from a staged development model (Stirrat et al., 2008; Patton, 2011; Brandon-Friedman, 2019; Renteria, 2018), focusing on sexual identity formation as one aspect of *intersectional identity formation*, positing that it is less helpful to focus on one aspect of identity separate from others that influence and impact it.

Exploration of sexual identity development within the collegiate context has been very limited. Stevens (2004) presented one of the few models that specifically explored the influence of the college environment on the development of gay college men. Dilley (2005; 2010) expanded Steven's work by looking at the limits of identity categories, pushing beyond the more traditional categories by developing a spectrum of sexual identity nomenclatures and typology of non-heterosexual college men. Theories such as these modern ones by Stevens & Dilley, however, remain bounded by being rooted in developmental stage thinking in their presuppositions about sexual identity development.

As Crawford et al. (2002) note, this is challenging, because the assumption that a person's sexual identity, sexual expression and conceptualization develop in some type of linear formation is not representative of the experiences of all youth. In some cases, people develop identity and expression concurrently, while for others, expression and exploration come first (sometimes as a result of sexual violence), and identity formation and integration occur much later.

According to Crawford et al. (2002), there is no consensus on the best model to use to measure sexual identity development. There is no agreement on what type of structure, whether

phased model of development or non-phased, is a valid approach. The purpose of this research is not to support any one theory or developmental model of sexual identity development, but to build on the work of Rosario et al. (2011) to explore and better understand how LGBTQ+ students who are participating in a mentoring program on a college campus make meaning of their experience. Rosario et al. (2011) supports a conceptualization of identity development that moves away from staged development and instead focuses on the confluence of a variety of factors (integration-associated activities, internal attitudes, and experiences) to assess the sexual identity development of an individual.

This is the framework within which this study will be conducted. This will allow for a richer exploration of the students' experiences without being limited by the confines of any one specific model of development, particularly given the lack of consensus in the field on which model may be ideal (Denton, 2016). The design of the study will be rooted in the ideas that Rosario et al. (2011) lay out, drawing on a variety of ways of conceptualizing LGBTQ+ identity (self-identification, participation in aligned activities, sexual attraction, and desires). This will allow us to explore the sexual identity development of students and alumni of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program from a variety of different angles, incorporating the full range of different angles of how to look at sexual identity that Rosario et al. discuss.

Research Approach

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas, I studied the experiences and perception of members and alumni of the University of Miami's LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. These students were either current participants or student alumni of the mentorship program, referred by the director of the program. The study took a phenomenological approach to examining the shared experience of these students who all

participated in a common program. The study explored this shared experience and the ways in which students made meaning of that experience, using a semi-structured interview approach. As is common in phenomenological research, the purpose of the study was not to make generalized conclusions about all students, but to create a deep and rich exploration of students' experiences in this program, and to create a basis for future exploration of this phenomena at other institutions of higher education to continue to build the base of research in this field.

After opening with demographic questions (to enrich the depth of analysis post-research), I utilized semi-structured interview questions that built on previous work by Rosario et al. (2011) and Fuller (2016) to explore students' sexual identity development as well as their reasons for pursuing participation in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University. We then explored their experiences thus far in the program (for current students) or their prior experiences (for alumni), as well as the ways in which they have made meaning of that experience, and connect it to their individual identity development. Each interviewee was anonymized and interviews were recorded and transcribed. Following this transcription, results were coded and thematically analyzed to begin the process of drawing research conclusions. For security purposes, all recordings and transcriptions will be kept in a password-protected environment and recordings will be destroyed once the study concludes.

Assumptions & Limitations

In designing this study, I made a number of assumptions regarding my research sample population. The challenges of interviewing undergraduate students are well-noted by Terenzini & Pascarella (1998), particularly the difficulty of finding responsible students who will follow through with commitment to participate. One assumption made was that we could establish rapport and get good, open and honest information (particularly related to complex personal

information) from students in the course of one interview. Another assumption made was that, although the gatekeeper would only grant me access to a subset of the LGBTQ+ students within the program, that their experiences would still be representative of the experiences of students in the program overall.

A possible limitation of this study, as Windmeyer et al. (2013) discuss, is that very little work has been done in this field. To date, only one small case study has looked at identity development in gay male college students. For this reason, there were very few "guides" for how to undertake a study with this focus. This study, which examined students from one peer mentorship program at the University of Miami, maintained a limited scope in order to make completion feasible and manageable. It will thus help to increase the breadth of the literature and shed light on the best path forward in research in this area.

A primary challenge and limitation of any study involving LGBTQ+ people is the ability to access LGBTQ+ people based on "outness." The way in which we accessed these students requires self-disclosure, and given the context shared above on the negative experiences of LGBTQ+ students in (even liberalized and welcoming) campus environments, it is perhaps unsurprising that there remain many students and adults who choose to remain closeted. While this is a logical avoidance mechanism, it unfortunately complicates the matter of truly assessing the totality of LGBTQ+ students' experience at the undergraduate level. Without this important facet of LGBTQ+ student experience, it remained impossible to assess the development and experiences of those that remain closeted. Unfortunately, in the absence of other options for accessing these students, this will remain a limitation to studies of this type for the foreseeable future.

The Researcher

Much of my life has been a long pattern of 'firsts'; particularly when it comes to my sexuality. 'First Openly Gay _____ [insert moniker here]' has become somewhat a constant: from joining a fraternity in college, to delivering the valedictory address at my undergraduate Commencement, to running for local political office. However, I have rarely paused to interrogate the events in my life that may or may have not directed this pattern.

During the course of my doctoral studies in adult education, two things became apparent: first, that analyses within the adult education field from an LGBTQ+ perspective are extremely limited, and second, that there likely were experiences in my own education journey that contributed to the aforementioned pattern.

In considering the specifics of what might have led me to this new space of learning, I found the search regularly leading me back to my participation in a particular minor program during my undergraduate studies: Peer Education in Human Relations. The program started with a Freshman year class; Making Connections, rooted in the teachings of Paolo Freire. This became my introduction to the concepts of heterosexism and institutionalized homophobia. In combination with the major I ultimately declared in LGBT Studies, I developed key mindsets that encouraged me to step into the space surrounding this moniker: the "First Gay ____,". For better or worse, this decision has underpinned many of my accomplishments.

As this awareness grew, I found myself more incensed by the lack of research in the area of exploring LGBTQ+ students' experiences in collegiate education. I knew I had found something worth exploring once I met experts in the field who directed me to the Miami LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. I am excited to be able to undertake this study, and to help begin filling this important gap in the literature and LGBTQ+ history.

This personal connection and affinity for this program, while giving me great insights into the ins and outs of this type of program, also created potential pitfalls. My experiences in my own mentor program allowed me to bring the practical experience of being an LGBTQ+ student during my undergraduate experience to the study, with knowledge and understanding of both the context and content of this type of program. However, I must also acknowledge that these same experiences which are so valuable, may have also created the opportunity for bias in designing my research and completing my analysis. In order to account for this, I put in place numerous safeguards including triangulation, bracketing interviews, and member-checking, to ensure that the research remained as valid as possible.

Rationale & Significance

As noted, the current state of research on LGBTQ+ students' experiences in higher education, while relatively limited, points to the likelihood that these students, like those of other marginalized groups, experience a variety of challenges that make achieving a degree harder than it is for non-marginalized students. This begets the need for both further research, as well as analysis of the shared experiences of students that have completed programming that may equip others with tools to better navigate these complex, often difficult spaces and phases. Filling this important gap in the literature can create an initial step toward creating better, research-based approaches to supporting LGBTQ+ students in higher education spaces.

As noted elsewhere in this chapter, a great deal of research exists into the impact of minority-aligned programming on positive outcomes for students within those groups (Cammarota & Fine 2010). Lindsey et al. (2013), and Rupp & Freeman (2015) similarly point to the fact that there exists great potential in application of this type of programming for LGBTQ+ students, although they note further research is needed in the area. These findings align with the

central tenets of Paolo Freire's research and writings which suggest that, for members of any marginalized group, the most effective way to overcome the challenges put in place for them by society is to be taught how to recognize and navigate those challenges. This support and education allows individuals to see the structures within which they operate, and navigate through and around them to higher levels of success in society overall. Thus it is worth exploring whether there may exist a positive correlational value between LGBTQ-specific programming and higher recruitment, retention, and matriculation of LGBTQ+ students within the higher education context.

These concepts and contexts, when taken together, suggest the potential for a major positive impact on LGBTQ+ students that learn about the systematic social structures created by heterosexism. In this study, we have investigated the experience and meaning that students make after participating in a program such as this at the University of Miami.

Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study

Sexual Identity

This concept defined the population that we examined in this study, and is defined by students' self-identification of LGBTQ+ status on surveys and in campus record-keeping mechanisms. Based on Lindsey et al. (2013), Rupp & Freeman (2015) and the Rutgers study (2018), this appears to be a standard approach to conceptualizing LGBTQ+ status in a consistent, reproducible way. Further discussion of the many approaches to defining this status can be found in Chapter Two. For the purposes of this study, LGBTQ+ status / sexual identity was self-identified and reported by students as part of the initial demographic data that was collected from all students, as a way to standardize data collection.

Critical Consciousness

Freire (1968) defined critical consciousness as the ability to read the systems of oppression around oneself, and thus see how to better navigate the world. For the purpose of this study, we did not utilize critical consciousness as a component of the theoretical framework. We simply utilized critical consciousness and its prior research application to higher education for other marginalized groups as a component of the rationale for the potential impact of this study.

Gender

Previously in this chapter, the concept of cisgender was mentioned. Butler (2002) was one of the cornerstones of Queer Theory, which completely shifted the bedrock of feminist theory by positing that gender, rather than being tied to physical sex, is socially constructed. This theoretical change has been critical to understanding, valuing, and validating the experience of trans people, by divorcing the concept of a person's gender identity from their physical sex at birth.

Transgender

Transgender refers to anyone whose expressed gender identity is different than their sex which was assigned at birth.

Cisgender

In practical terms, cisgender is utilized to signify an individual whose birth sex matches their expressed gender (to differentiate from transpeople).

Queer

Queer refers to anyone whose expressed gender transcends or exists without the traditional binary with which gender and sex have historically been understood. The term first

came to use in this way with Butler's (2002) seminal work in the field of queer theory, which

broke down the traditional gender binary (as rooted in sex) as a social construct.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter undertook a review of the literature in key areas related to the concepts and terms that are central to this study. After reviewing each of these areas in depth, we took a deeper look at the literature surrounding the key concepts and research underlying the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter closes with a summary that situates the literature reviewed in the larger context of the study and its research questions.

LGBTQ+ People: Describing the Population

Developing a working definition of LGBTQ+ college students has historically been a challenging undertaking, due in part to social norms and acceptance of student identities shifting over time. This has made self-reporting a more reliable measure when conducting studies on LGBTQ+ students on college campuses. Rodriguez-Hobbs (2016) defines LGBTQ+ students as students who self-identify as LGBTQ+ on student surveys. This study similarly utilized self-reporting on demographic questions to define students' status within this population.

The understanding of who identifies as LGBTQ+ has changed significantly over time. According to Stryker (2009), this is partly because terminology, definitions and conceptualization of these terms changes and evolves. For example, the addition of the T to LGBTQ, has been, historically speaking, recent. Even once "T" was added, its meaning has shifted over time as the concepts of sex and gender changed (moving from "transvestite" to "transsexual" to the current terminology/construct of "transgender").

While the differences between these meanings are of course important, the more germane impact of these changes, relative to this study, were the resulting changes in the identities that people could claim and inhabit in their daily lives. When discussing the very real impacts of

these identities on other aspects of life, such as critical consciousness, the reality of these shifting identities becomes paramount. In order to identify within a certain subgroup, individuals must have an identity to claim, which drives the conversation of the implications and outcomes tied to that identity.

More modern conceptions fall in line with the conceptions posited by Rosario et al. (2011), which shifted their focus much more to the ways in which individuals identify themselves, and the strength with which they associate themselves with the LGBTQ+ community, rather than focusing on individual "selection" of an identity. This was reinforced in Pew's 2013 survey of LGBTQ+ individuals, which greatly expanded the questions that were asked to focus on the degree with which each individual associates themselves with their community. There were also a number of questions focused on the degree to which each individual places importance on their association with the LGBTQ+ community. The most meaningful findings of this survey were that, particularly for lesbian and gay individuals, they felt the highest sense of community identity and importance with the wider community.

As Bilodeau & Renn (2005) note, "Feminist, postmodern, and queer theoretical scholars present significant alternatives to medical and psychiatric perspectives on gender identity (p. 32)." Modern conceptions of gender have divorced the concept from biological sex, focusing more on the ways in which society has assigned value and attributes to these roles. This has driven much of the modern movement away from viewpoints of LGBTQ+ identity as a sign of mental illness, placing it within a fluid spectrum that allows for adaptation based on the self-identification of the individual. These conceptions have also found ways to connect themselves to historical and anthropological constructs of gender fluidity, nonbinary

constructions of gender, and sexual orientations that exist outside the male-female binary or the gay-straight one.

The historically shifting nature of the identities wrapped up within these concepts has likely contributed to the shifting approaches to measuring the presence of these identities that are discussed in the next paragraph. When what is being measured changes, it is challenging to measure it. Beyond this basic fact, however, lies the realm of social attitudes and acceptance, and the impact each of these concepts have on the chosen measure, as well. For example, even once the concept of "gay," or "lesbian," or "transgender" came into being, this did not equate to automatic acceptance within greater society. Even today, as Stotzer (2017) points out, transgender people, especially young transwomen of color, face a higher likelihood of being murdered than their cisgender peers. In this context, it can be challenging to study the impacts of these variables on outcomes, because there can be a genuine danger to those who choose to publicly identify by these markers. This invisible social pressure likely contributes to the variety of strategies that scholars have been required to use in examining these variables and their relationships over time.

Identifying LGBTQ+ College Students

Different scholars have developed different strategies over time to discuss and measure the impact of sexual identity on other factors such as collegiate success within the context of higher education. Some scholars, such as Harper and Gasman (2008), have chosen not to even disaggregate the subpopulations of LGBTQ+ students *at all*, because, when examining student outcomes related to conservatism at "more conservative" institutions of higher education, it was so challenging to find students who were willing to self-identify within such an environment. Their study did not have anyone self-disclose their sexual orientation, and rather focused on

overall campus climate and impact on Black male success rates. They did examine attitudes of faculty and leadership towards homosexuality and transgenderism as a variable, and also looked at student success outcomes of Black male students (assuming, in doing so, that GBTQ - no L since this is a single-sex institution - students existed within this population). Their research, which focused on the impact of the collegiate environment on students in HBCUs, found that students overall experienced less success in these "more conservative" environments, regardless of individual identity markers.

In 2015, Fine utilized a slightly different approach to identify LGBTQ+ individuals in a study focused on examining their post-secondary outcomes. This study utilized anyone coded on the 2000 census as partnered with someone of the same gender and identified these individuals as LGBTQ. The benefit of this approach, of course, is that it does not rely on self-reporting, meaning that it becomes possible to identify LGBTQ+ people living in regions or situations that might make self-identification challenging. The challenge of this approach, however, comes in being able to track data and outcomes for unattached LGBTQ+ individuals, because in this approach, identity becomes rooted in partnership, rather than actual individual identity. There are similar issues in, for instance, states where people are able to actually change their government-assigned gender, meaning that there could be LGBTQ+ people that fall under the radar if one of them has fully transitioned, essentially "masking" them as a straight couple.

In Rodriguez-Hobbs' (2016) study, the author examined within the context of high school education, the impact of protective factors on LGBTQ+ students' retention within the school environment. To do so, the author relied on students' self-reported identity on surveys to identify and track LGBTQ+ students. This approach of course presents challenges of its own. For example, this will exclude any closeted individuals that choose not to self-identify, which is

unfortunate, but at this time there does not appear to be a viable workaround to capture data on these individuals without looking at the success rates of students overall, as Harper & Gasman did.

While there are many ways to define and measure LGBTQ+ students, the most effective approach for this study was to utilize students' self-identified status, as reported by the coordinator of the program and their own demographic answers, to identify this population of students. This allowed us to, in the most concrete and accurate way possible, identify the students whose experiences and critical consciousness development were most closely aligned to the outcomes we seek to explore.

The Ways that College-Aged Students Develop

Many different theories and models of traditional-aged student development and change in college exist, and generally fall into two categories: overall development, and identity formation, or some aspect of identity formation, such as gender, race-ethnicity, or sexual orientation. One of the earliest and most influential models was developed by Arthur Chickering, and was developed and directly modeled after staged development in other types of development theories such as Erickson (1950) and Marcia (1966). Chickering's "Seven Vectors Theory of Student Development" (Chickering,1969), which was framed around seven vectors or developmental tasks students must go through to develop their identity. According to the theory, students move through these developmental tasks sequentially, and they include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity.

In 1970, Perry conducted the first major study to focus specifically on the aspect of student development of undergraduate students. After conducting a series of interviews with male Harvard students (and a few female students from Radcliffe), he developed a scheme of development that outlined nine positions ranging from dualism through relativism to making commitments in a world that is understood to be complex. In Perry's conceptualization, students moved progressively through these positions like stages, although at times adversity or fear might cause them to retreat to an earlier stage out of comfort.

Beginning in the 1980s, other theorists such as Erikson (1980), focused on other aspects of young people's development, such as their development of more mature relationships and development of their feelings. While these theories apply to students' development overall, much of the work around student development in college focuses on intellectual and cognitive development. Later, Chickering and Reisser (1993) expanded on Chickering's model to include students of all ages and revised the original idea that students must move through the stages sequentially. Rather, students could move through the vectors simultaneously.

Kuhn and Dean (2004) built upon the work of Perry (1970) to develop what they deemed a developmental process of epistemological transition, meaning the transition in the ways that students are able to "know" things. Their work, like that of Perry (1970), focused primarily on the ways in which students' understanding of *knowledge* as a construct itself changes over time. From early adolescence, children begin from an absolutist view of knowledge: knowledge is absolute and unchanging. From there, they develop a multiplist worldview: knowledge is variable based on personal preference. Black and Allen (2017) liken this stage to the teenager who responds "whatever" to everything, because multiplism (where knowledge's veracity depends on personal preference) does not require critical examination of knowledge to determine

its value. The authors describe the ways in which critical inquiry and engagement must be explicitly taught, so that students arrive at the understanding that the value of knowledge can, and should, change based on critical inquiry. According to the authors, this is what pushes students into the final stages of cognitive development, where they become mature critical thinkers.

Belenky, et al. (1986) took the same area of epistemology (how students make meaning of knowledge) as their primary focus, interviewing a series of college-aged women to dive deeper into what they referred to as ways of knowing. Expanding on Perry's (1970) work, which only utilized one subset of collegiate males at Harvard, their study exposed differences between the ways that cognitive growth differs in women versus men, primarily rooted in the heavier emphasis among women on the importance of connection with others and finding one's own voice as a means of making meaning of knowledge. Their study ultimately identified seven ways of knowing, which develop in stages like the ones described in men: silence, listening to the voices of others, the inner voice, the quest for self, the voice of reason, separate and connected knowing, and integrating the voices (Belenky et al., 1986). These phases ultimately parallel Perry's stages of development, moving from absolutism to relativism, but the authors found important differences in the way that women perceive that relativism, which the authors note as tending to minimize the value of their own opinions, in contrast to what the authors noted for the men in Perry's study, who typically believe they have a right to their opinions (Black & Allen, 2017). Belenky et al. (1986) ultimately found that, when women reach the final stage of integration, they realize that "all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known (p. 137)," which aligns with the relativism identified in the later stages of epistemological development in the models previously discussed here.

Another key study of the cognitive development of undergraduates was conducted by Baxter Magolda in 1992. Her work uncovered four key stages or phases of knowing. These were absolute knowing: receiving and mastering knowledge from authorities; transitional knowing: gaining personal understanding, having some degree of uncertainty; independent knowing: thinking for oneself, expressing opinions; and contextual knowing: comparing perspectives and judging them based on evidence and context (Magolda, 1992). In summarizing the outcomes of her study, Magolda (1992) found that only 32% of college freshmen start college in the transitional phase, and the other 68% are in the absolute phase of knowing, with no students beginning college in the later phases of development. Even by senior year, she found, 83% of students had reached the transitional stage, with none reaching later stages until post-graduation, inferring that college experiences and learning do not necessarily push students to the later stages of epistemological development. Like Belenky et al. (1986), she found that both genders require connectedness in order to reach contextual understanding of the knowledge they acquire.

King and Kitchener (1994) developed a staged model of epistemic belief development, building on the prior work discussed here, and tying in the concept of reflective judgment that develops in stages. In their study, they focused on students' ability to tackle ill-defined problems (with no clear correct answer), particularly in written assignments, as a way to assess development of reflective judgment. The paradigm they used to construct the stages of development was devised in seven stages as follows: (1) Knowledge is absolute and concrete: "I know what I have seen"; (2) Knowledge is certain but may not be available: "If it's on the news, it has to be true."; (3) Knowledge may be temporarily uncertain: "When there is convincing evidence it's knowledge, until then it's just a guess."; (4) Knowledge is individual: "There's no proof how the pyramids were built. Who can you ask? No one was there."; (5) Knowledge is

contextual and subjective: "People think differently. Other theories can be as good as mine, just using different evidence."; (6) Knowledge is constructed into individual conclusions: "It's difficult to be sure, you just reach a point where you're sure enough to take a personal stance."; and (7) Knowledge is the outcome of reasonable inquiry: "One can judge an argument based on reasoning, evidence, and consistency."

Using this framework as the base of their research, King and Kitchener (1994) conducted a 10 year longitudinal study following students from high school, to college, to doctoral-level studies. Their study found, in examining this wide variety of students, that there was no "neat" pattern of development that fit all students, and rather that students developed in extremely varied ways and orders, as opposed to a clean and concise series of stages that are linear and easy to define. Overall, however, they did find trends in development, with students on average beginning at stage 2.8, and in 10 years ending, on average, at stage 5.3.

Student development researchers have noted the tension between the various models. Torres, Jones, and Renn (2019) discuss how student affairs (and with it, student development theories), as a discipline emerged in the late 20th century as a "low consensus field of research and practice (p. 645)." As a result, as identity theories around students are developed, tension and complexity within the field are created, because traditionally a more universalist stance to students' experiences and cognitive growth has been taken. According to Braxton and Berger (1999), student affairs is a low-consensus field precisely *because* it accepts diverse perspectives.

Because of this low consensus model, many researchers continue to pursue research and theory from the perspective of more traditionally styled student development theory. While the varied models discussed above all have some similarities, they use varied terminologies and models to explain staged development of cognition. For ease of analysis and application within a

crowded field of competing theories, Black and Allen (2017) elected to generate a simplified

version of the stages that integrates the work of these various theorists, which is captured below.

Dualism

Expects to:

obtain knowledge from Instructor

find the right answer

use straightforward methods to find Information

Knowledge is certain or absolute

Multiplicity

Expects to:

be open to various opinions

have own opinions accepted

view all Information as equally valid

Knowledge is subjective

Relativism

Expects to:

analyze assertions in context

support assertions with evidence

seek Information to make connections and determine context

Knowledge depends on facts and context

Commitment in Relativism

Expects to:

critically analyze Information in context

take personal positions on what is true

play an active role in knowledge creation

Knowledge is based on facts, context, and what I believe

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the stages of student development in college.
Adapted from 'College Student Development,' by S. Black & J. D. Allen, 2017, *Reference Librarian*, p. 219-221. Copyright 2017 by Reference Librarian.

This model presents the idea (mirrored in the other theories presented here) that, in cognitive development, young adults move from the initial stages of dualism, where they must receive knowledge from others (and receive it in the form of absolute truth), through the intermediate phases to the final stage, where they reach the realization that knowledge is personalized and integrative, requiring active commitment from the knower to have shape and meaning (Black & Allen, 2017).

The Role of Colleges and Universities in Student Development

Colleges and universities play an important role in the development of students. The theoretical frameworks that have been developed to explain their role vary in terms of complexity and the factors chosen by the authors to measure student development (Astin, 1982). In examining these theories, Astin (1982) points to the fact that they often vary based on the role of the theorist and their relationship to the student development process. Professors, for example, have historically treated academic content, in the form of subject matter transmitted to students, as the root of student development. Supporters of this *content theory* of student development find value in the ways in which students' content knowledge develops over the course of their collegiate education. Administrators and policymakers, on the other hand, tend to be more supportive of the *resource theory* of student development (Astin, 1999). This theory situates student development within the resources that are made available to students to support their success at the school, such as physical resources, human resources, and financial resources. The argument at the root of this theory is that student development is something that happens if these resources are put in place.

A third perspective is the *individualized theory* described by Chickering & Associates (1981), which posits that the individual teaching methods and content must be customized to

meet the needs of each individual student. When this idea (now much more mainstream) first

came about in the early 1980s, it was considered far too complicated to implement (Astin, 1999).

Despite these initial reservations, this theory of development drove a lot of major developments

in "progress" and thinking about policies and approaches in higher education, such as

competency-based learning, in the early 1980s (Grant et al., 1979). The early stages of the

implementation of individualized theory focused on students being able to progress through the

curriculum at highly individualized rates and meet learning targets at the pace they were most

comfortable with, rather than in accordance with rigid timetables. As implementation of

individualized theory progressed, theorists had to build increasing complexity into their models

to bridge the various and disparate concepts they each incorporated. An example of this is

Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement as a measure of student development, which uses a

much more individualized and student-dependent measure as the focus of measuring a student's

development in the collegiate space.

In reviewing the progression of these theories taken as a whole, Black and Allen (2017)

challenged higher educators to be aware of students' cognitive development, bridging the gap

between student development, which in these models was mostly looked at completely separate

from the cognitive theories of the previous chapter. In doing so, the authors argued that the most

effective instructional approach is to meet learners in the stage of development they are in, which

will be responsive to their development as students (relative to their collegiate experience) and

also help them move further along the path of cognitive development.

As previously noted, Black and Allen (2017) built on the work of Chickering and Reiser

(1993), which theorized student development as centering on seven vectors:

- developing competence

- managing emotions

- moving through autonomy toward independence

- developing mature interpersonal relationships

- establishing identity

- developing purpose

- developing integrity

The primary contribution of Black and Allen's study (2017) to the field of student development

is that they moved beyond the vectors in making recommendations for how to instruct students

in ways that are responsive to their stage of development (as measured by the vectors). The

authors noted that instructors can and should instruct students in college at one level of

development beyond where they currently are (i.e., instructing students in "Dualism" phase,

which is the majority of freshmen, at the "Multiplicity" level, to encourage and shape their

development beyond where they currently are). They provide these recommendations:

- "Students grow in their ways of knowing when given appropriate challenges and support.
- The process of moving from one developmental stage to the next is likely to cause
  students to feel uncomfortable or anxious.
- Given appropriate instruction, students can achieve at one level of metacognition above
  their comfort zone. However, it is unreasonable to expect a dualist (about 70% of
  freshmen) to analyze evidence in context and relate it to personal beliefs" (p. 224).

Black and Allen suggested that their recommendations reflect a growing belief in the field of

student development theory that students' development is a concrete process that can be

impacted and influenced by educators. By treating student development as a series of "teachable"

skills, they asserted that universities can, in fact, direct and guide the process by which students

develop once they arrive at the undergraduate institution. Theories such as the ones posited by

Black and Allen here also drive the types of mentoring programs that this study means to analyze

and examine.

Identity Development in College

One of the first researchers and theorists to introduce the concept of identity development into the study of adolescents was Erikson (1950), who built upon Freudian concepts to frame identity development as the primary focus of adolescent growth and development. While this initial work was widely hailed as groundbreaking, theorists have since criticized its limitations of scope. Berzonsky & Adams (1999) noted that Erikson's work heavily focused on describing ego identity and ignoring all other aspects of identity. Marcia (1966) was the first to develop this work to the level of creating a reproducible, concrete model of identity development.

Marcia's (1966) explicitly stated purpose was to establish the "psychosocial criteria for determining degree of ego identity" (p. 551) so that later theorists could test their own hypotheses regarding the behavioral consequences of ego identity. This seminal study resulted in four stages or "profiles" of identity status: *achievement*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, and *diffusion*. In determining which of these stages an individual was in, Marcia (1966) gathered evidence of exploration and commitment in the domains of occupation, religion, and politics, through the use of a semi- structured interview process. Later, in the 1980 follow-up to this study, Marcia would expand the "occupation" domain to "vocation" in order to expand the domain to its widest possible term and fully capture the spirit of one's "work in the world."

Similar to the student development theories discussed elsewhere in this chapter, Marcia (1980) noted emphatically that this process of identity construction is not "neat" or easily captured in a smooth, step-by-step process. Much of this is driven by the confluence of the known and the unknown, whereby "unknown" aspects of identity choices and rejections create a messy process in young adults.

According to Marcia (1980), identity *achievement* represents an integrated sense of self. People in this stage exhibit evidence of high degrees of both exploration and commitment. *Foreclosure* represents an acceptance of authoritarian values, or as Marcia (1966) puts it, "an apt description for one who is becoming his parents' alter ego (p. 551)." While people in this category also show high evidence of commitment, their evidence of exploration was low. Anyone who is found to be in the *moratorium* and *diffusion* stages both had low evidence of commitment. *Moratorium* represents active exploration in search of a sense of self, and thus these individuals show a correspondingly high evidence of exploration. On the other hand, *diffusion* shows an ongoing pattern of apathy and nondirectional thinking, leading to low evidence of both commitment and exploration.

This model, as a comprehensive and empirically testable and reproducible construct of identity development in college-age young adults has been central to ongoing research and studies related to identity development and its relationship with other factors in young adult life. For example, Shea, Crossman and Adams (1978) utilized this model as a theoretical lens through which to explore the relationship between identity development & physical attractiveness. Adams and Fitch (1983) examined university environments as a variable to explore impacts on identity development status. Chapman and Werner-Wilson (2008) used the identity development stages to explore adolescents' attitudes about sexuality. Considering the deficiencies of this model, in their critique of both Erikson and Marcia, Berzonsky and Adams (1999) noted that, although Marcia follows closely in Erikson's footsteps (and thus shares some of his limitations), this model is particularly useful in assessing how individuals navigate institutional settings like college campuses.

Marcia's (1966) studies found that subjects who are in *foreclosure* status may perceive ideological bias with greater frequency than subjects in alternate statuses. People in *foreclosure* are described as "becoming what others have prepared or intended him to become. . . College experiences serve only as a confirmation of childhood beliefs (p. 552)." This particular status may be relevant in the context of exploration of LGBTQ+ students' identity development, because, as Marcia's describes *foreclosure* behavior, "A certain rigidity characterizes his personality; one feels that if he were faced with a situation in which parental values were nonfunctional, he would feel extremely threatened (p. 552)."

Sexual Identity and College Students

Research on college students and their sexual identity is limited. One relevant study was a basic qualitative study conducted by Collins (2018), that assessed the transformative learning of three Latinx men in South Florida who participated in a communications course. This course was offered by a local LGBTQ-Oriented nonprofit organization and focused on helping LGBTQ+ youth and their families improve their communication, regardless of their personal beliefs and views on sexuality, same-sex relationships, and other aspects of the youth's identities.

While this study focused primarily on the men's identity and learning through the lens of transformative learning, the author noted the importance of further research to determine the ways in which tailoring learning experiences such as this to the learner's needs can positively impact outcomes for learners. But more so, he pointed out that there is inadequate representation of LGBTQ+ experiences and voices across the field of adult and later education, and there is a need to expand this area of research by bringing these voices into the fold.

Patton (2011) conducted a qualitative study of how six African American gay and bisexual men made meaning of their identity, decisions regarding disclosure of their identities,

and how their identity experiences were mediated by their environment at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Patton (2011) concluded that while these students primarily experienced supportive environments on campus, particularly where their race was concerned, it was much more of a mixed experience when it came to their sexuality, meaning that they experienced much less supportive environments in terms of their sexuality than their racial identity.

Because the primary focus of this study was to better understand the experiences of these men, Patton's (2011) findings include several cautionary notes about research involving LGBTQ+ students that are important in this field of research and draw on the work of previous authors. One caution relevant to the current study is to avoid essentializing students' experiences, as this can be reductive and damaging to further research by closing future avenues of exploration rather than creating further opportunities. As Abes and Kasch (2007) noted, essentializing individual experiences of men who have sex with men (MSM) has the impact of reinforcing the heterosexual/nonheterosexual binary, which simultaneously reinforces the concept that nonheterosexual identities are abnormal. This essentialism also has the impact of distorting the overall portrait of these students' experiences, expanding and expounding on them in ways that create deficiencies in the overall narrative.

Similarly, Rhoads (1997) cautioned against over-generalizing the experiences of LGBTQ+ students, because doing so can have the impact of weakening the integrity of further research within this population. The rationale here is that, while the men in Patton's (2011) study may describe incredibly similar experiences, this does nothing to negate the fact that there still exist many other spaces within the realm of lived gay and bisexual realities, and reducing the experience to a universalism as a result of this small study essentially erases these nuances. This

draws on the writings of Wall and Evans (1991) who noted that lived realities among LGBTQ+ students are often, at a minimum, mildly divergent, and thus any attempt to generalize creates an oversimplified picture of a complex issue. This remains particularly true when examining the ways that gender and race intersect with sexual orientation to create an incredibly wide array of multifaceted experiences that can easily be destroyed with oversimplification in research reporting.

A key finding and recommendation of Patton's (2011) study is that "student affairs educators can play a significant role in helping these students deal with both negative and positive experiences related to their sexual identity (p. 97)." The author points to the fact that this reinforces the idea that the influence of collegiate programming is central to ensuring that these students are properly supported during their undergraduate experience. Patton (2011) notes that there are many both positive and negative possibilities when it comes to the experiences that students may have related to their sexual identity. Negative experiences can include depression and other mental health issues, while positive experiences can include the establishment of very close relationships with other students with whom they share these identity markers. Other points of discussion are the importance of students being able to talk about their sexual identity without judgment from others, and also notes that there are many social challenges as they engage in the navigation of their exterior environments. According to the author, this study was limited by the fact that the students were all male, and notes that further research is needed to determine if there are similar or divergent experiences among female students. Also, the author notes that the focus of this research was on experience, rather than a true exploration of identity and therefore, while many of the experiential questions that were asked stem from the ideas underlying sexual identity development, it was difficult for her to draw any conclusions that truly extended to the

realm of the students' own identity development. For this reason, further exploration in this area, as well as further research on the specific ways in which schools can support students who may be experiencing issues such as these, should occur.

Programs Available to LGBTQ+ People in College

Current research into programming for sexual minorities on college campuses focuses on a number of areas that diverge from the focus of this study. Perhaps the most deeply studied programming for LGBTQ+ young people are Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), which are social organizations that bring together gay and straight youths to work on LGBTQ+ issues. Many studies (Griffin et al., 2004; MacGillivray, 2000; Mayberry et al., 2011; Mayo, 2004) have outlined the positive impact that GSAs have on overall school climate. Similarly, many studies have outlined the positive impact of GSAs on their members, both LGBTQ+ youth and allies (Cosier, 2009; Grace & Wells, 2007; Kosciw et al., 2008; Lee, 2002; MacGillivray, 2005; Mayo, 2009; Walls et al., 2010). However, Mayo (2013) conducted exploration of the application of critical pedagogy to the GSA spaces to "create the foundation for reflective, activist-oriented learning (p. 266)." In this context, Mayo defines critical pedagogy as "an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life (p. 268)." Mayo notes that one of the challenges and critiques of GSAs has been their tendency to center straight members' experiences by placing a higher value on their experiences than those of their LGBTQ+ counterparts, and lack of ability to create space for nonwhite, nontraditional membership.

Other research in this area centers on another type of programming in the form of Ally Training Programs, or ATPs. ATPs function by creating opportunities for straight allies to learn more about the challenges facing LGBTQ+ people, and function as allies and advocates who create better opportunities for their LGBTQ+ peers. As Poynter and Tubbs (2007) note, ATPs are critical and important to improving campus climate for LGBTQ+ students in higher education. However, a number of shortcomings of ATPs in the context of this study's focus are noted in the research. Draughn et al. (2002) take note of the fact that ATPs do not prepare allies for direct action against homophobia and heterosexism. Broido (2000) similarly notes that programs that offer information on discrimination only, without preparing members for direct action, do not actually assist in changing campus climate for the better.

The final segment of LGBTQ-related programming that has been explored in the research is student-organized groups, such as Pride Alliances and community organizing groups on college campuses. Meyer (2004), in exploring these groups through the context of the field of communications, notes that, despite the near-universal presence of these groups on college campuses, they are nearly universally absent from the literature, as researchers tend to not take them as seriously as faculty-led groups. Meyer (2004) notes that organizational research studies tend to only focus on well-recognized organizations long after they are formed, and often marginalize newer, more individualized organizations that focus on humanizing issues through individual interactions. This means that many of these studies focus on bigger organizations which tend to have a greater focus on sweeping, large actions, rather than individualized interventions.

Eklund-Lee and Young (1997) and MacCarron and Bennet (1996) similarly analyzed these organizations, but through a focus on student interaction and engagement, rather than

focusing on their intention and impact within the larger campus context. In doing so, they examined the ways that individual students interacted and engaged with the Pride Alliances and community organizing groups. This may be because, as Boden (1994) notes, organizational studies of student groups tend to be too high-level to truly assess the granular details of their functioning. Meyer (2004) ultimately found, through grounded theory research, that further research is needed to understand the impact of these organizations, and help determine why it is that they are successful in dissipating tensions that exist in other community organizing groups, allowing students to "be together" with those that share their identity. This research points to the potential impact of also examining faculty-led, student-centered groups, like the mentoring program at Miami, to better understand how these programs are experienced by participants as well.

Perhaps the most critical component of assessing these types of organizations relates to their ability to have a positive impact on school climate in terms of its support and acceptance of LGBTQ+ students. Day et al. (2019) dig into this deeply in their high level assessment of GSAs and their impact on campus climate. Fetner & Elafros (2015), Heck et al. (2013), & Kosciw et al. (2016), note that GSAs, and LGBTQ+ policies do have a deep impact on the perceived level of support for LGBTQ+ students on campus. But Day et al. (2019) note limitations on the impact of this fact on LGBTQ+ students themselves, harkening back to Mayo's (2013) point that these organizations often focus more on their straight members than on their true impact on their LGBTQ+ peers.

Chapter Summary

Taken altogether, this literature review supports a number of key areas of interest in underpinning the need for further research into LGBTQ+ students' experience of the Mentoring

Program at the University of Miami. Theorists agree that there is a key connection between the lived experience of social injustice that relates to their identities, collegiate programming that shapes students' identities, and programming that bridges the gap between these two.

The impact of development programs for college students is robustly researched and measured through a variety of both qualitative and quantitative studies. There also exists significant research on the lived injustice experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals. At this time, however, there is a gap in the research around programs and learning experiences that focus on LGBTQ+ students; therefore, this connection merits further discussion and exploration. A phenomenological examination of how students in the Mentoring Program at the University of Miami make meaning of their experiences will help to begin filling this crucial gap in the canon of research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction & Overview

This chapter provides a brief overview of the methods that I used to explore how participants make meaning of their experiences in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. After delineating the rationale for the study and its structure, I will briefly explain the research methods I used, and outline potential threats to research, before addressing potential issues with ethics.

Purpose

This study explored the ways in which members of an LGBTQ+ student organization make meaning of their experience in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. Peer-reviewed research such as that done by Cammarota & Fine (2010) into the experiences of other marginalized groups suggests that programs such as this impact the ways in which members of oppressed groups make meaning of their identity. Thus, it is imperative that researchers examine the ways in which the members of this group experience their education.

This study seeks to help close a gap in the literature by adding the missing voices of LGBTQ+ college students to the canon of literature in the field of adult education, as recommended by current researchers such as Collins (2018). These researchers present the argument for further examination of LGBTQ+ students' experiences, in order to inform better practices to support LGBTQ+ students on college campuses. By examining the experience of students within this program, we may support educators at other campuses in making more informed choices about the possible impact of implementation of similar programs on their own campuses.

Research Questions

This study employed a phenomenological approach to answer the following research questions intended to explore college students' shared experiences in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. The questions are:

- How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?

- How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?

- How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?

- How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?

Rationale for Approach

Prior to embarking on research, it is important to thoroughly consider the literature base of the topic and from that base determine the best research approach to reach the desired outcomes of the study. In this section, I will outline the current research on best practices in research design, and explain why I have made each critical choice in designing the research model for this study.

Qualitative Research

Initially, this study was proposed as a quantitative study, which would use logistic regression to assess the impact of participation in gender studies coursework on student success rates in undergraduate education. This approach was chosen due to the nature of the variables to be used, but barriers to success quickly presented themselves. As planned, logistic regression would have required a sample size of over 1,200 students in order to properly analyze the correlation between participation in gender studies courses and positive outcomes for students. The challenge with that approach was whether or not it was possible to actually secure

student-level data for this many students. As noted by Windmeyer et al. (2013), at that point in time, there were merely two schools, Elmhurst and the University of Iowa, that asked students for LGBTQ+ identification on their college application, or tracked student-level data in this way. In reviewing the data on Data USA's higher education database (2020), it became clear that the number of institutions asking for this information had not increased, thus representing a major challenge to accessing the required data set to do logistic regression.

The other numerical barrier presented by logistic regression was whether or not 1,200 students who had taken gender studies courses actually *exist* within the data. This challenge is underpinned by a review of the available data on Data USA (2020), which indicated that in 2017, only 45 Gay & Lesbian Studies degrees were awarded in the United States. Given such a small number (which was actually a 45% increase from the number awarded in 2016), the likelihood that nearly 27 times as many students exist within the data and have taken the coursework seemed far-fetched at best, necessitating a review of other possible approaches.

A smaller pool of available data would have required a conversion to a linear regression analysis, but then the challenge would become whether or not schools would be willing to release student-level data on a smaller pool of students, as this increases the likelihood of identifiability being a barrier. If, for instance, Elmhurst only has data on 20 LGBTQ+ students, they may be unwilling to release data attached to the various identifiers needed for quantitative methodology, further complicating the feasibility of the statistical analysis required. For these reasons, I chose a qualitative approach.

In this study, in particular due to the sensitivity of the issues being discussed, it was important to establish a trusting relationship with the students in question. It was made clear to all participants that the research process is shared, with both researcher and participants building

a shared meaning of the phenomena being explored. Due to the complex and personal nature of questions of sexual orientation and identity, it was important to keep the trust of participants sacred in all interactions. I did this from the very initial reach-out, sharing a bit about my experience as a gay man and my interest in the study. I also opened our interviews by sharing a bit of my background and the personal nature of my interest in this area of research.

Creswell (2018) describes some of the key characteristics of qualitative research as needing the researcher to be the key instrument in study. While the researcher may utilize a protocol, interview instrument, or other method for collecting data, the researcher ultimately occupies the place of designing the instrument and interpreting the data, rather than relying on external tools to do so. Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2018), also typically works inductively, building meaning through the research, rather than analyzing to seek deductive conclusions. Based on these characteristics, taken into account with the limitations discussed above that presented barriers to quantitative investigation, a qualitative approach yielded the best approach.

Phenomenology

In the field of qualitative research, there are many methodologies from which the researcher can choose. In considering other traditions, such as case studies or participatory action research (as described by Carmen et al., 2015), it became clear that many of these approaches are geared towards fields where there is a great deal more research previously established. In dealing with a smaller program like the one focused on here, with somewhat limited participation (based on the target demographic) and only a few years of students to interview, phenomenology was best suited to address the experiences that this group of students shares. In addition, phenomenology, with its focus on how participants make meaning of their shared experiences,

seemed to align most closely in a philosophical sense with the theoretical framework that was established.

As previously discussed, Rhoads (1997) and Renn (2015) have argued as part of the newer waves of theory in sexual identity development that a staged development approach to this topic is inappropriate. The replacement idea in the field circulates around the idea that individuals should be able to place themselves within this development trajectory based on lived experience and how they make meaning of that experience. Given the focus of phenomenology on how individuals make meaning of shared experiences, the approach seemed a natural fit to this theoretical framework.

Mottern (2013) gives a strong overview of the history of phenomenology as an approach, tracing its roots back to existential philosophy. As a research method, Valle et al. (1989) describe phenomenology as "the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (p. 6)," Meanwhile Creswell (2009) stated that "phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. Understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method" (p. 13). The objective of this research (making meaning of shared experience) seemed well-aligned to the objective of identity development as elucidated by Troiden (1989), which similarly creates meaning based on both individual and shared experiences of an identity.

Mottern (2013) describes a phenomenological method suggested by Thomas and Pollio (2002) that was used by a phenomenology research group at the University of Tennessee. It serves as a method of doing existential hermeneutic phenomenology research, and was the method proposed for use in this study. "Hermeneutics" is the term for the study of interpretation

(George, 2020). Thus, this method focuses on the study of people's existential interpretation of their own lives, utilizing the research method of phenomenology.

The diagram below shows a visual description of the method for doing existential phenomenology based on dialogic research that was developed at the University of Tennessee. This method has been used multiple times in adult education research at the university level (Anderson, 2008; Anderson et al., 2007; Donaghy, 2005; Frye, 2007; Frye et al., 2005). The prior usage of this approach shows the potential value of this phenomenological approach to the field of adult education research. This approach thus supported me in taking a research-grounded approach to making meaning of LGBTQ+ students' experiences in the peer mentorship program.
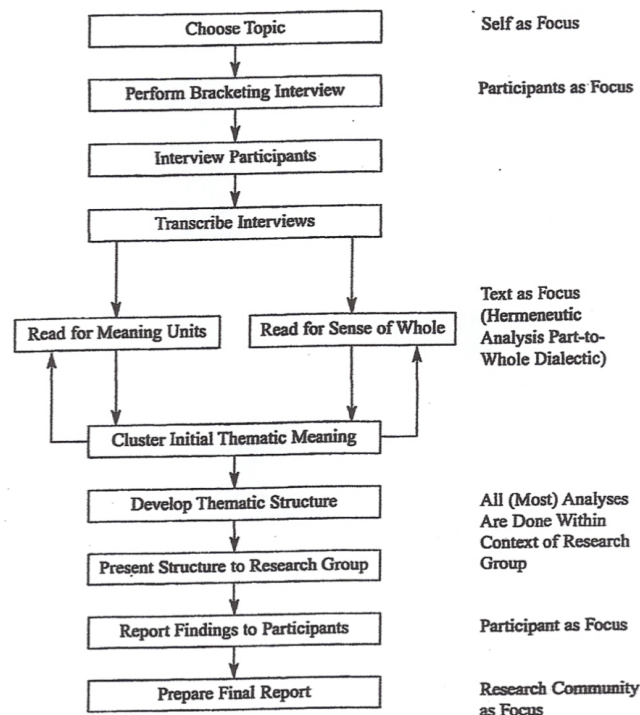
Figure 2. Graphical representation of the stages of the phenomenological research approach created by the University of Tennessee. Adapted from *Listening to patients: A phenomenological approach to nursing research and practice*, by S. P. Thomas & H. R. Pollio, 2002, p. 63. Copyright 2002 by Springer.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) note, there are specific approaches that should be selected for a study based on the attributes of the study, to ensure that there is alignment between the method and the research in question. Phenomenology, with its focus on how participants make meaning of their shared experiences, aligns most closely in a philosophical sense with the theoretical framework of sexual identity development theory, as identity development hinges on the self-perception of individuals, and their integration into the world. Phenomenology, in an existential sense, refers to study of things as they appear, to help shed light on the essential meaning of humans' experiences (Valle et al., 1989). It is also a strategy of inquiry focused on finding the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon, using the descriptions of participants (Creswell, 2009).

Ultimately, due to the fact that the research questions relate directly to the shared experience of this group of students who have all engaged in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, a phenomenological study design was used to explore the shared experience of these students, and the ways in which they make meaning of this experience and their identities.

Overview

Ultimately, this study seeks to add to the literature surrounding LGBTQ+ students' experience within higher education by exploring students' perception of their participation in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. By collecting demographic data on these participants, then conducting a series of interviews with them exploring their experiences in the program, as well as their perception of their own identity, we could begin to make sense of how each participants' sexual identity and their experience in the program are interrelated. In doing so, we could also begin to highlight the importance of this type of programming on collegiate campuses.

Research Sample

Research Sample & Population

The population for this study was current students and alumni of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. In addition to the students who are currently in the program, the current number of alumni of this program is several dozen. The director of the program functioned as the gatekeeper and agreed to identify participants and assist with the invitation process.

The University of Miami is a private university that costs approximately $66,000 per year to attend, according to Data USA (2021). The makeup of students is relatively diverse, with approximately 40% of students identifying as white, followed by Hispanic/Latinx students at 27%, Black students at 7%, and Asian students at about 5% of the total population. The student body is approximately 53% female, which is also reflected in the degrees awarded by the institution.

The LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program is a program implemented by the LGBTQ+ Student Center at the University of Miami, and is available to any students who are interested, from undergraduate to graduate level study. Students are selected for the program by filling out an application that covers their personal areas of interest, identity, and the interests they have in terms of a mentor (Vega 2020). Mentor applicants also fill out a background profile in order to help guide matching with mentees. All parties then attend a "mixer" event where they are able to "speed date" between different mentors and mentees and begin seeking out a best fit. Mentee applicants then rank their highest interests in terms of potential mentors, which guides Dr. Vega (the program coordinator) in matching students with mentors based on best fit. Once students enter the program, they are able to set a rhythm that makes sense with their mentor, ranging from

weekly meetings up to monthly check-ins. The mentorship program also holds social events for mentees to gather with other LGBTQ+ students and engage in social programming and community-building. Students are welcome in the program for the duration of their time at the University of Miami, and may continue on into graduate school if they are staying at the University for that portion of their academic careers.

The LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program draws from the larger campus population but may not be representative of the student population as a whole, due to the fact that there are multiple layers involved in identifying this subpopulation. For instance, students must self-identify as LGBTQ+ in order to qualify for the program. This may be a barrier to representative inclusion because, as Patton (2011) noted, Black men in particular face barriers to self-identification within the LGBTQ+ community, such as social and religious stigma that create challenges within families and social settings when they choose to self-identify as LGBTQ+.

Purposeful Sampling Strategy

According to Le Vasseur (2003), phenomenological research requires 3-10 participants for successful saturation of interview data. In order to reach saturation, snowball sampling was utilized, beginning with the gatekeeper interview, and utilizing referrals beyond this initial round of interviews. Because of the challenges with consistency of access for undergraduate students, as noted by Terenzini and Pascarella (1998), it was important to identify responsible, responsive students who were likely to participate in 1-2 interviews. This set of criteria was used to guide the initial set of students selected for research, as well as to quality check the referrals gathered from initial rounds of interviews with other students.

Criteria for Sample Selection

Van Manen (2007) points to the fact that phenomenology is primarily focused on making meaning of shared experience, so the criteria for selection for this study were quite simple, as the most important thing to consider was whether the subjects in fact are a part of the shared experience being examined. Students were required to be members or alumni of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, and were recommended by the Program Director. Demographic information collected in the first interview with each student was used once the initial round of interviews concluded, in order to assess whether a sample was selected that was sufficiently representative of the student body as a whole (this information can be found in Chapter 4). This was done by comparing the demographic statistics of the sample with the demographic statistics of the University as a whole in order to make a determination.

Site Location

The location of the program is in Miami, Florida, but given my current location in East Africa, COVID travel restrictions, and the fact that students were in their home locations during the time before and after winter break, all interactions in this study took place virtually, over Zoom.

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Overview of Information Needed

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The information needed is presented in the form of a table below, as a means of giving a high-level overview of all information that was needed for the study, while also illustrating alignment between the research questions and the chosen methodology and qualitative research approach.

Table 1: Overview of information needed. Presentation of alignment between types of data needed for this study, the research questions of the study, and the method of data collection for each type of information.

	Type of Information Needed	Information Yielded	Method of Data Collection
Demographic Post-Survey	Demographic	Age, Gender, Ethnicity, SES, Background, etc.	Adapted SERBAS-Y Survey Instrument
Research Question #1: How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?	Perceptual	Participants' Self-Identification Status	Adapted Semi-Structured Interviews from Rosario et al. (2011) and Fuller (2016) instruments
Research Question #2: How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?	Contextual	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas	Adapted Semi-Structured Interviews from Rosario et al. (2011) and Fuller (2016) instruments
Research Question #3: How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?	Perceptual Contextual	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	Adapted Semi-Structured Interviews from Rosario et al. (2011) and Fuller (2016) instruments
Research Question #4: How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?	Perceptual Contextual	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	Adapted Semi-Structured Interviews from Rosario et al (2011) and Fuller (2016) instruments

Research Design

The design for this research is modeled on the method for doing existential

phenomenology based in dialogic research, as utilized by researchers at the University of

Tennessee. As previously mentioned, this approach has been well-documented and vetted as a result of being adopted as the "official" research model by the doctoral program at the University, and thus lent itself well to the validity and reliability of results. The approach, described by Thomas & Pollio (2002), followed the University's planned process of developing the initial steps of data collection, beginning with bracketing interviews, then working into first and follow up rounds of interviews, which were then followed up by thematic analysis and member checking with participants before final analysis and presentation.

<div align="center">Data Collection Methods & Tools</div>

Literature Review

Prior to data collection, a review of selected literature was undertaken. Although the literature which was reviewed and synthesized in the preceding chapter informs this study, it is not data to be collected. The information obtained and reviewed in the process of the literature review informed the decisions made for the data collection design that follows, and can be seen as the framework within which this study exists.

Data Collection: Gatekeeper Interview & Qualitative Documents

Creswell (2018) describes initial interviews with a "gatekeeper" as the first step in a qualitative process where the population includes a population with controlled access (such as students at an institution). The founder and director of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program served as the gatekeeper for this study. Her interview allowed the establishment of trust, ensured access to students, and also informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions by providing further information about the structure and components of the mentorship program, as well as its theoretical underpinnings, and her approach in designing the program.

During the gatekeeper interview, I also requested access to printed/digital documents that describe the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, which further contributed to the development of semi-structured interview questions. By incorporating these information points into the process of developing the interview questions, I was able to ensure that the interview itself was tailored to the program in question, and could elicit higher quality responses from participants.

Due to my physical location in East Africa (and challenges with international travel due to COVID-19), I conducted interviews via Zoom. First, I sought IRB approval from the University of Arkansas to conduct the study. Once the gatekeeper made the initial round of referrals, I submitted for IRB approval, then invited students to participate in the study and conducted an initial email screening for Zoom connectivity and availability with each participant. This ensured accessibility for quality interviews that yielded transcribable results. The invitation to participate can be found in Appendix A.

Minichiello & Kottler (2010) describe phenomenology as the exploration of the interior experience of a phenomenon, thus pointing to the importance of strong trust-building between researcher and participants. For this reason, in the first portion of the interview I utilized shared story-telling as a way to share my own experience and to begin to create a sense of trust and shared community with my participants. Creswell (2018) also clearly delineates the value and importance of trust in phenomenological research, and this need is heightened in the presence of a virtual-only environment. This approach provided participants with the opportunity to introduce themselves and to ask questions about the research process, which helped increase trustworthiness of ongoing interview results.

The strength of this approach, according to Creswell (2018), is that it may help to ensure that access can be had to the population. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, it can be a

challenge to access college students, who are oftentimes protected from access by the general public, for qualitative interviews. The gatekeeper's knowledge of individual students helped us overcome the challenges presented by interviewing college students that Terenzini & Pascarella (1998) note.

The challenges of this approach were that, with the gatekeeper being the individual selecting the participants, it might have been potentially challenging to attain a representative sample of the population. This would have impacted the transferability of the study's findings. For this reason, I used demographic markers in the interview process in an attempt to ensure that we were able to generate transferable results through the research process.

Data Collection: Demographics

The first portion of the interview was intended to collect demographic data and information on the psychosexual and sociosexual development of each participant. Based on the work of Rosario et al. (2011), adapted portions of the SERBAS-Y (Sexual Risk Baseline Assessment for Youth) were utilized to assess how individuals identify, as well as how their sexual and social behaviors align with their identity. This assessment, in both its original and adapted forms, can be found in Appendix A. This tool utilizes various measures of psychosocial and sociosexual development to determine what stage of development each participant is in. While this measure is typically used in quantitative analysis, having this information helped me look for possible limitations of the study's conclusions (depending on the homogeneity of the group), as well as ensure there was adequate representation to avoid a monolithic or ethnocentric interpretation.

The advantages of this approach are that utilization of this instrument allowed for inclusion of a previously tested instrument in collecting demographic data. The demographic

data collection also allowed for analysis of the sample population to ensure that the sample is as representative as possible of the general population at the University of Miami and, where representation is not possible, ensure that the analysis accounted for any necessary gaps. The challenge of this approach was that starting with demographic questions could undermine the attempt to build a collegial and open atmosphere in the interview by positioning me quite plainly as a researcher with "subjects," rather than colleagues. Terenzini & Pascarella (1998) note that modern college students value a more friendly type of relationship with the interviewer, so it may present challenges in developing the atmosphere needed for the semi-structured interviews to be successful. To account for this, I moved the demographic interview to the end of the interviews to allow the beginning portion to be more collegial.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

In each Zoom call, I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants using an interview protocol (Appendix A). Interviews were conducted and recorded in Zoom and generally lasted 45 minutes to one hour.

Interview questions were developed based on triangulation and integration of a variety of sources:

- the SERBAS-Y mentioned above, which measures psychosocial and sociosexual, development of participants

- Rosario et al.'s (2011) survey questions of sexual identity development, which seek to quantify the sexual identity development of participants within the spectrum,

- Fuller's (2016) interview questions for motivation in selecting identity-based coursework, which seek to understand why students may select specific coursework or programming based on their own individual identities,

- the gatekeeper interview & document review,

- and the research questions for this study.

These questions were developed to be broad enough to allow for the open-ended discussions required by phenomenology, while still guiding the discussion enough to generate meaningful data. Original versions of adapted instruments, as well as the final integrated baseline questions for the interviews, can be found in Appendix A. This broadly structured, yet guided, approach is modeled upon the recommendation made by Morgan (2014) when considering how to best approach phenomenological interviews.

I developed a standardized interview protocol whereby I recorded the interview on Zoom, also utilized an audio-recording device (to ensure a back-up), and took reflexive notes during the interview to help ensure reflexivity of myself as the interviewer. All interview protocols were checked and approved by my committee and the IRB prior to commencement of this stage of data collection.

The advantage of utilizing this approach was that, using the literature as a guide, I was able to adapt my instrument from previously-tested instruments that have been utilized by others in peer-reviewed publications, while still adapting them to the population I was studying. This helped to increase the reliability of my own interview instrument. Semi-structured interviews are also noted as the norm in qualitative research today by Creswell (2018), so it was helpful to approach the interviews utilizing the accepted approach in the field. The challenge of this approach was that, in utilizing pre-written interviews, it was a bit challenging to discern the appropriate portions to modify, and which to use as written. If used in too prescriptive a way, it could make it challenging to make the interview instrument responsive to the sample. I was able to overcome this by testing the protocol using a bracketing interview with one of my doctoral

program colleagues. This allowed me to see how well the interview flowed, tweak my questions slightly, and ensure I was ready to utilize it with students.

Data Collection: Analysis

Once the interview stage was complete, each recording was transcribed via automatic service. I then verified and corrected the transcripts by reading through each manuscript while audio-checking the recordings. Then I analyzed the data, using the phenomenological approach outlined by Thomas & Pollio (2002). This approach began with two initial readings of each transcript, the first for meaning units within the text, and the second for the sense of the meaning of the whole transcript. These readings aligned with the part-to-whole stage of hermeneutic analysis and helped maximize the utility of the following stages.

Following the initial review, I clustered initial thematic meanings and developed the thematic structure of my findings. Throughout this process, I returned to reading the manuscript in its entirety as often as necessary to further crystallize the thematic meanings that I elucidated in my coding. Once these codes were distilled into the thematic structure, I began to elucidate the other items required of phenomenological research, such as significant statements, meaning units, and an essence description (Moustakas, 1994).

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Ethical Issues

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Students were made aware that their privacy was protected. No results, individual or collective, were to be able to be tracked back to any individual student. This was particularly important due to the participants' status as undergraduate students, as well as their status as LGBTQ+ individuals, who are already at greater risk of violence and other challenges than other collegiate students, as was documented by Windmeyer et al. (2013).

Additionally, due to the fact that traumatic experiences often inform students' experience of their identity, it was important to remind participants prior to interviews that they might be asked to relive past traumatic experiences. I was always prepared to stop interviewing students at any point if reliving past traumatic events was too painful.

Students' data and information also had to be sufficiently anonymized in the final presentation to ensure that their identities are not exposed. Given the small sample size that is required by phenomenology, this became even more crucial. It was important for nothing that is published to contain enough identifying information to easily identify any student, so I made this a portion of the external audit that I completed prior to submission of the final report.

Trustworthiness

In phenomenological research generally, but especially given the positionality information shared below, it was critical that steps be taken to ensure trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the data that is generated. Trustworthiness in this type of research requires credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, steps have been taken from the initial pieces of design to attempt to maximize trustworthiness. In choosing previously tested strategies, I knew that I was increasing the likelihood of trustworthiness being high. The following strategies were utilized to maximize trustworthiness and ensure that the findings of this study can withstand critical peer review.

Bracketing

Chan et al. (2013) describe bracketing as "a useful methodological device to demonstrate validity in phenomenology (p. 6)." The authors note that as researchers, in order to achieve bracketing, we must first "assess whether we are suitable for conducting a phenomenological study (p.4)." To accomplish this, Tufford & Newman (2014) recommend using a bracketing

interview prior to beginning interviews with subjects. Bracketing is a technique in phenomenological research wherein the interviewer completes the interview as a participant. Rolls & Relf (2006) also recommend the bracketing interview as a strategy to help remove personal bias and allow the interviewer to truly enter the phenomenological mindset by centering themselves in the experience of the subject. Morgan (2011) recommends enlisting a professional or peer (but someone external to the study) to actually give the interviewer the interview, code it, and write it up the same way that the subjects' interviews will be treated. I implemented this strategy using the help of one of my doctoral program colleagues, who gave me the interview protocol via Zoom. Engaging in this process allowed me to ensure that my questions flowed well, were adaptable as needed to respond to the real-time experience of the interview, and also allowed me to ensure that the questions were likely to generate results that would be usable to answer the research questions as written. This was done prior to engaging in any interviews with study participants and the results were positive, garnering helpful feedback from my doctoral colleague, and allowing me to confidently utilize my protocol in the final interviews.

Member-Checking

Creswell (2018) denotes member checking as one of the most important techniques that can be utilized in order to determine the accuracy of qualitative findings. At the final stage of research, I returned my results (in the form of summaries, with the final copy of chapters 4 and 5) to participants for their review and feedback, and corrected any issues that they noted. The majority of participants did not have any major changes to note, except for a couple of transcription errors on words / titles of programs that were challenging to understand from the audio, which were promptly corrected and re-checked with participants. Participants expressed gratitude for being included in the process, and were interested to see how their experiences

related to others' in the same program, as well as seeing the breakdown of the themes and answers to the research questions. I believe this was an effective iteration of member checking to ensure that the participants were able to properly receive and comment on the findings and summary.

Peer Debriefing

Creswell (2018) also makes a case for peer debriefing as a key strategy for increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research. This process involves enlisting a peer (which I utilized in the form of a doctoral graduate from a different school) to review and ask questions about each stage of the qualitative study, so that the information presented and the overall study are meaningful to those who are not as close to this subject.

I enlisted a peer who is completely separate from the study, in terms of my potential proximity biases and also in terms of their field of specialty, to ensure that the debrief viewpoint was as neutral as possible. A close friend of mine, who has a PhD in Educational Leadership from LSU, provided the basis for my peer debrief. By gathering data from this outside perspective, I was able to add interpretation beyond myself and ensure that the final account which I presented for the study had validity.

Audit Trail

Once I completed my study and wrote my final report, I was able to enlist an external auditor, as recommended by Creswell (2018). This person provided an objective assessment of the study as a whole, reviewed the final manuscript for clarity and readability, and ensured that, even if the audience is unfamiliar with my writing style, the results of my study are valid. As discussed below, I also believe that this helped to ensure ethical issues of privacy and safety for vulnerable students were respected, and that all students could participate in the study freely.

Limitations & Delimitations

As noted elsewhere in this paper, the largest external factors limiting this study were the difficulties in accessing LGBTQ+ college students for study, and the internal barriers that impact LGBTQ+ young people. The self-imposed issues that authors such as Patton (2011) note made it more challenging to get a sample that was not impacted by the limitations of the survey sample, but there was no way for the researcher to impact this. Certain groups (Black men, Latinx men, etc.) are more likely to avoid self-identification with the LGBTQ community, and thus I was worried that these voices might be excluded from this study. However, based on the final survey sample demographics, it was important to assess the transferability of the findings, and I was happy to note that these critical voices were very well represented.

Delimitations here are imposed to make this study feasible within a reasonable timeframe. As noted elsewhere, LGBTQ+ people face a multitude of barriers, across all facets of society. However, in order for this study to be feasible, we only looked at LGBTQ+ students at one campus, who have participated in one program. By creating these delimitations, we made it possible to examine this one program and look at how its participants make meaning of it, without being waylaid by the varying challenges that impact LGBTQ+ students outside the program, or indeed LGBTQ+ people in the world beyond undergraduate education.

Researcher Positionality

As shared in the personal statement in Chapter One, I personally identify as a gay man, meaning that I am positioned extremely closely to the topic at hand. This means that I had to work diligently to ensure that I utilized reflexive thinking in my research process, maintaining distance from my subjects and ensuring that I did not project my own beliefs and experiences onto them. In order to do this, I avoided oversharing personal experience in interviews to help

avoid contaminating the interview subjects. In the interest of building trust, I did need to balance this with the need to occasionally share to create a safe space, but to offset this, I pre-planned the anecdotes I was willing to share, then vetted them with peers prior to embarking on research to ensure that I was able to balance these two interests sufficiently.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the research and analysis methods that I utilized to investigate LGBTQ+ students' experiences within the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, as well as the challenges presented in accessing large numbers of students, phenomenological research, with semi-structured interviews, was the most appropriate research approach.

In order to achieve this, students were interviewed and the results were analyzed and interpreted through a phenomenological lens to better understand the shared experience of these students. The analysis is presented in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, with a discussion of the conclusions and implications for future research presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter Four: Presenting Findings

Introduction & Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine and explore the ways in which participants in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami made meaning of their shared experience in the program. The researcher believed that by examining the experience of students within this program, it is possible to support educators at other campuses in making more informed choices about the possible impact of implementation of similar programs on their own campuses. In completing this phenomenological study, a model developed by the University of Tennessee for phenomenological research was implemented, which involves constructing a thematic structure for the research results based on meaning units and the meaning of interviews as a whole. This chapter presents background information on the cohort interviewed, as well as the key findings, presented as themes, obtained from 10 in-depth interviews with students and alumni of the program. Six major thematic structures arose from this study:

1. Overall, students regarded the program as highly important and meaningful, with many benefits to them as LGBTQ+ students.

2. Students reported a variety of challenges that they faced specifically as LGBTQ+ students, which the program helped them address and navigate.

3. Many students highlighted the importance of exposure to LGBTQ+ role models and elders.

4. In general, students reported that the importance of the program, as well as the centrality of their LGBTQ+ identity to themselves as individuals, *decreased* the longer they had been out of the closet.

5. Students generally pointed to the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ+ community and meeting other LGBTQ+ students, in addition to their mentors.

6. Students often highlighted the program director herself as a key feature of both their motivation to participate in the program and the impact they experienced as a result of participation.

The thematic findings of the phenomenological study addressed the research problem, indicating that more needed to be done to assess the impact of the campus environment on LGBTQ+ students' quality of life, and the need for further research to understand the way in which students make meaning of their experience in LGBTQ+-specific projects such as the one studied.

Demographics of Sample Cohort & University Demographics

One of the critical areas of concern in considering potential limitations of any study is representativeness of the sample cohort utilized. For this reason, each interview concluded with research-based demographic interview questions to gather details about the background of each individual and assess representativeness of the cohort. Demographic results are presented below:

Table 2: Comparison of demographics of sample cohort and university population.
Presentation of data from Data USA (2021) measuring the gender and racial demographics of the University of Miami as a whole, compared to the gender and racial demographics of the sample cohort obtained for this study.

Demographic Area	University of Miami Population	Sample Cohort
Women	53%	30%
Men	47%	30%
Nonbinary Persons	Not Tracked	40% (30% born female, 10% born male)
White	40%	40%
Black	7%	30%
Latinx	27%	20%
Asian	5%	10%

An analysis of these results points to each demographic area being within 10% of the percentage representation in the overall population of the University of Miami, with the exception of Black students, who are slightly over-represented in the sample cohort. Nonbinary persons, who are not tracked at the University-wide level, were broken down by sex assigned at birth to determine proportional representation when taken together with those who still identify with their sex assigned at birth. This was intended merely as a tool to help ensure maximum reliability of the data, not in order to misgender any participants, which is why they are still represented in the "Nonbinary Persons" category in this data set. It is the opinion of the researcher that these results can thus be interpreted as being reliable when interpreted within the context of the wider University of Miami population.

Introduction to the Study Cohort

What follows are a series of interview summaries prepared after the transcription and thematic coding of each interview. These are intended to give the reader a deeper understanding of the lived experience of each individual, as these lived experiences and the ways in which they diverge and converge, represent the essential work of understanding how the participants make meaning of that lived experience.

P1 Interview Summary

P1 is a queer, nonbinary sophomore at the University of Miami and had a fluid, unlabeled mentor. P1 came out 6 years ago to family and friends. They are fairly well-established in their nonheterosexual identity, although the specifics of their identity are still fluid and flexible. They are no longer in the mentorship program, having spent their freshman year as a part of it. In discussing the mentorship program, a number of key themes emerged. P1 noted how helpful their mentor was as an older queer person, helping guide them to (gender) transition resources and helping them find their place as a queer person at the University of Miami. Having a queer role model also gave P1 an anchor for what happiness and success can look like as a queer person after the college experience ends. P1 also noted that their mentor was helpful outside of the queer space, guiding them to other campus programs and educational experiences that have enriched their experience at the University. This denotes an impact and level of benefit both within the queer campus experience, and the campus experience in general.

P2 Interview Summary

P2 identifies as a Black, bisexual, gender nonbinary junior at the University of Miami. P2 has been out for 6 years, and has a gay male mentor. P2 joined the mentorship program as a freshman and has remained in the program since then. P2 was drawn to the mentorship program

because it helped them feel less alone as a freshman, and has stayed active because the program has given them guidance both in how to grow into their identity as a young, queer professional, and because of the professional and collegiate guidance they have received from their mentor. P2 strongly identifies the mentorship program as a positive aspect of their collegiate experience, referring to it as the "backbone" of their University of Miami experience. While there are still challenges with finding intersectional opportunities for support around race and gender/sexuality, P2 notes that the mentorship program has provided them with better support than the career center. Joining the program to find access to queer elders and professional guidance, P2 has found both, noting that the program has provided them with multiple professional opportunities that would otherwise not be available, and bridging lines of difference to find a common LGBTQ+ identity with their mentor, helping them feel greater connection to the larger LGBTQ+ community at University of Miami.

P3 Interview Summary

P3 is an alumna of the University of Miami who identifies as bisexual and female. She has been out for 6 years. She participated in the mentorship program as a senior, in her final year at the university, and had a straight male mentor. P3 was motivated to join the mentorship program through a personal interest in its founder, Dr. Vega, as well as a desire to gain further connection to the LGBTQ+ community at University of Miami. During the program, themes that emerged were a deepening of professional skills and access to professional opportunities for after graduation. P3 also discussed the positive impact she was able to have on her mentor as an ally, and a deepened connection to the LGBTQ+ community at the University. She also noted that now, having graduated, with less of the level of support and programming specific to sexuality, she feels less connected to her identity than she did at the University. She spoke of a desire to

find more opportunities like this in order to be able to recapture this connection, and continue her journey of self-discovery, as her identity continues to evolve.

P4 Interview Summary

P4 is a freshman at the University of Miami who identifies as a Black, gay male. He has been out for a little less than one year, having come out to a school counselor and then to his family at the end of his high school career. His mentor is a bisexual male. As someone who has only recently come out to himself, the mentorship program is one of the first LGBTQ+ community activities that he has taken part in. He was motivated to join the program because, as a new student and a newly out individual, he wanted to find deeper connections to the LGBTQ+ community, as well as find someone to talk to about issues of sexuality openly. Themes that emerged included feeling a deeper sense of connection to the LGBTQ+ community on campus, finding a deeper sense of self, and having someone with whom to discuss homophobia and other challenges facing the queer community. P4 also discussed the ways that the program has motivated him to seek out more leadership opportunities, and has motivated him to continue building his connections to the LGBTQ+ community at University of Miami.

P5 Interview Summary

P5 is a graduate student from Latin America who identifies as a bisexual woman. Due to the challenges with being openly gay in her home country, she has only recently fully come out. Having just come to the University of Miami this year, she is in her first year in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, with a mentor who also identifies as a bisexual woman. P5 was motivated to join the program upon first arriving on campus and seeing that the University took steps to actively support queer students, and also by wanting to be a part of something larger. Themes that arose in our discussion of the impacts of the program included a sense of feeling a deeper

connection to the LGBTQ+ community on campus, feeling more confident in herself and her own identity, and learning to be a young queer professional in her field of work. She noted that, prior to joining the program, she had nobody she could talk to about her identity or her place in the community, but the program has given her this, and has overall changed her life for the better.

P6 Interview Summary

P6 is a freshman at the University of Miami who identifies as an Indian-American female. She has only come out since attending college, and then only to close friends. Having just begun at the University of Miami, she is in her first year in the mentorship program, and has a mentor who identifies as a bisexual woman. P6 was motivated to join the program because she felt like she did not have access to the LGBTQ+ community, or especially to older queer people who could help guide her as she develops in her own identity. She noted that the program has been very important to her, and in fact is her main extracurricular focus as she navigates her developing identity as a "fledgling" member of the LGBTQ+ community. Themes that arose in our discussion of the impacts of the program included a sense that she can now better explain her identity to others, has found it easier to come out to new people, and has been able to develop a better and deeper understanding of, and connection to, the queer community.

P7 Interview Summary

P7 is a freshman at the University of Miami who identifies as nonbinary and is attracted to men. They began the process of coming out more than 5 years ago as a middle schooler, having come out to their parents more recently. Having just come to the University of Miami this year, they are in their first year in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, with a mentor who identifies as a gay man. P7 was motivated to join the mentorship program because they didn't have any supports available to them as a high school student in a conservative rural southern

community. Themes that arose in the discussion of the impact of the program included the ability to see the success of older queer people, the ability to have a queer role model, and the guidance they are able to receive as they navigate the queer portion of their identity. P7 noted that the program is "integral to" their success as a college student, and has given them confidence for life as a queer professional in the future.

P8 Interview Summary

P8 is a junior at the University of Miami who identifies as a Latino gay man. Originally from Latin America, he is more out at school than he is at home, for reasons of safety and security, and began the process of coming out more publicly when he arrived at the University. He has been in the mentorship program since his freshman year, and it is the only LGBTQ+ organization he is involved with. He was motivated to join the program because he did not have any supports when he first arrived at the University, and found it very challenging. Upon joining the program, he was matched with a mentor whose identity matched his very closely which helped him feel less alone, and he had a role model and model of success, both personal and professional, that he could look up to. Impacts of the program included him feeling like the University has gone out of its way to back up students like him, feeling less alone, and feeling like he has a model for what success he can obtain as a gay professional and person.

P9 Interview Summary

P9 is a recent alum of the University of Miami, having graduated last year, and who identifies as nonbinary, although they also closely identify still with the identity of Black womanhood. They have been out for about 3 years, having come out while at the University, and they identify as bisexual. Their mentor was a gay male, but they identified Dr. Vega as being the strongest resource that came out of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. Despite the lack of

connection with their individual mentor, they were motivated to join the program soon after coming out, because they were not getting support from their family. Themes that came out in our discussion included a strong sense of connection to the LGBTQ+ community at the University through the program's group and cohort programming, and both personal and professional guidance that they received through Dr. Vega and other individuals at the LGBTQ+ Student Center. Despite the challenges with their mentor, they also noted that the program was an important part of their undergraduate experience, and allowed them to develop a close connection to the University that they would not have had otherwise.

P10 Interview Summary

P10 is a University of Miami alumnus who is also a current student at the Law School, and who identifies as a gay man. He also identifies as a Catholic and notes that his faith is important to him, probably the most important part of his identity. He has been out for 6 years, and while he does not feel that being gay is the most important part of his identity, he does believe it is important to his life and work as an out gay leader on campus. He was motivated to join the mentorship program to increase his connection to the LGBTQ+ network, especially as part of his post-graduate planning. Themes that came out in our discussion included the ways in which his mentor has supported him with post-graduate preparation, his transition to the graduate school, and as a personal support.

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Coding Analysis Results

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What follows are the results of the process of reading and making meaning outlined at the University of Tennessee for phenomenological transcript analysis. Transcripts for each interview were read first for meaning, allowing the interviewer to focus on the larger meaning of students' words and focus on their "story-telling" to make meaning of the information presented within the

interview. Next, each transcript was coded using a process of identifying meaning sub units by adding comments to the document as each sub unit appeared during repeated re-readings. At the same time, these sub units were roughly mapped onto larger meaning units to add an initial sense of grouping (i.e. "benefits" or "challenges"), to assist with the grouping and regrouping process that came after. After transcribing and coding all 10 transcripts, these sub units were then grouped and regrouped to create a thematic structure of the results as a whole, while being placed into a tally grid in Excel, to allow for the possibility of counting and impact analysis. The final result of this process is presented below, in Table 3.

Table 3: Meaning units and sub units from thematic analysis. Presentation of the results of thematic analysis using the hermeneutic phenomenology approach developed by the University of Tennessee and described by Thomson and Pollio (2002). Meaning units are presented in each column, followed by the sub units grouped within that meaning unit and the rate at which each sub unit occurred across coding and thematic analysis of all 10 transcripts.

Meaning Unit	Gender & Sexual Identity / Development		Student Identity		Coming Out	
	Sub Unit	Rate	Sub Unit	Rate	Sub Unit	Rate
	Changing Ideas / Fluid / Interchangeable / Experimenting	19	Alumni	3	At university	6
	Nonbinary	8	Freshman	3	6 years ago	3
	Integral / Important part of me	7	Gender & Sexuality	2	Family	3
	Part of me but not all of me	5	Graduate student	2	Challenges with family	3
	Gay	5	Sophomore	1	To self	3
	Safety & Desire for Comfort	5	Junior	1	Recent	2
	Transitioning / Trans	5	Double major	1	Challenging	2
	Queer	4	Senior	1	Open in America, closed in L. America	2
	Presentation	4			Semi Out / Less Open	2
	Bisexual	4			Involuntary	1
	Female	4			To Counselor	1
	Asexual / Grey Ace	4			Not Out due to safety	1
	Freeing	3			Attacked as an out person	1
	Difference from expectations	3				
	Male	3				
	Learning about community	3				
	Performance	2				
	Queer professional	2				

Table 3 (Cont.)

Meaning Unit	Identity		LGBT Studies Coursework/ Orgs		Motivation	
	Sub Unit	Rate	Sub Unit	Rate	Sub Unit	Rate
	Blackz	5	None	7	Dr Vega	15
	Latin American	3	Spectrum	5	Seeing adult queer success	8
	Student	2	OSTEM	3	Role models	7
	Core Values	1	Concurrent	2	Missing queer elders	6
	American	1	LGBT Student Paper	2	No support	6
	Black AND Queer	1	Other community orgs	2	Hard to Meet Others	5
	Fledgling professional	1	After Program	1	Opportunities	2
	White	1	Minor	1	Someone to help get involved	1
	Indian	1	Less involvement = less connection	1	Want best for me	1
	Writer	1	Ambassador Program	1	Other Orgs	1
	Artist	1	Gay Org in HS	1	Less involved due to other orgs	1
	Black Woman	1	LGBT Greek Org	1	Less involved due to established identity	1
	Catholic	1	OutLaw	1	New perspectives	1
					Seeing support	1
					Desire to be successful	1
					School is backing me up	1
					Build network	1

Table 3 (Cont.)

Meaning Unit	Challenges		Benefits / Impacts of Program		Mentor Attributes / Relationship	
	Sub Unit	Rate	Sub Unit	Rate	Sub Unit	Rate
	COVID Restrictions / Online Format	7	Group Events / Cohort / Meeting Students	25	Encouraging	3
	Schedule	2	Connection to LGBT community	20	Shared cultural understanding	2
	Transphobia / Ignorance	1	School & Professional Advice	14	Cisgender	1
			Connection to resources & Programs	10	Trans support	1
			Not feeling alone / belonging	9	Flexible labels	1
			Sexuality advice	9	Queer	1
			Mentor Relationship	8	Good relationship	1
			Increased Involvement / Leadership	8	Divergent	1
			Learning to be a queer professional	7	Aware of race	1
			High investment & importance	7	Straight male	1
			Less scared to be me	6	Easy to talk to	1
			Weekly meetings	5	Lesbian	1
			Seeing queer adults	5		
			Potential to be happy	4		
			Connection to mentor identity	4		
			LGBT Community Service	3		
			Mental health support	2		

Presentation of Thematic Findings

Following is a discussion of the six thematic structures that became apparent during the thematic analysis of the 10 interview transcripts. Each theme includes a description of evidence that supports the theme, as well as an explanation of how each theme shows the ways in which participants make meaning of their experience in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. Since phenomenology, as described by Valle et al. (1989) and Mottern (2013) is so intensely focused on the individual consciousness of participants, the presentation of evidence is heavily inclusive of participants' voices, allowing them to share the meaning in their own voices, while the researcher weaves these experiences together to highlight key thematic findings.

Illustrative quotations are taken from transcripts to highlight each participant's divergent and convergent experiences of this shared program, while also illustrating the richness and complexity of the ways in which different individuals can experience the same program. Where appropriate, data from thematic code analysis and demographic data is included to further solidify and round out the thematic evidence.

Theme 1: Overall, students experienced the program as highly important and meaningful, with many benefits to them as LGBTQ+ students.

The primary theme of students' reflections on the program was that it was important, with the majority of students (7 out of 10) reporting that the program was "very" or "extremely" important to them. According to thematic analysis, participants reported 34 different varieties of motivations for participation or benefits and impacts of the program on them as participants. Positive impacts shared varied from impacts specific to LGBTQ+ identity and support, and others more specifically related to university or professional guidance.

Some students mentioned the general importance of the program as a whole to them, pointing to the program as a key aspect of their extracurricular involvement at the University of Miami. High investment in the program was mentioned seven times. Two students mentioned mental health support as a key benefit of participation in the program. Students also pointed to the program as a way for them to get involved in other activities and organizations that they might not otherwise have known about or had access to.

> "(The mentorship program) is important to me, it's the backbone of my time here at Miami. If I take away all of my other extracurriculars, the thing that stays on my resume for the longest time is ... the mentorship program. That's the main thing that I did as a freshman, and up to now. So it is very important to me" (P2 2021).

> "I feel like it was really a good opportunity for everyone involved, not just the mentees, but also the mentors, a learning experience for everyone" (P3 2021).

> "I'm enjoying the cohort community, and seeing everyone there. We all sit at a table, we talk to each other. And this conversation we had last meeting, where we all together did a little pop in. And that was really fun. And it's also helped connect me to certain activities that I wouldn't know (about otherwise)" (P4 2021).

Students who mentioned the general importance of the program also pointed to the ways in which it enhanced their ability to be engaged in campus life despite other challenges they were encountering in life at the same point in time. A sense of not feeling alone or a greater sense of belonging as a benefit of the program was mentioned seven times, according to the thematic analysis.

> "It is very important for me just because in my college career, I foolishly did not get involved as much as I wanted to, but it was because I was going through personal things. I feel like every student has a certain awakening throughout their educational lives, and it could happen in high school or happen in college. I feel like for me, it happened in college, and it really impacted my college experience to do other things. So when I came into the LGBTQ+ mentorship program, I was really happy going on campus to go to the office or the meetings" (P9 2022).

> "Yeah, it's actually been really good. My mentor is great. He's super helpful. Not just with LGBTQ+ issues, but just with life stuff. It's really nice to have someone that I can talk to, especially (about these issues)" (P7 2022).

Other students spoke more specifically to the ways in which their mentor was able to support them with LGBTQ+ specific issues, such as navigating their identity or dealing with real-world implications of LGBTQ+ status, such as dealing with life as a transgender individual. Sexuality advice was mentioned as a key benefit of the program nine times, according to thematic analysis. Speaking about their mentor, P1 shared "she works with a lot of trans clients, she has a lot of trans friends who she's helped legally transition because she's in the law school. And so I felt like she would have a lot of resources for me" (2021).

Shared identity was often a frequent point of connection between the students and their mentors. Four students mentioned connection to their mentor's identity as a key facet of the program, and the strength of the mentor relationship was mentioned by 8 out of 10 students. Mentor identities mentioned included gay men, lesbians, bisexual mentors, queer mentors, and straight men. Students also described their mentors as "encouraging" in multiple instances, and "easy to talk to." While not all mentors exactly matched their students' identity status (less than half had a direct correlation between sexuality and gender with their mentor), students pointed to the commonality of sharing queer identity as a major part of what made the program so impactful. Two students spoke specifically to a "shared cultural understanding" that came out of this shared LGBTQ+ status as being a meaningful part of their relationship to their mentors, and students mentioned feeling "less scared to be me" six times, as tracked in the thematic analysis. Beyond this, for students who did have an exact match in identity, this connection and its importance took on additional weight.

> "My mentor's name was M8. I liked him a lot because he was a gay man. But also he was Latino. So for me, it was like, Yes, this is what I'm looking for. It was really important to me. Not only from that he was my culture. But it was nice, because we could speak in Spanish a lot. And then I speak Spanish, and then we got to know each other" (P8, 2022).

The final major area in which students reported receiving benefits and positive impact from the program was in the area of professional and school-related guidance and development. School and professional advice was mentioned 14 times according to the thematic analysis. Students also mentioned connections to other programs and connections to resources 10 times. There were 8 mentions of increased leadership and involvement on campus as a result of participation in the mentorship program. Three students mentioned getting involved with LGBTQ+ community service as a result of their participation.

> "My mentor consistently will recommend me to summer research opportunities, because he's like, I know that you're doing microbiology, so, here's this in microbiology. Or okay, if you don't want to go far, then here's something at the University you can do, things like that. Things that sometimes only people who are on faculty and staff get sent in order to tell students about and we don't get sent these things directly" (P2 2021).

Students also mentioned motivations for participation related to seeing the impact the mentorship program being offered had on them. Ideas related to this included a sense that the school was "backing up" LGBTQ+ students by implementing the mentorship program, and a desire to be successful that lined up with an ability to build one's network, and gain new perspectives by participating in the program.

Theme 2: Students reported a variety of challenges that they faced specifically as LGBTQ+ students, which the program helped them address and navigate.

Interviewees reported a variety of challenges that they face specifically as LGBTQ+ students, which could potentially make their educational journeys more challenging. They also reported the program as helping them navigate and address these issues. As noted above in Theme 1, there were 9 mentions of the program providing advice on sexuality challenges, per thematic analysis. A common area of challenge noted by participants related to coming out. Six of the participants came out during their time at the University, rather than before, and three

noted discrete challenges with coming out to their family. At least 3 participants are also not currently out to their families due to safety issues or other areas of concern. As P2 noted, " I'll be like, Yes, I am non binary. And it's like, well you don't look like that. And I'm like yeah, sometimes there's a reason for that. It's my own safety. It's safety from other people who don't know me" (2021). Thematic analysis also revealed two mentions of coming out as "challenging," two participants who are more out in the USA but not as open in their home countries in Latin America, and two students who choose to be less open or out. One student was outed involuntarily, and at least one participant mentioned not being out due to personal safety concerns. Out students were not necessarily fully safe either, with one student being attacked as an out student leader.

> "College was actually the only time I've ever been back in the closet, because I'm in an all-male (dorm). And it's pretty much an all-straight 40 floor of boys with a communal bathroom, on the 12th floor here, so I was actually back in the closet then. Because I was honestly kind of scared of big giant frat boys with communal bathrooms. So that's the only time I've been back in the closet. In a few situations, with straight men, I'll go back in the closet for a minute" (P7 2022)

> "(I joined at) the time when I came out, and I just thought that I needed support, specifically, because I wasn't getting it from my family. And it was then really offered to me by a professor, because she saw that I was struggling and going through things. So it was a factor that I needed. And it was offered to me, because I had no idea that it existed initially" (P9 2022).

> "In college, I felt like the gender crisis came in. And you know how they say, if you feel the need to ask yourself a lot of times, you probably are. In other words, I was asking myself every other day, am I trans and if you're asking yourself this a lot, to the point where you're losing sleep over it, yeah, you probably are. So then I was like, oh, and then I saw people doing, or I guess, looking like the way I wanted to look. And then that gave me people in the LGBTQ+ community or not, essentially looking how I would want to look, or, carrying themselves the way that I want to carry myself. And that helped me recontextualize, it really is just clothes, you can wear whatever you want, and be in the community, or you can wear whatever you want and not be and it's all good. You know? You can go by whatever pronouns you want, blah, blah, blah, yes, gender is a construct, but also, it's a construct that you can take advantage of. And that's how I thought about it from then on" (P2 2021).

"Being bisexual is really hard. Especially in my country, because most people they get like, Nah, you're just gay. You're saying you're BI. So it's really hard. And that is really important for me. I project myself as bisexual because I think people really don't get it, they have this idea that you're just into girls or boys, and in my mind, how don't they get it" (P5 2021).

"I was attacked as an out gay student leader. In 2019, I was in leadership of the Senate. So I was the Speaker Pro Tempore of the branch, and one of our senators decided to start a rumor that I was not born a man, but that I was a closeted female to male transgender, which was egregiously offensive, and deeply disturbing" (P10 2022).

These challenges, which are unique to LGBTQ+ students, create a desire for a space, and people, with whom students can feel safe. As P4 noted about his mentor, "I'm able to talk to him about stuff. And we talk about stuff within the community and what's happening. And the homophobia that there is against us" (2021). Five students of 10 mentioned a desire for safety & comfort as a key component of their sexual identity. This was also clear in a thematic analysis of students' motivations for joining the program. Six mentions were recorded of "no support" or a lack of prior support as a motivation for joining the mentorship program. The ability to see this support in the program itself was also mentioned as a motivational factor.

"She helped me look at transition resources at the school and what's covered and what isn't. And whether or not that's a plausible thing for during my undergraduate or not. So all of that was quite helpful for me. But I think really what I got out of it was a place to talk every week, something consistent" (P1 2021).

"I think that the first factor (that motivated me to apply to the program) was that I didn't have that kind of support at my university. So I know I was closeted at the university when I was starting in law, but there was no organization like that at my university. So I didn't have that support or anyone to talk about it, besides my friends, to feel that support that I needed. So once I got to University of Miami, the first thing that I saw was a stand of LGBTQ+ community. And it was really surprising for me. And I was like, Okay, I need to get it in there. So then I started talking to them. And they were like, Yeah, we have the mentorship program, you can follow us. And I needed to feel part of something, I really needed that" (P5 2021).

"The high school that I went to was open minded in a sense, but at the same time, it felt very restrictive. So I didn't have anyone I could go to. And when I came to

college, I was like, okay, I'm around new people. And it seems there's more people like me who I can actually go to for help or advice if I ever need it" (P6 2021).

"(The Mentor Program) was a solid 80 when I got here, because I don't have family here. When I came here, I didn't know anyone at that point yet. So I was really, really by myself. And it was hard, because I always was surrounded by family or friends. And then when I got here, I think I had a mental breakdown. Honestly, and then just having someone that was there to talk to you, to have events like theirs to relate to you. It was very good to know" (P8 2022).

"Being able to socialize and vent sometimes, I think, is really important. Because, as I'm sure you're well aware, a lot of stresses that people face are compounded with other stresses in the LGBTQ+ community. Sometimes those things dovetail" (P10 2022).

Theme 3: Many students highlighted the importance of exposure to LGBTQ+ role models and elders.

One theme that was mentioned by multiple students was the interrelated ideas of the need to be more exposed to older LGBTQ+ people and a desire for more queer role models. There were eight mentions of "seeing adult queer success" as a motivation for joining the program, according to thematic analysis, as well as seven mentions of "role models" as a motivating factor. Seven mentions were also made of "learning to be a queer professional" as a positive impact of participation in the program.

"I think I've started to think of myself as sort of a fledgling queer professional because all the mentors are within that category" (P2 2021).

"My mentor, she's someone that I can really go to for advice. And it's one thing to go tell your friends for advice. But, it's different, to talk to someone who's been through the same things that you've been through, and who is older and has more experience. So that's been really nice" (P6 2021).

"I like how he showed me how he was successful, he was doing a good job, he had a partner, all of those things I don't think I see a lot when it comes to LGBTQ (people). So it was nice to have someone to talk to about problems or concerns not only in the professional world, but also in my personal life after college, which he had experienced before" (P8 2022).

"It was like, okay, I can meet LGBTQ+ people who have for lack of a better word 'made it,' you know, in terms of they're teaching faculty or they're staff, or they have a Master's, or they have this or that, or things that may not be in my same

field, but things that I would want to do at some point. So it's more of a role model sort of deal. And that's really what drew me in" (P2 2021).

Students also mentioned the idea that queer adults are missing from young LGBTQ+ people's lives as a motivation factor, with six mentions according to thematic analysis. Five mentions were made of seeing queer adults as a positive impact of participation in the program according to the same analysis, while there were also four mentions of seeing the potential to be happy as another positive impact of participation.

> "It's just cool to see somebody be successful and openly queer, and an adult and openly queer. Because I didn't have really any queer people to look up to and see that in my life. And I think we are missing a lot of our queer elders. So having that was really important to me" (P1 2021).

> "(I was motivated to join by) definitely the fact that I've never gotten to know many people who are a part of the community and especially older people, or people I could go to for advice or anything like that" (P6 2021).

> "It's honestly hard to find queer adults, I feel like I don't have those role models in my life. And so M7 is very successful, he went to Princeton and Columbia, and then he owns the largest car dealership in Miami, super successful, but also simultaneously queer, and out to everyone. So it's really nice to have that role model" (P7 2022).

Theme 4: In general, students reported that the importance of the program, as well as the centrality of their LGBTQ+ identity to themselves as individuals, decreased the longer they had been out of the closet.

Thematic analysis, when overlaid against the measure of the amount of time each student had been out of the closet, produced a seemingly meaningful relationship between the amount of time each student had been out of the closet and two other factors: the centrality of the student's LGBTQ+ identity, and the importance with which they view the program.

For students who have been out for a longer period of time, there was a greater expression of a sense that LGBTQ+ identity was not a central part of their larger life, and a greater sense that the mentorship program was less important to their collegiate experience. At

least three mentions were made of coming out 6 years ago, according to thematic analysis, and at

least one student mentioned being less involved in the mentorship program due to their identity

already being quite established prior to joining. Five mentions were made of the idea that

LGBTQ+ identity is "part of me, but not all of me." Students who had been out for longer were

also more deeply involved with a wider range of other LGBTQ+ organizations. Five mentions

were made of Spectrum, the LGBTQ+ student union, and 3 mentions were made of OSTEM, the

organization for out students in STEM fields. Two students mentioned the LGBTQ+ Student

Newspaper, and two students mentioned other organizations, including OutLaw, an organization

for queer law students, and an LGBTQ+ Greek organization. One student mentioned being less

involved due to this involvement in other organizations, and one student mentioned being less

involved in the LGBTQ+ community after graduation because they were less involved in these

organizations.

> (Out for 6 years) "I have this sort of internal perception of myself, that is just me. And so nothing outside of like, who I am as a person, my personality, the core values that I hold, the actions, the things I care about. Nothing outside of that matters to me at all, but it matters so much to other people. So I'm very comfortable in who I am as a person" (P1 2021).

> (Out for 4 years) "On a scale of one to five, where one is like, I don't care at all and then five is like I am utterly invested. I would say a four. Because I'm not like quite utterly invested, I'm not at the LGBTQ+ center every day" (P2 2021).

> (Out for 6 years) "By the time that the mentorship program, and I had started, I was pretty fine. I was comfortable in my identity. If it had been a couple years prior, when I was just starting college, I think it would have been a more valuable experience or just more relevant to my time in college. When I look back at college, the first thing that comes to my mind is not the mentorship program" (P3 2021).

> (Out for 3 years) "Yes, I'm a gay man. I'm also Latino, and I don't act like a gay person from the States does. Definitely, I feel like sometimes people don't recognize that. I just get put into this category with everyone. So for me, it's kind of annoying, because I'm more than that" (P8 2022).

> (out for 6 years) "I don't wake up with rainbow colored glasses in the morning. And so I don't feel that I personally wake up in the morning and I see everything

and think, wow, how do I as a gay man interpret this? I think part of that may be because I don't consider that to be ... and I'm not saying that I don't celebrate that part of my identity... but I don't consider that to be my only identity, or, frankly, my most important identity" (P10 2022).

(out for 6 years) "I think (the program) is important, I think it's a really great value. I wouldn't say it's like, oh my gosh, if this was canceled, it's the end of the world" (P10 2022).

Alternately, students who recently came out appeared to view the program as the most important to them, while also placing the most importance on their identity as a key portion of their identity. In total, at least two mentions were made of recent coming out, along with seven mentions of LGBTQ+ identity as "central" or "integral" or "a key part of me" according to thematic analysis. In terms of quantitative data, at least four students reported having come out within the last year, or being in a partial process of having come out.

(Out less than 1 year) "(The program) is pretty important to me. It's just given me connections and someone to talk to. So I'd say it's pretty important to me. As I said, I've enjoyed the experience. And I'm so glad I decided to (join). Because I am a fresh new college student. I just came out this year" (P4 2021).

(recently out as nonbinary) "I think it is a very integral part of my life, because I am misgendered on a daily basis. And I feel like attraction is something that comes up in conversation quite a bit" (P7 2022).

(Out 1 year) "For me, (the program) is really important because I need someone that also identifies as a member (of the LGBTQ+ community), and also someone that is going to be able to help me just even though in the little things like if I don't know the answer for this type of thing of the law, I know I can rely on her to ask her anything, or even if I didn't feel good about it in any kind of way, I know we can get some coffee or anything. I know I can rely on her on that too. Because she's really amazing. So I think it's mostly support, because I never really had it" (P5 2021).

(Out less than 1 year) "I would say that (the program) is very important to me because it's one of the few extracurricular activities that I really focus on. Cuz it helps me hone a part of my identity. And it just feels close to my heart because of that. And because it's such an open and comfortable and inviting environment, I think it's become a priority to me" (P6 2021).

(recently out as nonbinary) "I do think (my identity is) a central part of who I am. Only because I feel like for me, coming out and being queer is restructuring who I was before. So now I feel like it implements me with different values or a

different mindset on how we're supposed to go about life. So I definitely think it's an essential part of who I am and how I identify within the larger community" (P9 2022).

Theme 5: Students generally pointed to the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ+ community and meeting other LGBTQ+ students, in addition to their mentors.

As discussed in previous chapters, the program involved a variety of activities beyond the one-on-one meetings with mentors. One facet of this which was frequently mentioned by participants, and became a key theme of the thematic analysis, was events and experiences involving the group of mentees and mentors together, allowing students to meet members of the wider LGBTQ+ University of Miami community. Five mentions were made about the difficulty in meeting other queer people as a motivational factor for joining the program, according to thematic analysis. One student also mentioned needing help to get involved as a motivational factor. These factors were also by far the most mentioned sub units with respect to benefits and impacts of participation. "Group Events / Cohort / Meeting Students" received 25 mentions in total across the ten interviews, more than 15 more mentions than any other sub unit clustered under "Benefits & Impacts of Program" and "Connection to LGBTQ+ community" came in second with 20 mentions. This points to these factors being key components of the program and its impact on participants.

> "When I realized it wouldn't just be me, it would be a cohort of mentors and mentees with some people that I had known before, then that would be, I guess, factor number three (that motivated me to join)" (P2 2021).

> "The program, being involved in going to more activities and spending more time together, helped further strengthen (my connection to the LGBTQ+ community), and it provided more of a connection" (P3 2021).

> "For me the benefits of being in the program are making connections in the LGBTQ+ community as a whole on campus. Because there's definitely this sort of feeling of it's just me. And it's not, obviously. But especially if you're a freshman also, or if you are a transfer student, or in any way, shape or form, this is your first

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time at the University and you're like, Wow, it's really just me, huh? And it's like, no it's not' (P2 2021).

"I just came out this year, and I haven't really done much related to the community. I just did a lot of online research. So the great deal was to be actually a part of something and do something relating directly towards the community and seeing people. It's been pretty important to me, and just connection wise and learning more about what I can do" (P4 2021).

"Right now, I'm so into getting to know these other people and getting to know what they've been through. And really to get more of this idea of the struggle of being an LGBTQ+ member. So it's not just me, there's many other people out there" (P5 2021).

"My experience so far? I have very much enjoyed it. I'm so glad I decided to join this mentor mentee program. And to see other people within the community, because if I never would have joined it, I wouldn't have so much connection with people to meet with other people. I can't imagine not meeting my mentor. That'd be a weird experience. It's so important to me" (P4 2021).

"Just having an environment where I feel safe and comfortable expressing my feelings too has been, it's just been a great experience overall. ... I liked all the activities that we've done. And to be honest, I wish I could go to more events" (P6 2021).

"The small events that we had and seeing other University of Miami students of the community who I didn't know before, is good to see. And it was really nice to see that the University had those types of programs. And they were concerned about all types of students" (P8 2022).

"I really enjoyed getting together with the other LGBTQ+ students on campus. And just seeing who are the ones that come to the actual meetings and programs. It's a very big, very big campus learning population, and it can be kind of isolated, if you're not sure who's who. So just to have that communal space, when we did get together, we would have meetings, and sometimes we would go to the movies. So that was pretty cool" (P9 2022).

"They also treat it like a cohort style, which I'm sure you've heard a lot about, where sometimes we get together as a cohort, whether that's on Zoom or in person. And some of those have been really fun. We've had some good laughs" (P10 2022).

Theme 6: Students often highlighted the program director herself as a key feature of both their motivation to participate in the program and the impact they experienced as a result of participation.

The final theme that emerged strongly from the thematic analysis was the centrality of the program director as a key aspect of the impact of the program. Dr. Vega, the program director, was mentioned by name by the majority of respondents within their interview. Her name also was mentioned and grouped as a motivation for participation at least 15 times across the 10 interviews, as measured by thematic analysis. One student also stated that, despite having a poor relationship with their mentor, maintaining a relationship with Dr. Vega and receiving support from her kept them invested in the program as a whole, even when not meeting with their mentor (P9 2022). This points to her presence and work as being a key component of students' experience in the mentorship program.

> "I think the number one thing was just being able to be with Dr. Vega and see what she's like. And then furthermore than knowing that she had my best interest in mind when she not only formed the mentorship program, but when she asked me about it" (P2 2021).

> "When I felt like maybe I did need a little bit more support, I was mainly getting support from Dr. Vega" (P9 2022).

> "P3: I didn't really want to say no, I guess I liked Dr. Vega.

> Interviewer: She bullied you into joining!

> P3: (Laughter) Not that she bullied me but she was like, it'd be a really good opportunity, etc. And I was hesitant because I was like, it's my senior year. I don't know if I really need a mentor at this point. I'm pretty good, I guess. But I was really involved with her ... So it just kind of made sense" (P3 2021).

> "I got to know Dr. Vega, she's just a person that's always on campus doing work. So I've seen her do the first generation project, and I think after I came out, I'm not even sure exactly how I got into her office, but I got into her office, and she just helped me from there" (P9 2022).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which students make meaning of their shared experience in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. In this chapter, the results of the study's interviews were presented in a phenomenological context, centering the students themselves and their voices in the process, primarily because as Creswell (2009) stated, "phenomenological research … identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon *as described by participants*."

The research process was guided by four research questions:

- How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?

- How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?

- How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?

- How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?

Following the University of Tennessee's phenomenological research process as described by Mottern (2013), these questions were addressed by reading the transcripts for their larger meaning, then rereading for meaning units & sub units, coding, then analyzing the results of this process for thematic meaning. This process generated six major themes:

1. Overall, students experienced the program as highly important and meaningful, with many benefits to them as LGBTQ+ students.

2. Students reported a variety of challenges that they faced specifically as LGBTQ+ students, which the program helped them address and navigate.

3. Many students highlighted the importance of exposure to LGBTQ+ role models and elders.

4. In general, students reported that the importance of the program, as well as the centrality of their LGBTQ+ identity to themselves as individuals, *decreased* the longer they had been out of the closet.

5. Students generally pointed to the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ+ community and meeting other LGBTQ+ students, in addition to their mentors.

6. Students often highlighted the Program Director herself as a key feature of both their motivation to participate in the program and the impact they experienced as a result of participation.

In theme one, students described a wide variety of impacts and benefits of participation in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. Students described the general importance of the program, while also pointing to the ways in which it helped them become more deeply involved in campus life. Other key areas of impact involved the impart of guidance for how to navigate LGBTQ+-specific issues, and the impact of professional and career development skills.

In theme two, students reflected on the specific challenges that they have experienced as LGBTQ+ young people during and before their collegiate careers, and aligned these with ways in which the mentorship program has supported them in navigating these issues. Students primarily highlighted issues of personal safety and a lack of previous support from friends and family as generating the need to seek these types of positive benefits from the mentorship program.

In theme three, students reflected on the need for more access to LGBTQ+ elders and role models for them as they navigate the collegiate space. In highlighting this, students brought out

the need for role models for them to anchor an idea of queer success, while also noting that for many of them as younger LGBTQ+ people, they did not have any older people on whom they could rely for advice, a need which the mentorship program was able to meet.

In theme four, students shared the ways in which the program has varying meanings, as do their LGBTQ+ identities, in relation to the amount of time that they have been out. For newly out students, both the program and their identity were highly important to their daily lives, whereas for students who have been out longer, the importance of both the program and their identity appeared to decrease.

In theme five, students shared the importance of the other aspects of the mentorship program, most especially the ways in which it allowed them to be exposed to LGBTQ+ peers and a cohort environment. For these students, connection to the larger LGBTQ+ community at the University of Miami was critical as they worked to find their place on campus and in the community at large.

In theme six, students highlighted the importance of the program director herself as an integral part of the experience of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. Students pointed to their personal interests in Dr. Vega as a key aspect of their motivation to join the program, and also pointed to the ways in which interactions with her were an aspect of key impacts of participation in the program.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the results of this study in conjunction with pertinent literature and will offer suggestions for future research in the area of student guidance and support for LGBTQ+ students in the higher education setting.

Chapter 5: Analysis & Interpretation of the Findings

Introduction & Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the ways in which students and alumni of an LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami made meaning of their shared experiences in the program. It was hoped that by examining these shared experiences of members of this minority group, insight could be provided that would guide educators at other educational institutions looking for ways to increase support and maximize outcomes for a historically underrepresented group on their campuses. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?

2. How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?

3. How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?

4. How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?

This chapter opens with an analysis of the answers to the research questions, followed by a review and summary of the findings of the thematic analysis in the context of relevant literature. The findings are then discussed through the lens of the theoretical framework, including relevant pieces of the literature for deeper contextual understanding. The final sections of this chapter explore the implications for higher education administrators and directors of similar student programs, and also provide recommendations for future practice and research.

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?

This research question was primarily addressed by Theme 4, as well as Theme 3, Theme 5, and Theme 2. What became clear across thematic analysis and quantitative data collection is that students have many varying ways that they think of their identity, both in terms of sexuality and gender. "Nonbinary" received 8 mentions as a sub unit, with "gay" and "trans" each receiving 5 mentions. The terms "queer," "bisexual," "female," and "asexual" each received 4 mentions. "Male" received three mentions in the overall thematic analysis. Students also often reported feeling that multiple terms apply to them, and that they identify with a number of identity markers.

> "I identify as bisexual, recently open. I think it's changing in the way that I'm able to put myself out there, and I'm able to ask for support to be part of something, to get to know other people, to get to know their stories. And that was really challenging for me, because I'm an introvert. So right now, I'm so into getting to know these other people and getting to know what they've been through" (P5 2021).

> "I feel like I use terms interchangeably. When I first came out, I considered myself bisexual, and I still consider myself bisexual, just because I feel like people don't like to reclaim that term a lot. There's a lot of controversy around that term. So I like claiming it and for that reason, overall, I would say I'm queer" (P9 2022).

Another key aspect that came out in conversations was the ways in which this changes over time for many students. Numerous students pointed to the fact that their identity is still in flux, and has even changed during their time in the program. The most common sub unit in "Gender & Sexual Identity / Development" meaning unit was "Changing Ideas / Fluid / Interchangeable / Experimenting" with 19 mentions, making it the third most common sub unit of the thematic analysis overall.

> "(I think of myself as) a student, like a fledgling; I'm trying to grow. And gain more knowledge in the area. Because I don't think I feel comfortable enough to

help other people in that area. But I could do with some help myself. So there's that. I'm just learning about it so far. And just growing in my own identity, and having the help of the people around me" (P6 2021).

"When I applied for the mentorship program, I identified as non binary and gay, but more recently, I identify as non binary and just having an attraction to men. I've always been out of the closet since middle school. I used to identify as a gay man, before I came out as non binary, just because I was a little bit more scared to come out as non binary. I came out to everyone except my parents. And then I came out to my parents in high school" (P7 2022).

"I'm still working through it. But I like to think that I'm more leaning towards non binary these days. Just because I'm exploring my relation to gender. But I still feel like I have ties to Black womanhood, and I'm not sure how that works with being non binary. I can't look into those terms but I would definitely consider myself as non binary" (P9 2022).

Theme 4 showed that students have a variety of ways to perceive both their identity itself and its importance in their lives, with a potential relationship to the amount of time they have been out. This variety reflected the complex role that this identity marker can have for students. For some participants, their LGBTQ+ identity is a critical aspect of who they are as people, and the way that they present to, and interact with, the world. For others, this is just one aspect of many that make up who they are as people, and therefore is not afforded such a central place in their lives.

"I have layers to this where if I have to be specific I will be but usually I just go with queer and non binary, those are really broad, overarching terms. And so I think they're significantly more comfortable. Because it's sort of fluid. For everybody in general, I think human beings in general, identity is personal and fluid" (P1 2021).

"It kind of goes in waves. I think I thought it was something that I would figure out at first, like, okay, I know that I'm not totally straight. But what am I, I'm going to figure it out. And then after going through college, I realized that's not how it works, it's fluid. And it's inevitable that your identity is going to change throughout your life, at least, in my opinion. So I think it goes in waves for me" (P3 2021).

"It's sometimes hard to be part of (the LGBTQ+) community. For me, it's more like, Yes, I'm a gay man. I'm also Latino, and what I do is different than a person from the States. I feel like, sometimes people don't recognize that. I just get put into this category with everyone. So for me, it's kind of annoying, because I'm

more than that. As an individual, it's still hard sometimes. Because I guess it's more my background and how I grew up than anything else. I feel like for the gay friends that I've met in the States, it's not that they don't have traditions, but for me, my thing is, family is important. Religion is important. Tradition is important. And we're in 2022, which I get, but in my relationship with my family, I have overcome different problems. This is a lot that makes me who I am. So there's a conflict, I guess" (P8 2022).

"It's not that I don't view things as being connected to my sexual identity. But I don't see my sexual identity as being my end all be all. So I feel it's very nuanced. And I don't want to give the impression that I'm like, oh, no, gay is not important. But I think that it's just one of my many identities. And I think that they all impact me in different ways" (P10 2022).

Theme 3 and Theme 5 showed the ways in which the students look for and make meaning of their identities as they relate to other people, both elder role models and the community in general. This reflects the way that LGBTQ+ identity, for participants, is not simply a matter of how they think about themselves, but can also include social aspects of how they relate to others and to society as a whole.

"To think of myself as a whole, or where I fit in society. It's that I guess I'm a straight cis-passing person. But I am not actually straight or cis. And I think that for me that I don't really think of myself that way. But I'm self aware enough to know that that's what it looks like from afar. But for me, I'm like, how did you not know that I was gay? How did you not know that I was non-binary, look at me, and people look at me and they're like, I wouldn't have known" (P2 2021).

"In terms of intersecting my LGBTQ+-ness with being African American, for me, it's like, Why does it take so much to find other people like myself? Black queer people on campus or not on campus just in general? Why do I have to be turning over rocks? And looking around and all this stuff? Why can't I just organically find people, in the same way that other people have found me. I feel like sometimes the LGBTQ+ part is not all that lonely by virtue of me being in organizations that support that. But the black, LGBTQ+ person in me is like, Man, I wish I had more Black friends who also understand being in the LGBTQ +way, that sort of thing" (P2 2021).

"As a queer individual, I'm a part of (the LGBTQ+ community). As a very new member, as I said. It's a process for me in getting myself into it in helping others within the community, and doing community service, too. I view myself as a small, small individual in a big community that we can all come together and fight for our rights. I'm just one individual among many. But I don't feel belittled being just one person" (P4 2021).

Theme 2 elucidated the ways that students think about themselves as LGBTQ+ individuals in relationship to the challenges that they face from society, and from the expectations of others. As with Theme 3, this points to the fact that this identity, for participants, is about more than just one identity marker or one facet of LGBTQ+ identity, but a totality or sum of a variety of experiences and interactions that have shaped them into the ways in which they conceptualize this today.

> "I'm very comfortable in who I am as a person. But then sometimes when I'm aware other people are perceiving me differently, that creates discomfort or friction. So as an LGBTQ+ person, I see myself as another person, except cooler and better in every way, I'm freed by a lot of expectations that I think society puts on people. Because I don't particularly give a shit about the expectations. I just want to do what makes me feel comfortable, what makes me feel good and what feels congruent with the things I care about. And oftentimes, that looks different from what other people expect. And I think that's cool" (P1 2021).

> "I've always told some of my other friends under the trans and non binary umbrella, I say gender is a performance, and I'm the worst actor, and that seems to get a kick out of everyone. But for the most part, I feel like I actually am performing a gender" (P2 2021).

What becomes apparent when considering all of these themes and evidence together, is that students' conceptualization of their LGBTQ+ is complex and personal, but not without common threads of meaning. The themes explored here elucidate some of the ways in which these personal experiences and meaning-making overlap and flow together. While they do not capture the totality of this complex aspect of students' identity and personality, they do highlight some of the ways that shared identity and status have shaped students' conceptualization of their identity in similar ways.

Students each think of their identity in unique and personal ways, but despite these differences, that identity *is* important to each student in their own way. Even for students who may not think of their identity as central to who they are as a person, there is evidence that this identity is, nonetheless, fundamental. This stems from the

preponderance of lived experiences, internal questions, external dilemmas, and challenging circumstances that have shaped each students' conceptualization of self. While all students indicated that they are on, and have been on, a journey with relation to this sense of identity, and while most indicated that there is a level of flex and/or flux to their self-concept in this area, that does not remove the weight of these labels and identities from each student.

Research Question 2: How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?

This research question was primarily addressed by Theme 1, as well as Theme 6. When considering the thematic analysis, the themes, and the narrative data from students' individual transcripts, it is clear that the program is meaningful to students for a number of reasons, and through a number of lenses. This can be organized in terms of thinking about the ways in which students described their interaction with the program. Students spoke frequently about their motivations for joining the program, which revolved around the value that they thought the program would bring to their lives as students and as members of the University of Miami community.

> "(My mentor has) been super good. I feel like the program has been integral to my success in college. I feel like whenever I need to talk to someone, I can just tell him. He's a confident, wise figure in my life" (P7 2022).

> "The first (reason) was that I didn't know anybody on campus. I didn't have any connections on campus, and I knew it was going to be really difficult for me to make those connections from online. So I went oh, here's a good way for me to start getting involved on campus, or to meet with somebody who knows how to get involved on campus, because she went here for her undergrad, and graduate, and then also worked at the University of Miami. So she's been through this before" (P1 2021).

> "I'm very new to everything. I thought it'd be great to have another perspective to look from, and to have someone I can talk to about topics like these just openly. So we can have this connection with each other being a part of the community and knowing someone's like, we're together in this. I wanted to do some more gay

stuff. (I wanted to) learn more about myself and learn more about others. So I thought it'd be something I would enjoy" (P4 2021).

"(Without the program) I would have felt more alone, I guess. I don't know if I would be as open as I am. I can see all the people that (because of it) were super fine with who they are. And then they know that their school is backing them up. It was nice for them to see. I feel like if I hadn't seen that before, I don't know how would I be like right now" (P8 2022)?

Students also discussed a number of facets of their participation in the program that were meaningful or important to them as participants, which were primarily explored in Themes 1, 3, and 5. Much of this discussion revolved around the aspects of the program or students' mentors that made an impact on them through their time in the program. In addition to what has already been analyzed, students also mentioned the weekly meetings with mentors as a key facet 5 times in the thematic analysis, as well as the ways in which their mentors' identity as flexible or queer individuals impacted them in at least 3 instances.

> "It was really lovely. We met every week. So it was a good check in point. And she helped me with a lot of general university tasks. So there was a lot of like, here's how to better organize your time. Or she would offer to be a point of accountability, where I could come to her every week and share all of the things I've accomplished. And then she connected me to a lot of resources on campus, and also in the greater Miami area. So I went to the Creating Change Conference. And then there's an organization called the Yes Institute here that I ended up going to a course for, that I really enjoyed. And then on campus, she encouraged me to get involved with Spectrum, which is the undergraduate LGBTQ+ organization. So I lead Trans Hangout for them" (P1 2021).

> "So that's benefit number one. It's not just you. And in fact, not only is it not just you, but we want you with us, right? So I think that's the number one benefit. Number two benefit is if you are a mentee, and you're paired with someone that's in your field, or maybe not in your field that can still offer some sort of career professional advice, or just, maybe able to tweak something you've written for a resume or something like that, then that's much easier sometimes to be able to go to your mentor and be like, Take a look at this, rather than having to make an appointment at the Career Center. And then, you may not meet with a faculty advisor, you may meet with a peer advisor. And it kind of feels like you're being proofread instead of polished off, sometimes. That's another benefit, being able to just go to your mentor for things like that" (P2 2021).

> "(I think of myself) like a starting lawyer, bisexual, that has an amazing girlfriend. But I think the only part that I've been a little sad about is, I've not been able to

participate a little more in the LGBTQ+ community. But it was because it was not really a thing back home, where people were really supportive about it. And I just started to see it here. And right now I have this support, and these groups and these events and everything I can be part of" (P5 2021).

"It was important, just personally. To see queer adults, and to know that that's possible, and that that can be my future... that I can be successful and clear and happy" (P1 2021).

"In the beginning,we mostly just talked about the mentorship program in general. But I've grown more to asking her stuff about my educational experience as well, and gone to her for those things, too, for example, because she's one of the Study Abroad advisors. And one of the things that I want to do is go study abroad, and she's helped me out with figuring things out in that area. And she's been very reliable. And even if we don't have something that I have a problem with, or a time where I need to ask for advice, we still meet up, and have a good conversation about what went on in the week. And what eventful things happened" (P6 2021).

In considering this wealth of data, it would seem that, much like the answers to Research Question 1, there is a personalization to the experience that each student has had in the program, dependent on their own identity development, their experience with their mentor, their interaction with other cohort members, and a variety of other factors. What does not seem to be fungible between participants, however, is the sense that the program is important and has had a definite impact on their journeys as both LGBTQ+ individuals and as students. All students referred to the guiding impact of the program and its staff, and seemed to experience the programming as a developmental aspect of their life experiences in college. This sense of guidance and partnership led to overall positive conceptualization of the program among all students, regardless of the level of importance that they assigned to it. Thus, it could be said that students conceptualized their experiences in the program as net positive and impactful, albeit in ways that are adapted and closely tailored to the needs and interests of each individual student.

Research Question 3: How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?

This research question was addressed, in many ways, in all of the themes above, particularly as they relate to the ways that students found impact and benefit from the program in their personal and professional/student lives. Students were able to articulate the ways in which the program related to their abilities to function as students and members of the campus community, as well as their ability to access resources. As P1 noted, "I was involved with the GSA at my high school. It was a pretty informal GSA, it really wasn't even like an official club. Other than that, not a lot of involvement before I got to the University, and now I'm much more involved (2021)." This mirrors other anecdotes which articulate the ways in which the program equipped them with skills for campus life. These skills reference both life skills and student skills that have helped these students navigate campus life and more skillful ways.

> "I'm doing a lot of LGBTQ+ community service now, which is congruent both with what I care about and with what I wanted out of the program, which was making connections on campus. And then, in terms of practical life skills, I'm significantly better at scheduling my time now. ... Definitely better organizational skills, in terms of schoolwork and practical work. ... I also once texted her to ask if I could eat the leftovers in my fridge. Because I wasn't sure how long after it was safe to eat them. She helped me out with that. She was like, does it have beef in it? And I went, Yes. And she went, it's been four days. Throw it out. I went, okay. And I didn't get food poisoning" (P1 2021).

> "(My mentor) understands the whole paradigm that we have where white men with less qualifications than a woman or a person of color, and they'll choose the white guy. He understands sometimes when I'm like, Oh, I don't know if I'm qualified for this research thing, whatever. And then he'll be like, I need you to have the mentality of a white man and I need you to just apply. Number one, yes, you do have all the eligibility requirements. Maybe your GPA is not a 3.2. But it's a 3.19. Go for it. Just do it, it's fine. At the end, he says, the worst that they can tell you is no. Right? And then if they tell you, No, you just go and apply for something else, because they obviously didn't see your potential. ... I think that his approach has changed my approach to a lot of things in terms of oh, this application is a little daunting, especially now that I'm thinking about grad school. Just go ahead, apply for it. And if they tell you no, you move on to the next thing" (P2 2021).

Students also referenced the ways in which the program equipped them with skills that allowed them to better navigate the world around them as individuals after college. In this sense, the program helped equip them with skills for professional life that can have a long term effect on their ability to find the supports needed as well as the people needed for them to chart trajectories to personal and professional success.

> "(The program) has taught me to look for community when I'm isolated. I'm lucky enough that when I was having that issue, I knew to look for community, because I had close friends at the time, but they weren't a part of the (LGBTQ+) community. So even though there were friends, I always felt I need someone that understands the familial aspect of that and how I need support navigating that because my friends couldn't help me at the time. So that's something that I feel like I'm going to carry with me: to always look for specifically community and then people that can provide me with all types of resources, which is what the program essentially gave us apart from just talking to Dr. Vega, she always provided me with resources when I was going through things" (P9 2022).

> "It felt like I was in this new stage of my life that was becoming more professional. And after college is the big step of real life. And I wanted to understand how can I be successful? Not only with my career as an architect, but also with who I am. And (in the program) I see people that are successful. And that was nice to see. I wasn't surrounded by that when I was younger. So it's just nice to have it" (P8 2022).

> "I think it's really helped me find my own safe space. Because before I didn't have that kind of place that I could go to for just having someone to talk to or getting advice from someone. And now that I'm in college, at first I thought, I don't want it to be the same experience that I had in high school. So I felt like being part of the mentorship program really helped change that. And helped me be more open and comfortable with my identity. This is the only time I can have a fresh start in life. And start off well, this time, instead of struggling for four more years. That was my biggest fear. I was like, I can't I can't do this for another four years. I think it's been nice being able to start with that instead of, they already have a perception of me. And I have to change that. And then I don't? Yeah, I don't want to go and change that because I'm afraid of what their reaction would be" (P6 2021).

Considering the skill gains described here, it seems that students found profoundly personal and weighty intersections between the program and their lives, both as students and young professionals. Students gained real world skills that can serve them both during the rest of

their academic careers, and in their professional careers upon graduation. Thus, it seems likely that the majority of students find a meaningful connection between the program and their lives, in that they are more likely to be able to find long term success.

Research Question 4: How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?

In considering the mentorship program, students often spoke first of their motivations for joining, as these were the reasons that drew them toward the program. Here, students spoke most often about things that were missing from their lives as queer students, or things that they desired to seek out as a part of the program. As discussed in Theme 1, Theme 3, and Theme 5, much of this had to do with missing supports or missing people that students sought to add to their lives as young LGBTQ+ people. As P4 shared, "I really like my partner. He is someone I can talk to, for sure, definitely. I remember we had a conversation, the first time I've ever had a conversation about dating apps. And I never talked about that with anyone in a full conversation and our experiences with that (2021)." As LGBTQ+ students, participants described college as a time of change and flux for their own identities, and the program as a support which was able to guide them during these times of change.

> "In terms of sexuality, I think that has changed a lot. Because I had ideas of what I wanted. And then I got to the University, and a couple people asked me out, and I went, ooh. I don't know if I want a relationship actually. I don't know if I experience romantic attraction. So that was the biggest surprise probably was when I've sort of been confused about how it differs from platonic attraction for all my life, but I think that's just because I don't experience it. So that one took me by surprise" (P1 2021).

> "I thought I had figured it out. I was like, I'm a lesbian. And I was super involved with the queer community at college. I think that's part of it, too. When I was at college, I was involved in the mentorship program, and the queer club, and I did other things, and everyone knew me as she's gay. And then when I came home, all that stuff went away. I'm not currently involved in anything queer related, necessarily, my job is not in any, queer type of space. I'm not volunteering in that. ... I think being in college, and having a lot of opportunities so accessible to

involve yourself in and so many identity based organizations at your fingertips that I felt like I was more involved in the queer part of my identity then than I am now. Now, I want to be more involved in it and want to think about that part of myself a little more than I do" (P3 2021).

Students also discussed the ways that, as their identity changes, it can be hard to keep up with these changes in terms of how they conceptualize and share their identity with others. In this sense, the "coming out process" can be something repeated over and over, as one discovers new identities and labels, and must then navigate sharing those identities with others. As P8 shared, "I think when I came here, I wasn't as open as I am right now. I didn't know what to expect when I came to the University, that was also the first time that I came to Miami. I feel like I've grown a lot (2022)." The program was also described as a support that guided students in how to better explain themselves through these many changes, and to be more comfortable with being out as themselves.

> "(One benefit of the program) is definitely being able to educate and explain to people around me, my own identity. Because my friends for sure don't understand it completely. But they're willing to listen and it's nice to be able to explain something new to them, because they might never have heard of what I'm talking about. And what's funny is even one of my friends is gay and when I was explaining gray sexuality to him, he didn't understand that. He'd never heard of it. It's so confusing. Even me, I went through so many labels to even get to there. So I was like, Oh, this is exciting. I want to help someone else find out about this. Even if they don't identify by it, it's just nice to be able to have them know something about me, and have them understand that aspect of myself. It's not even that they don't like it or anything, they just don't understand what it means. And I can only get that there's so many labels, there's so many different identities" (P6 2021).

> "I feel like (without the program) I might have still been more closed off and hesitant about disclosing my sexuality to other people because I probably would have felt like they would treat me in a different way or just not want to be around me because of that. But just being in the environment of the mentorship program helped me open up to my friends in college, and just feel more comfortable with that aspect of my college experience. And even though I don't go around disclosing that information to everyone, it's definitely better than what I was doing in high school. But it's really funny, because the more that I come out to other people, the more people that I find are also part of the community themselves. Which is really funny because maybe that could have been my high

school experience... So it's nice to have that type of experience in college. Because then I have more people that I can talk to about (my identity)" (P6 2021).

For LGBTQ+ students coming into their identities, there was also mention of the ways that students sit at the nexus of queer identity and professional identity, and of a need for guidance as they navigate this new dual identity. Here, again, the program was mentioned as a tool that has helped them begin to think about how they can be both queer and a professional as they prepare for the next stage of beginning their careers.

> "I'm thinking okay, if I'm a queer professional, then is there space for me? Or would there be space for me at whatever workplace or job to be a mentor to someone else? This is something I've been thinking about a lot. How can I pay forward what I've been given as well, when I become a professional, and there are kids seeking out, you know, research or an internship or mentorship in biological research, and I'm there. And then I can provide a perspective, not as a career professional, but as a Black person, as an LGBTQ+ person, I can give perspective in all of these sorts of areas" (P2 2021).

> "(My mentor) has a wife. And it's pretty amazing because she's also a lawyer. She's talked to me about her struggles with having a wife and because they're also an interracial couple. So all the struggles about it, for me, was really touching because I'm also a lawyer, and my girlfriend was kind of like me. So that part is not that different, but I feel like we need more LGBTQ+ lawyers out there that are going to be able to support each other and also be able to pursue their dreams, because she's really into the type of law she's pursuing. And I'm also like that, I want to practice family law. So she's amazing" (P5 2021).

Here we can see how, much like in our other Research Questions, the program intersected with students' self-conceptualization as LGBTQ+ individuals in a myriad of ways that were highly personalized based on their own development and identity. Students made meaning of this based, primarily, on what they *needed* from the program. Students who needed guidance on how to navigate their own changing identities found it. Others who needed guidance on how to be better students while LGBTQ+ found it. Still others found guidance on life as a queer professional as they look forward to the workplace. No matter the context, this intersection

seemed to be a highly important aspect of the program's impact on each student and their experience in the program.

Research Questions Analysis Summary

Analysis of the data collected across the series of 10 semi-structured interviews points to the idea that the answer for each research question was, in many ways, individualized to each student, but that the themes helped illuminate the overlap between different students' experiences in helpful ways. Each student had an individualized experience in the program, but the program was important for each of them, and played a critical role in helping them navigate both their personal & professional lives and LGBTQ+ identities through the period of change that constitutes the undergraduate experience.

In considering the first research question, students perceive their LGBTQ+ identity in myriad, shifting ways, many of which were still in flux at the time of the interviews. Despite this lack of certainty, students all remarked that being LGBTQ+ is a critical part of the way that they view the world, despite having varying levels of "centrality" in this identity, and also depending on how long they have been out. Students are aware that this identity makes them different from the overarching "norm" of heterosexuality, and have had a variety of experiences that affirm and cement this sense of self as "other" than "normal."

Data related to the second research question indicated that all students who have participated in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami have found the program important, and a meaningful part of their undergraduate experience at the University. The relationship developed between students and mentors, as well as their experiences in cohort experiences with LGBTQ+ peers, have supported them in their educational journey and led them

to develop meaningful connections with each other and with the University of Miami community as a whole.

Consideration of the third research question, in light of the data, leads to an indication that students have found the program to intersect with their lives. Students reported that the program helped them with challenges they have encountered as undergraduates, helping them to solve problems, develop skills as students, and access resources and programs they otherwise would have been ignorant of within the context of the undergraduate experience. Students also reported that the program has been of assistance as they prepare for, and transition to, professional careers after their undergraduate journey has ended. This support has helped them prepare for life outside of the University in meaningful ways, and is reported as a key benefit by the majority of students who participated in this study.

The fourth question points to the ways in which students' experiences in the program have intersected with their LGBTQ+ identities and again, in light of the data, the connection appears to be meaningful for the students in this study. As students solidify and explore their individual identities, their mentors and the program at large have given them tools and terminologies to help them through this process. As students reported that their identity is meaningful both as individuals and within the larger context of the LGBTQ+ community, the connections fostered within the program have helped guide them in both regards, which is meaningful given the critical juncture of identity development in which the majority of students in the study found themselves during their undergraduate studies.

Given the totality of available data, the answer to this study's research questions can be summarized as follows: Students had highly personalized and individual experiences with the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, which reflects the highly personal nature of each student's

identity and mentor/mentee relationship. Despite this personalization, however, this study offers examples of how there are lines of meaning that cross identity markers and thus, point to a shared phenomena of program experience that can be described in thematic ways that point to tangible, meaningful benefits for a group of historically underserved students, and merits further examination and propagation of similar programs in other contexts.

Review of Thematic Findings

To explore how the students and alumni of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program make meaning of their shared experience in the program, I performed ten semi-structured interviews and quantitative data collection exercises. Using the University of Tennessee's phenomenological data analysis model (Thomas & Pollio 2002), I used repeated readings, first for overall meaning, then for thematic meaning units, to determine sub units of meaning and meaning units. I then cross-referenced these sub units and units to cluster initial thematic meanings, and used these to create an overall thematic structure for the meaning this process generated. Approaching the process in this way allowed the voices and stories of the study cohort to remain centered in the process until it was time to present the findings, which were first presented to the study cohort for member checking and final edits. As this process continued, six meaningful themes consistently emerged across most or all participants' data:

1. Overall, students experienced the program as highly important & meaningful, with many benefits to them as LGBTQ+ students.

2. Students reported a variety of challenges that they faced specifically as LGBTQ+ students, which the program helped them address and navigate.

3. Many students highlighted the importance of exposure to LGBTQ+ role models & elders.

4. In general, students reported that the importance of the program, as well as the centrality of their LGBTQ+ identity to themselves as individuals, *decreased* the longer they had been out of the closet.

5. Students generally pointed to the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ+ community and meeting other LGBTQ+ students, in addition to their mentors.

6. Students often highlighted the Program Director herself as a key feature of both their motivation to participate in the program and the impact they experienced as a result of participation.

When examined in light of relevant literature, these themes provide a clearer and richer illustration of the shared meaning that can be found within the relevance that the students in the study cohort identified in their experience in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. Importantly, these themes also helped to answer the research questions of this study. The next section of this chapter considers each of the emergent themes identified in this study alongside the literature in these areas.

Theme 1: Overall, students experienced the program as highly important and meaningful, with many benefits to them as LGBTQ+ students.

The primary theme that emerged in thematic analysis was that students felt the program was overall highly important and meaningful, and they recounted a wide variety of benefits and positive impacts of participation. One important area to note is that, while this was a common thread, the impacts shared by each student were highly personalized to their individual identity and areas of interest. Each student sought guidance from their mentor on different things, based on their identity or other areas where they specifically needed support. Other dynamics

influencing this personalized relationship included the mentor identity, mentor professional area, and any number of other variables.

Considering the literature in this area, particularly the role of schools in student development, this makes a great deal of sense. Chickering & Associates (1981) were the first to introduce the concept of student development as *individualized*, meaning that individual teaching methods and content must be customized to meet the needs of each individual student. Astin (1999) noted that this has now become the mainstream approach to student development in college, and the ways in which universities should guide and help students through this process. As discussed in the literature review, this theory was originally applied primarily to curriculum development, with the introduction of concepts such as competency-based learning, but has now become mainstreamed within student development and student life programming. More modern measures of student development, such as Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement as a measure of student development, use a much more individualized and student-dependent measure as the focus of measuring a student's development in the collegiate space.

Black and Allen (2017) made major contributions to the field of student development by moving beyond vectors or simple measures in making recommendations on how to instruct students in ways that are responsive to their stage of development (as measured by the vectors). All of these developments seem to fall in line with the individualized benefits, impacts and experiences that students had in the mentorship program. Because the program is designed so that each experience is unique (rooted in the development of the student and the individual relationship with the mentor), it seems likely that the design of the program meets the recommendations of theorists such as these in meeting students exactly where they are, and providing support as each student develops during their time in college. By avoiding a "one size

fits all" approach, the program avoids the pitfalls of earlier student development theories, which focused heavily on staged development and moving groups of students from one level to the next.

Contemporary literature on the role of colleges and universities in shaping student development rests heavily on schools' ability to build programs that are tailored to the individual needs of students. The results of this study seem to be reinforcing this notion in the literature, in the sense that the myriad individualized benefits that students found from their participation in the program seem to be inextricably linked with the individualization of the program itself. Thus, the findings of this study seem to mirror those of the authors discussed here, that to find the maximum benefit from programs such as these, the program must meet students where they *are*, and help them determine the best path forward to the next step in their development, rather than following a pre-planned trajectory.

Theme 2: Students reported a variety of challenges that they faced specifically as LGBTQ+ students, which the program helped them address and navigate.

Students reported a variety of challenges encountered before and during their collegiate experiences that are unique to their various identities as members of the LGBTQ+ community. These challenges are unique in the sense that they are bound up with students' status as members of the community, rather than a "normal" challenge experienced by the "average" college student. Students pointed to the mentorship program as a specific support that helped guide and influence them in how to respond to these challenges.

Considering these findings in light of the relevant literature, they harken back to a key finding and recommendation of Patton's (2011) study that "student affairs educators can play a significant role in helping… students deal with both negative and positive experiences related to

their sexual identity (p. 97)." The author pointed to the fact that this reinforces the idea that the influence of collegiate programming is central to ensuring that these students are properly supported during their undergraduate experience. Patton (2011) also noted that there are many positive and negative possibilities when it comes to the experiences that students may have related to their sexual identity. Negative experiences can include depression and other mental health issues, while positive experiences can include the establishment of very close relationships with other students with whom they share these identity markers.

The findings of this study appear to build on Patton's (2011) findings. Participants reported a variety of challenges, including struggles with trans identity and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender. Multiple students also pointed to mental health supports as a benefit of participation in the program, implying that mental health struggles were an aspect of the challenges that they experienced as LGBTQ+ students. One student even referenced having a "breakdown" upon arrival at the University of Miami, which would appear to be in line with Patton's (2011) findings as well.

The literature also points to the importance of students being able to talk about their sexual identity without judgment from others, and further notes that there are many social challenges as they engage in the navigation of their exterior environments. According to Patton (2011) , the study was limited by the fact that the students were all male, and the author noted that further research is needed to determine if there are similar or divergent experiences among female students. Also, the author noted that the focus of this research was on experience, rather than a true exploration of identity. Therefore, while many of the experiential questions that were asked stem from the ideas underlying sexual identity development, it was difficult for her to draw any conclusions that truly extended to the realm of the students' own identity development.

In this area, this study appears to integrate well with Patton's (2011) findings, but with a wider study cohort that included multiple sexes and genders of participants. This would appear to relate to and bolster some of the claims that she made. Multiple students pointed to the importance of the program as a safe space for them to talk about issues of their sexuality. Students also discussed the ways in which, for many of them, the mentorship program was the first time they had a space with an adult where they could discuss these personal challenges. By aligning these challenges faced with a space where they could seek guidance from people who had been through the same challenges in the past, students were able to find a way to more effectively navigate the personal struggles they encountered. This aligns with Patton's recommendations for how to support LGBTQ+ college students most effectively.

Theme 3: Many students highlighted the importance of exposure to LGBTQ+ role models and elders.

Another common theme of conversations with students and alumni of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program was the idea that an important aspect of the program was the opportunity to be exposed to, and interact with, older LGBTQ+ people as queer elders and mentors for younger LGBTQ+ participants. Students spoke of the difficulty of finding these types of people in their lives outside of the program, as well the general ways in which older LGBTQ+ people are missing within the larger community as a blueprint for younger queer people to follow as they navigate their sexual identity development. Students mentioned this both in terms of their motivation for joining the program, as well as the impacts and benefits they experienced as part of their participation. While it existed within the universe of general benefits that students described, it was nonetheless a theme that came out strongly on its own among the many benefits and impacts discussed by students.

The idea of a program such as the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program being able to provide

students with individuals who can help guide and steer their development is supported in the

literature in terms of the ways that colleges can help students through the stages of personal

development as a component of student programming. Chickering and Reiser (1993) theorized

student development as centering on seven vectors:

- developing competence

- managing emotions

- moving through autonomy toward independence

- developing mature interpersonal relationships

- establishing identity

- developing purpose

- developing integrity

These vectors represent the important areas in which students must grow in order to move from

each level of identity development to the next. According to Chickering and Reiser (1993), these

vectors represent the key ways in which students see and interact with the world around them.

Within this theory, colleges are responsible for using these vectors to develop students and help

them move through the stages of development, although the authors do not make specific

recommendations for how to do so.

Black and Allen (2017) built on the work of Chickering and Reiser (1993) by making

recommendations for how to instruct students in ways that are responsive to their stage of

development (as measured by the vectors). The authors encourage instructors to instruct students

in college at one level of development beyond where they currently are (i.e., instructing students

in the "Dualism" phase, which is where the majority of freshmen are, at the "Multiplicity" level,

to encourage and shape their development beyond its current level). They provide these recommendations:

- "Students grow in their ways of knowing when given appropriate challenges and support.

- The process of moving from one developmental stage to the next is likely to cause students to feel uncomfortable or anxious.

- Given appropriate instruction, students can achieve at one level of metacognition above their comfort zone. However, it is unreasonable to expect a dualist (about 70% of freshmen) to analyze evidence in context and relate it to personal beliefs" (p. 224).

Black and Allen's recommendations are rooted in the idea that students' development is a concrete process that can be impacted and influenced by educators, which they note is a growing area of consensus in student development as a field. By treating student development as a series of "teachable" skills, they assert that universities can direct and guide the process by which students develop once they arrive at the undergraduate institution. The idea here is that colleges can and should take a directive role in students' personal development, which is the type of thinking that underlies programs such as the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program.

The experiences and reflections of the students and alumni of the University of Miami program appear to align well with, and support, the ideas found in the literature. Students report the desire for, and positive experience with, queer mentors and role models who are able to guide them and teach them better how to live out their identities, at whatever stage of development they are in. Students thus would seem to be benefiting from the guided development that Black and Allen are recommending that schools engage in, helping them to navigate the process of identity development through intervention and guidance. This creates a smoother and less

challenging process for the students in turn, allowing them to achieve the next level of development with less struggle and personal challenges.

Theme 4: In general, students reported that the importance of the program, as well as the centrality of their LGBTQ+ identity to themselves as individuals, decreased the longer they had been out of the closet.

In the analysis of the varied experiences and stories related by participants in this study, a trend was noted whereby there seemed to be an inverse relationship between the amount of time that a student had been out of the closet, and both the importance of the program to them as participants and the centrality of their LGBTQ+ identity to them as individuals. For students who were recently out, the program took on a high degree of importance as a part of their undergraduate experience, and they also seemed more likely to report that their identity had a high degree of importance for them in their daily lives. Conversely, for students who had been out for a longer period of time, the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program seemed less likely to be reported as an important feature of their University of Miami experience, and they seemed less likely to note their LGBTQ+ identity as a key component of their day-to-day lives.

As stated in the theoretical framework of this study, we do not seek to stake a claim on what theory of sexual identity development theory is "correct," but merely seek to work within existing frameworks to explore the ways in which students' identity has developed within the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. In considering the literature, this finding of a seemingly converse relationship between time out of the closet and centrality of the program seems to make sense. Theories of sexual identity development all seem to agree on the idea of development from a latent state to one of fully formed identity, although most disagree on the steps taken to get there. Troiden (1989) presented a staged-development theory in which LGBTQ+ people

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progressed through stages from the initial stage of Sensitization (initial awareness of sexual attraction)to, ultimately, Commitment (positive identity and long-term same-sex relationships). As Rosario et al. (2011) noted, these types of theories have been challenged over the years as theorists moved away from the more rigid staged developmental theories of the early years of sexual identity theory. Today, most theorists follow in the footsteps of Erickson (1980), who created a model that was rooted in a more developmental theory of parallel processes of identity formation and integration.

According to Crawford et al. (2002), there is no consensus on the best model to use to measure sexual identity development. There is no universal agreement on what type of structure, whether phased model of development or non-phased, is a valid approach. Rosario et al. (2011) support a conceptualization of identity development that moves away from staged development and instead focuses on the confluence of a variety of factors (integration-associated activities, internal attitudes, and experiences) to assess the sexual identity development of an individual.

In designing the research instruments for this study, the instruments pioneered by Rosario et al. (2011) were central to the process. Because the interviews revealed a variety of ways in which sexual identity could be understood, this allowed for a richer exploration of the students' experiences without being limited by the confines of any one specific model of development, particularly given the lack of consensus in the field on which model may be ideal (Denton, 2016). The design of the study was rooted in the ideas that Rosario et al. (2011) laid out, drawing on a variety of ways of conceptualizing LGBTQ+ identity (self-identification, participation in aligned activities, sexual attraction, and desires).

The results reported by students seem to align with the general concept of sexual identity development as something that occurs over time, rooted in the depth of an individual's

experience of their own sexual identity, and growing from an initial stage of awareness to one of acceptance and integration. For students who are in the early stages of awareness and exploration, a program such as the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program is clearly very important. These are students who do not yet fully understand themselves as queer individuals, so having the guidance of a mentor is critical. The same seems to be true for students whose identity is in flux. For instance, students who have been out as gay or lesbian for a longer period of time, but have only recently come to terms with a different gender identity, seem to find themselves back in the early stages of identity formation. For students who have more fully integrated sexual identity awareness, however, the program, and their identity, are less central. This seems to bear out the idea that as sexual identity becomes more solidified, there is less turmoil for the individual as they come to terms with themselves. This means that there is less need for the guidance that the program offers. It would therefore seem logical that the program itself would be less valuable or integral to students at these later stages of identity development.

Theme 5: Students generally pointed to the importance of exposure to the LGBTQ+ community and meeting other LGBTQ+ students, in addition to their mentors.

Student and alumni participants in this study frequently pointed to the importance of the aspects of the program that related to their interactions with other LGBTQ+ individuals from the community outside of their individual relationship with their mentors. Students mentioned the frequent cohort-based activities that the mentorship program offers as an aspect of the benefits that they received from participation, as well as the way that the program increased their sense of connection to the campus's larger LGBTQ+ community. This was a commonality among students who participated, ranging from new participants to those that have been in the program for a few years. Students noted that these aspects of the program (the connection to the wider

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cultural segment of LGBTQ+ students on campus) provided support and feelings of belonging and connection that they may not have been able to glean from the relationship with their mentor alone. Therefore, it seemed to represent an important aspect of the programming to highlight, separate from and in support of, the mentor-mentee relationship.

Considering the literature, the importance of this aspect of the mentorship program makes sense, and seems to have a reciprocally reinforcing relationship with the research. D'Augelli (1994) and Rhoads (1997) contributed to the consideration of sexual identity development by shifting the focus of the process to include cultural contexts and dynamics, and the ways in which these factors impact identity development. According to this research, the cultural context and dynamics within which an individual grows up may impact their sexual identity development due to the norms and expectations within that culture around sex and sexual orientation. This work foreshadowed later developments, where the focus of sexual identity development theory shifted to include intersectionality and the relationship of LGBTQ+ identity to race, ethnicity, class, and other identity markers. Other more recent work (Stirrat et al., 2008; Patton, 2011; Brandon-Friedman, 2019; Renteria, 2018) also contributed to the current trend of focusing on sexual identity formation as one aspect of *intersectional identity formation*, positing that it is less helpful to focus on one aspect of identity separate from others that influence and impact it.

In considering the population of the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program, like the general population of the University of Miami, one finds students of a variety of different identity markers beyond LGBTQ+ identities, and, in considering the study cohort, we find students that had a variety of overlap (or lack of overlap) with the identities of their mentors. For a number of students who have other minority identity markers (Latinx students, Black students, etc.), they

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missed overlap with their mentors on these key aspects of their individual identities. Thus, it would seem important that the program offer other areas of connection beyond that one relationship. By offering group activities and chances for students to connect to a broader community through interactions with others that share their other identity markers, there are more opportunities for students to create the learning experiences necessary to help them progress in their identity development.

The research also points to the importance of recognizing that every student's experience of queer identity is individual and diverse. Patton's (2011) findings included several cautionary notes about research involving LGBTQ+ students that are important in this field. One caution relevant to the current study is to avoid essentializing students' experiences, as this can be reductive and damaging to further research by closing future avenues of exploration rather than creating additional opportunities. Abes and Kasch (2007) noted that essentializing individual experiences of men who have sex with men (MSM) has the impact of reinforcing the heterosexual/nonheterosexual binary, which simultaneously reinforces the concept that nonheterosexual identities are abnormal. This essentialism can also distort the overall portrait of these students' experiences, expanding and expounding on them in ways that create deficiencies in the overall narrative.

One way that the group and cohort aspect of the mentorship program avoids this pitfall is by diversifying the range and type of learning experiences available to students. By creating a variety of informal and unscripted learning environments for students, the program creates opportunities for shared learning that, rather than being reductive in nature and dictating what students "should" learn in order to grow as LGBTQ+ individuals, there is a possibility of being

responsive to individual students' needs, thus allowing the program to be responsive to the individual needs of students at their individual stages of development.

Theme 6: Students often highlighted the Program Director herself as a key feature of both their motivation to participate in the program and the impact they experienced as a result of participation.

The final area of thematic symmetry that arose from the thematic analysis of the data from this study was that there was a strong tendency of participants to point to the program director by name as either a motivation for participation and/or a benefit of participation in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program at the University of Miami. Students mentioned that they were motivated to join the program out of a desire to spend more time with or be able to interact with Dr. Vega. They also mentioned the importance of getting guidance from Dr. Vega while participating in the program. The participant who had a weak mentor-mentee relationship with their mentor also noted that, as much as they did not receive the expected benefit from working with their mentor, they were able to instead receive this benefit through regular guidance and working sessions with Dr. Vega.

In some ways, looking at the literature, this harkens back to the literature discussed for Theme 5. Patton (2011) and Abes & Kasch (2007) emphasize how important it is to not essentialize and simplify the lived experience of LGBTQ+ students. By offering an additional avenue to support and guidance, in the form of the program director, for students who do not experience the beneficial impacts of other aspects of the program, the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program is more able to avoid this key pitfall and meet the needs of all students. There is no expectation that to receive these benefits, students *must* receive them in any particular way or through any particular avenue. Accordingly, we avoid lumping all students into one common

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category by which there is only one path to participation. This is critical in allowing the program to reach as many students in as many developmental places as possible.

In addition, Dr. Vega (2020) herself noted that she is very experienced in running mentorship programs such as this. She has implemented similar programs at other campuses during her professional career, and was herself a participant in a mentorship program that helped direct her own development as an out queer student. Black and Allen (2017) challenge higher educators to be aware of students' cognitive development. In doing so, the authors argue that the most effective instructional approach is to meet learners in the stage of development they are in, an approach that is responsive to their development as students (relative to their collegiate experience) and also helps them move further along the path of cognitive development. The authors also pointed to the importance of schools taking an active role in shepherding this development. By appointing an experienced leader to guide the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program and other programming for queer students at the University of Miami, the school has taken the path recommended by these authors, helping to ensure that there are viable and meaningful development opportunities to students who are at this critical juncture of their identity development journey.

Implications

This study offers several implications for higher education administrators, program directors overseeing supports for LGBTQ+ students, and higher education staff members that identify as allies. For higher education administrators, these implications include the need to find funding for support programming like this, the need to find budget-neutral ways to support programming if funds are not available, and the need to appoint a strong program director with a good track record, if possible. For program directors, the implications include the need to ensure

there are cohort experiences included in programming, the need for an emphasis on finding queer

mentors if possible, and the need to create opportunities for outreach to newly out students.

Additionally, mentors need to be trained in order to meet students where they are at

developmentally, and encouraged to include all parts of a student's identity in their work with

students. For staff members at universities that identify as allies and note that they have students

who are struggling with their changing identities, but are working in environments where this

level of support is not currently feasible, it is advisable to find a suitable LGBTQ+ mentor who

can support the student through this process or, when no other option exists, to find a straight

mentor to stand in. These staff members should follow the recommendations for program

directors in terms of designing a one-off solution for students.

For Higher Education Administrators

The findings of this study highlight and reinforce the importance of programming such as

this for an at-risk group of students. Meyer (2004), Eklund-Lee and Young (1997), and

MacCarron and Bennet (1996) highlighted the challenges that LGBTQ+ students face when

coming to college, in light of programming put in place to support them. Poynter and Tubbs

(2007) highlighted similar challenges in their analysis of Ally Training Programs. All authors

noted that there are barriers to the success of the more "traditional" programming for LGBTQ+

students, such as Pride Alliances and Ally Training Programs (ATPs). This study's results

reinforced the idea that there are specific challenges and hardships that are encountered by queer

students on campus, and that effective supports are needed. Higher education administrators are

therefore encouraged to analyze the approach put in place at institutions such as the University of

Miami.

As shared by Dr. Vega (2020) and P10 (2022), despite the fact that the University of Miami is a Catholic-leaning institution, it has poured budgetary resources into supports for the LGBTQ+student population at the institution. This includes the establishment of a dedicated LGBTQ+ Student Center, existing separately from the Intercultural Affairs office, with programs for queer students run independently out of this office. With a full time director and staff, this requires a meaningful allocation of resources. Acknowledging that budgetary restraints can be a significant barrier to this type of programming, it may be important for administrators to seek out budget-neutral options in the absence of dedicated funding.

Higher education administrators, when implementing such programming, should appoint a strong program director with a good track record, if possible. The results of this study point to the impact of a strong program director for wraparound supports for students in the event that the program does not directly meet their needs. Also, given the fact that a large number of the benefits described by students derive from the program's design and structure, these aspects of the program design can be traced back to the program director as the architect of the program as a whole. Thus, implementing this programming with an experienced director, where possible, increases the likelihood of strong positive impacts on LGBTQ+ students.

For Program Directors

The findings of this study also highlight a number of critical recommendations for program directors of similar programs that may be implemented at other learning institutions. A major recommendation based on the findings of this study would be to ensure that any such programming includes cohort experiences. Creating experiences for students that venture beyond the binary relationship of mentor and mentee help to avoid the challenges that authors like Patton (2011) describe with essentializing and creating monoliths out of student experiences. By

creating opportunities for cohort experiences, program directors can both increase the likelihood of students having a meaningful experience (by increasing learning experiences outside of the mentor relationship), and also maximizing the number of different types of learning experiences available to increase students' connection to the queer community within the school, as evidenecd in this study.

This study also suggests that program directors should place particular emphasis on finding queer mentors (and can even look outside the school, if necessary). Only one student reported having a straight mentor, and was one of the students who mentioned that her program experience was not as important to her in terms of identity development. For students that are still navigating what their sexual identity means, having a queer mentor proves particularly important as they can help guide them through the stages of self-awareness as described by Troiden (1989). Having lived experience in this area is critical to mentors' ability to effectively guide students in these situations, so finding these mentors within the school (or externally, as Dr. Vega has done in some cases), can be critical to the success of this programming in effectively addressing the needs of this population.

This study noted that the program was most impactful for students who had come out more recently, which leads to a recommendation that a program director should create specific opportunities for outreach to newly out students. The most recently out students in this study cohort were the most likely to report having found the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program through one of these "wide net" approaches, such as generalized tabling on campus, thus emphasizing the importance of taking these types of approaches to get the largest number of participants within the developmental stages where these supports are most critical.

For Allies

An important consideration is also to be made here for faculty members and administrators in schools that do not have a robust support network for queer students like the one at the University of Miami. How can caring members of university staff offer support if they notice that they have LGBTQ+ students who are struggling to navigate their way through the space of exploring and nurturing their new identities?

This study suggests that there should be particular emphasis on finding queer mentors, rather than straight mentors for students in this situation. Only one student reported having a straight mentor, and she was one of the students who mentioned that her program experience was not as important to her in terms of identity development. For students that are still trying to explore their new identity as LGBTQ+ individuals, having a queer mentor is particularly important to help guide them through the stages of self-awareness as described by Troiden (1989). Having lived experience in this area is critical to mentors' ability to effectively guide students in these situations, so the first step an ally may want to take is realizing that, while they can be the first person to intervene to help, they are likely not the person best suited to support this student in the longer term.

A recommendation for staff members in this position would be to locate and identify a willing mentor who identifies as LGBTQ+ within the school (or externally, as Dr. Vega has done at times), to support the student. Making an initial introduction (as they are more likely the person the student trusts, having a prior relationship with them) would be an easy way to help the student build trust with a new stranger, but at that point, they can hand the relationship off to the newly-found mentor to help the student through their developmental progress from there. In the case that such a mentor cannot be found, the staff member who is an ally can certainly support

(there is no evidence in this study that suggests that having a straight mentor is detrimental), but it is worth noting that the most ideal situation is finding a queer mentor, where possible, particularly in situations where the student is in a high-need situation.

When "designing" a mentorship experience in a one-off situation such as this, it is recommended that, where feasible, the recommendations made here for program directors be followed. While it will not be possible in such a situation to design cohort experiences for the student, it is worthwhile to still place an emphasis with the mentor on meeting the student developmentally where they are currently at, and to ensure that all aspects of the student's identity (gender, sexual orientation, race, class, etc.) are included in the mentorship experience to ensure a meaningful outcome for the student.

Recommendations

This study yields important recommendations for future program directors, university administrators, and scholars in this field. Those recommendations can be divided into two categories: recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research.

Rationale for Implementation

It is worth noting that there are a variety of reasons why schools should consider implementing programming like this for students, particularly in the current environment in many schools where programs and departments are fighting for access to and receipt of a highly limited pot of funding. There would seem to be two primary reasons to support implementation of a program such as the one studied, on some level: practical reasons that benefit the university, and reasons of equity.

On a pragmatic level, programming such as this would be a boon to any university seeking to boost the performance of its student body and maximize rankings and public

confidence in the strength of the program offered. LGBTQ+ students represent a group that must overcome a myriad of challenges based on their identity. These challenges distract from, and detract from, their ability to be as academically and socially successful in the university in the same way as their non-LGBTQ+ peers. For this reason, it would be logical for any university to make meaningful efforts to support this group and help them to succeed as students, which in turn helps with their ability to finish school on time and perform well while there. Thus, it would be in the university's best interest to implement programming that will add to the overall prestige and success of the university by boosting this key demographic within the student body.

Additionally, the question of equity and equitable treatment has been a key topic for universities in recent years as they seek to address historical injustices that have taken place in the higher education space in decades past. While it is true that a rising tide lifts all boats, it is important for universities to note where special support and treatment are needed by certain historically disenfranchised groups, which includes LGBTQ+ students. In this instance, where a proven model exists to increase positive outcomes for this challenged group of students, it makes good moral sense from an equity standpoint for the university to act, and support these students to achieve and succeed where they historically have struggled. In the program at University of Miami, institutions are presented with a replicable, feasible blueprint of a program that provides tangible benefits to this marginalized group. Thus, if schools are serious about putting action to rhetoric where their commitments to diversity and inclusion are concerned, programming such as this can be an excellent start to creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for the LGBTQ+ students on their campuses.

Recommendations For Practice

The recommendations for practice that emerged from this study include ways that schools that can best support LGBTQ+ students navigating the challenging process of developing their identity as queer individuals while traversing the collegiate experience. Expanding these supports may support an underserved population, and could help students experience greater success during a critical time in their development, both as LGBTQ+ individuals and as young professionals, in meaningful ways. Schools that seek to better students' lives qualitatively and also maximize their successful development will be well served to implement this programming and these recommendations.

Implement Mentorship Supports for LGBTQ+ Students

The most basic recommendation is that, separate from LGBTQ+ student organizations, schools will be well-served to specifically implement mentorship experiences for this group of students. Students in this stage of life are in the process of defining themselves in a variety of ways: as young adults; as queer people; and as people preparing for a transition to post-collegiate professional life. By creating opportunities for these students to learn from, and be involved with, older queer mentors, schools can better ensure that students navigate this transformative process successfully, and are better able to integrate into the larger campus community, as well as the queer community, in meaningful ways.

Create as Diverse a Program Population as Possible

College campuses are diverse places, much like the world at large. Students in the cohort of this study found meaning and support in having cohort experiences with a group of students that matched their own diversity. Because the mentorship experience is so contextual and personalized, creating a diverse population within the program, where possible, maximizes the

likelihood that the students will create meaningful experiences within the program. As Patton (2011) noted, students require the ability to find meaning in the totality of their identity, rather than treating their LGBTQ+ identity as an essentialized and isolated component. Thus, program directors should seek to recruit a population for their mentorship programs that, as much as possible, reflects the diversity of the campus population as a whole.

Maximize the Diversity of Learning Experiences in the Program

Students in this study found meaning in a *wide variety* of learning experiences. For some students, the most meaningful experiences were found in their mentor-mentee relationship. For others, the cohort experiences with their peers and the larger LGBTQ+ community were most meaningful. For still others, this meaning was found in their relationship with the program director. Thus it is important that, in designing any such mentorship program for another educational context, the program director and designer utilize this philosophy of maximizing the diversity of different learning experiences in order to make sure the program experience is as customizable and individualized as possible. This is in line with student development theories such as those posited by Chickering and Reiser (1993), which found that student development is incredibly individualized.

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Recommendations For Further Research

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The researcher offers three recommendations for future research in this area including: a call to explore barriers to participation; exploration of how schools can better support students who are extremely early in the process of exploring their LGBTQ+ identity; and a need to find ways to overcome the barriers to quantitative research in order to more fully explore the breadth of LGBTQ+ students' development and experiences in programs such as this one.

Explore Barriers to Participation

A number of participants, such as P8 and P10, pointed to the fact that unexplored barriers still exist to participation for LGBTQ+ students in programming such as this. For instance, how can students who may not previously feel as connected to the LGBTQ+ community be encouraged to participate? How can we seek out students who, because of their other identities, feel divorced or distanced from the LGBTQ+ community? This was a key finding of Patton's (2011) study, exploring the intersection of students' racial identities and their queer identities. It would be worth taking a closer look at students who drop out of programs such as these, or students who apply and never participate, in order to better understand the barriers that exist to students' participation. Deepening understanding of these barriers would help administrators and student services program coordinators craft programs that better meet the needs of *all* students, regardless of where they are in their identity journey.

Supports for Students Who Are Not Yet Out

A critical group of students who likely *need* support are not included in this study: students who are not yet out, or who are very early in the journey of exploring their sexual identity. For students like this, entering a program with the name "LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program" is likely in and of itself a barrier. However, considering Troiden (1989) and others' research into the journey from early self awareness to integration of identity, this is one of the most turbulent and challenging parts of the sexual identity journey. Thus, this begs the question: how can universities create inroads for students who are undergoing the very primary steps in this integrative journey? How can supports be created that can reduce the stigma and challenges that prevent these students from accessing support services during this critical time in their

journey of self discovery? It is worth exploring questions like these more fully, although the barriers to participation in the program would likely create similar barriers to study.

Expand Opportunities for Quantitative Research

As noted elsewhere in this study, one of the most significant barriers to the original quantitative study design was that the data sets simply *do not exist*. In the absence of American schools who are tracking students based on LGBTQ+ status, some critical work may be needed on the part of researchers to expand access to data such as this in other ways. This can be accomplished by searching out other avenues where this data might exist (this study did not undertake a review of, for example, European higher learning institutions, to see if there are other countries where student data is tracked regarding sexual orientation or nontraditional gender identities). Alternatively, it might be possible to find a program like the one at the University of Miami and, with backing from the supporting institution, engage in longitudinal analysis of student data for longer-term participatory sets of students who have engaged in this type of programming.

It is the opinion of the researcher that, in order to make a lasting impact on the supports that universities are willing and able to offer to LGBTQ+ students, quantitative data analysis of a larger magnitude will be necessary, in order to convince institutions of the benefits of expending resources of this type of programming. Without a definitive promise of benefits, rooted in quantitative data analysis bolstered by qualitative study, institutions of higher learning are unlikely to be willing to expand budgetary line items to include this type of programmatic expense.

Chapter Summary

This chapter opened with an analysis of the research questions, in which the themes were then re-situated in the context of the four research questions guiding the study. In examining the intersection of these themes and questions, it became apparent that the answer for each research question was, in many ways, individualized to each student, but that the themes also reflected the ways in which commonalities arose across the cohort of students. Each student had a personalized, bespoke experience, but the program nevertheless was important for all students, and played a key part in helping them navigate both their personal and professional lives, and their LGBTQ+ identities through ongoing periods of change.

After exploring the research questions, the chapter progressed to a discussion and analysis of implications for key roles, including higher education administrators and program directors. Key implications included the need to offer programming and expend resources on this type of support for students, and the need to maximize the types of options open to students in designing these experiences for them. The chapter closed with recommendations for practice and recommendations for further research, which will allow this work to continue to address the needs of this subpopulation of students.

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SERBAS - Y

- What was your sex assigned at birth?

- How do you identify now in terms of gender?

- What is your birth date?

- What is your ethnic background?

  Male Questions

- In this interview, I will be asking you some questions about puberty and your relationships with (guys/men) and (girls/women). We will also talk about sex. You are probably not used to talking about this, but because of this research on the health and social relationships of young people, we need to talk about it in more detail than usual so that we make sure we have good information about the kinds of sexual experiences young people have. Whatever you tell me will be kept confidential.

- How old were you when your voice first started to change?

- How old were you when you first started growing body hair?

- When you think about sex, do you think of yourself as gay, bisexual, or straight, or other?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be bisexual?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being bisexual?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be straight?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being straight?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be gay?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being gay?

  Female Questions

- In this interview, I will be asking you some questions about puberty and your relationships with (guys/men) and (girls/women). We will also talk about sex. You are probably not used to talking about this, but because of this research on the health and social relationships of young people, we need to talk about it in more detail than usual so that we make sure we have good information about the kinds of sexual experiences young people have. Whatever you tell me will be kept confidential.

- How old were you when your voice first started to experience your period?

- How old were you when you first started growing body hair?

- When you think about sex, do you think of yourself as gay, bisexual, or straight, or other?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be bisexual?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being bisexual?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be straight?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being straight?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be gay?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being gay?

Other Rosario Measures

Sociosexual Developmental Milestones—As part of an inventory to assess involvement in gay-related activities (Rosario et al., 2001; see below for details), we asked youths at baseline for the age when they first spoke or wrote to anyone (e.g., peer, counselor, teacher, coach, adult, switchboard) about homosexuality or bisexuality. We asked a similar series of questions with respect to ages when they first participated in various social or recreational gay-related activities (e.g., going to a gay bookstore, coffee house). The minimum age across each series was used to

compute the age at which the youths first talked to someone about homosexuality and the age at which they first attended or participated in a gay-related activity. As with the psychosexual milestones described above, the number of years since each milestone was computed as the differences between the ages at each milestone and the youths' age at baseline.

Involvement in Gay-Related Activities—The prevalence of lifetime involvement in gay/lesbian-related social activities was assessed at baseline using a 28-item scale developed for this study (Rosario et al., 2001). At subsequent assessments, youths were asked about their involvement in the past 6 months (i.e., since their last assessment). A factor analysis of the baseline data identified 11 items (e.g., going to a gay bookstore, gay coffee house, gay pride march, gay fairs, gay clubs or bars) that loaded on a single factor. The number of these items that were endorsed was used as the indicator of involvement in gay-related social activities (Cronbach's α = .64 – .77 across the three assessments).

Self-Disclosure of Sexual Identity to Others—Youths were asked at baseline to enumerate "all the people in your life who are important or were important to you and whom you told that you are (lesbian/gay/bisexual)" (Rosario et al., 2001). At subsequent assessments, youths were asked about the number of individuals to whom the youth had disclosed during the past six months (i.e., since the last assessment). The number of individuals reported was used as the indicator of self-disclosure to others. Because the follow-up data were positively skewed (i.e., most youths reported very few new disclosures in the past 6 months, for example, median = 2.0, M = 9.5, SD = 20.4 at the 12-month assessment), the scores for the 6- and 12-month assessments were logarithmically transformed.

Certainty About, Comfort With, and Self-Acceptance of Sexuality—At the 6- month and

12-month assessments, items were added to assess the commitment of the youths to their

gay/lesbian identity or to that part of their bisexual identity that was centered on the same sex

(Rosario, Hunter, & Gwadz, 1994). We asked youths who had self-identified as gay/lesbian,

"How certain are you about being lesbian/gay at this point?" and asked the bisexual youths,

"How certain are you about being bisexual at this point?" For comfort with sexuality, we asked

the gay/lesbian youths, "How comfortable are you with your lesbianism/ gayness?" and asked

the bisexual youths, "How comfortable are you with your lesbian/gay side?" For self-acceptance

of sexuality, we asked the gay/lesbian youths, "How accepting of your lesbianism/gayness are

you?" and asked the bisexual youths, "How accepting are you of your lesbian/gay side?" We

coded the prevalence of being very certain/comfortable/ accepting (1) as compared to being less

than very certain/comfortable/accepting (0) for each variable.

Nungesser Inventory (modified by Schrimshaw)

DISCFSS1   Please indicate which of the following people you **first** told that you are gay,

bisexual, think that you may be, or that you are sexually attracted to other men.

[PICK ONE]

Mother

Father

Sister

Brother

Extended family member

Friend

Partner/Boyfriend/Lover

Formal adult

Other

DISCASS1   Please indicate which of the following people you have ever told

that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or that you are sexually attracted to other men.

[PICK ALL THAT APPLY]

Mother

Father

Sister

Brother

Extended family member

Friend

Partner/Boyfriend/Lover

Formal adult (e.g. teacher, coach)

Other

[SKIP IF NOT MOTHER]

DISCMOMSS1 You indicated that you have told your mother that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT FATHER]

DISCDADSS1 You indicated that you have told your father that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that his reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT SISTER]

DISCSISSS1 You indicated that you have told your sister that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT BROTHER]

DISCBROSS1 You indicated that you have told your brother that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that his reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT OTHER FAMILY]

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DISCFAMSS1 You indicated that you have told another extended family member that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that his or her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT FRIEND]

DISCFRNSS1   You indicated that you have told your friend that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that his or her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT BOYFRIEND]

DISCBFSS1   You indicated that you have told your boyfriend, partner or lover that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that his reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

150

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT FORMAL ADULT]

DISCFRMSS1 You indicated that you have told a "formal adult," like a teacher or a coach, that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to other men. Did you feel that his or her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT OTHER]

DISCOTHSS1 You indicated that you told someone else that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be or are sexually attracted to other men. Who is this person?

[TEXT RESPONSE]

Did you feel that this person's reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

Fuller (2016) Interview Questions

- Have you ever taken a Black Studies course? Why or why not?

- What factors motivated you to enroll in an African/African-American Studies course?

- Have your Black Studies courses influenced the way you see yourself as an African American or the world?

- Are you involved in any student organization(s)? Please list them.

- If so, why did you choose to join that/these organization(s)?

- If not, why did you choose not to join any organization(s)?

- Did your race/ethnicity play a role in your choice of joining an organization?

- How has your involvement in a student organization changed your perception of being an African American over time?

- How important is your organization to you?

- How do you think you have developed/changed your racial identity since your freshman year? Please give an example.

- Do you see yourself different as an African American compared to your freshman year? Please give an example.

- How do you see yourself as an African American today?

- What influenced your current understanding of your identity as an African American?

- How important is race in building relationships with people?

- Is there anything else you would like to address about being African American?

Permission to Adapt and Use - Rosario et. al

Reaching Out for Permission to Adapt Your LGBTQ Identity Development Tool 📎 5 ⌄ ⊞

Rosario, Margaret <mrosario@gc.cuny.edu>
Wed 8/19/2020 8:22 AM

To: Brendan Csaposs; eric.scrimshaw@ucf.edu; jh547@columbia.edu

Hi Brendan,
Yes, it's fine.

Margaret Rosario, Ph.D.

Past President, Division 44, American Psychological Association

Associate Editor, Journal of Sex Research

Associate Editor, Annals of LGBTQ Public and Population Health

Professor, Department of Psychology

The City University of New York--City College and Graduate Center

160 Convent Avenue

New York, NY 10031

212-650-5420 (telephone)

212-650-5659 (fax)

mrosario@gc.cuny.edu

Permission to Adapt and Use - Fuller

JM Jakia Marie <jakiamarie16@gmail.com>
Mon 8/24/2020 5:37 PM
To: Brendan Csaposs

Hi Brendan,

Thank you so much for reaching out. How are things in Kenya? I plan on visiting Nairobi if the COVID situation calms down.

Here is the link to the thesis. You can find the interview questions toward the end of the document https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/theses/810/

Good luck!

Jakia

Appendix B - My Instruments

IRB Letter of Approval

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

To:	Brendan Corbett Csaposs
From:	Justin R Chimka, Chair IRB Expedited Review
Date:	11/10/2021
Action:	**Exemption Granted**
Action Date:	11/10/2021
Protocol #:	2110362749
Study Title:	Making Meaning of the Shared Experience of Participants in an Undergraduate LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program

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.

cc: Kenda S Grover, Investigator

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Table 4: Semi-structured interview protocol. Presents the questions utilized for semi-structured interviews during the research process, along with the information yielded for each question and its alignment to the Research Questions guiding the study.

Question	Information Yielded	Research Question Alignment
1. How do you identify (i.e. within the structure of LGBTQ+)? Openly? If so for how long and to whom? *What other markers are important to you?*	Participants' Self-Identification Status	**Research Question #1:** How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?
2. Have you ever taken an LGBT Studies course or been involved in a gay organisation other than the Mentorship program? Have you been involved in any other LGBTQ+ movement work?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	**Research Question #3:** How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?
3. What factors motivated you to enroll in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas	**Research Question #2:** How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?
4. Tell me about your experience in the program. What has it been like? What did you enjoy? What was less enjoyable? Tell me about your relationship with your mentor? How did their identity relate to yours (or not)?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas	**Research Question #2:** How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?
5. How do you think about yourself as an LGBTQ+ individual?	Participants' Self-Identification Status	**Research Question #1:** How do students perceive their identity as LGBTQ+ individuals?
6. How has this changed over time since engaging in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship program?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	**Research Question #4:** How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?
7. How important is/ was the LGBTQ+ Mentorship program to you?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas	**Research Question #2:** How do students conceptualize their experiences in the program?
8. How do you see yourself differently as an LGBTQ+ person now than you did when you first entered the university as a freshman?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	**Research Question #4:** How do students think the program work has intersected with their identity as LGBTQ+ people?
9. How did your experiences in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship program relate to your life experiences and approaches since then?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	**Research Question #3:** How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?
10. How do you think your life experiences might have differed had you chosen not to participate in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship program?	Participants' Thoughts & Ideas Participants' Perceptions	**Research Question #3:** How do students make meaning of the intersection of the program work and their lives?

Demographic Post-Interview Questions

Sexual Identity Questions (SERBAS-Y)

- What was your sex assigned at birth?

- How do you identify now in terms of gender?

- What is your birth date?

- What is your ethnic background?

    Male Questions

- How old were you when your voice first started to change?

- How old were you when you first started growing body hair?

- When you think about sex, do you think of yourself as gay, bisexual, or straight, or other?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be bisexual?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being bisexual?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be straight?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being straight?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be gay?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being gay?

    Female Questions

- How old were you when your voice first started to experience your period?

- How old were you when you first started growing body hair?

- When you think about sex, do you think of yourself as gay, bisexual, or straight, or other?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be bisexual?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being bisexual?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be straight?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being straight?

- Was there ever a time when you thought you might be gay?

- How old were you when you first thought of yourself as really being gay?

LGBTQ+ Identity Integration Questions (Rosario)

Have you ever…

- Watched a television program or news-report, or listened to a radio program about lesbian or gay people or themes.

- Seen a play with lesbian or gay characters or themes. and/or a comedy act by a lesbian or gay comedian?

- Seen films at the movies or watched videos about lesbian or gay characters or themes?

- Read a lesbian or gay book, magazine, newspaper, etc .?

- Gone to a concert or musical event by lesbian or gay singers, choirs, dancers or musicians?

- Gone to a lesbian or gay party or dinner at someone's home?

- Gone to an annual lesbian and gay fair?

- Gone to an annual Lesbian and Gay Pride March?

- Marched as part of a lesbian and gay group in an ethnic parade (e.g., the annual Puerto Rican Day Parade) or other cultural event?

- Talked to lesbian or gay peers about homosexuality or bisexuality?

- Talked to straight peers about homosexuality or bisexuality?

- Talked to a counselor, teacher or coach about homosexuality or bisexuality?

- Gone to a lesbian or gay religious group meeting?

- Gone to a lesbian or gay bookstore or other establishment?

- Used an app or other personal ad to meet other LGBTQ+ people?

- Gone to a "cruising" location to meet lesbian or gay people?

- Gone to a park or beach where lesbian or gay people go?

- Gone to gay or lesbian dance clubs, bars, discos, or hung around these places?

- Gone to drag balls at the houses such as the House of Avis Pendavis?

- Attended an LGBTQ+ Political group or organisation?

- Joined a gay/lesbian sports team or seen one play?

How old were you when you did each of the following?

- Watched a television program or news-report, or listened to a radio program about lesbian or gay people or themes.

- Seen films at the movies or watched videos about lesbian or gay characters or themes?

- Read a lesbian or gay book, magazine, newspaper, etc .?

- Talked to lesbian or gay peers or adults about homosexuality or bisexuality?

- Gone to gay or lesbian dance clubs, bars, discos, or hung around these places?

- Went to other LGBTQ+ places such as community centers, cruising spots, etc.?

- Attended an LGBTQ+ Political group or organization?

- Used an app or other personal ad to meet other LGBTQ+ people?

- Talked to a counselor, teacher or coach about homosexuality or bisexuality?

Nungesser Acceptance / Rejection Inventory (modified by Schrimshaw)

DISCFSS1   Please indicate which of the following people you **first** told that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or that you are sexually attracted to others of the same sex.

[PICK ONE]

Mother

Father

Sister

Brother

Extended family member

Friend

Partner/Boyfriend/Lover

Formal adult

Other

DISCASS1   Please indicate which of the following people you have ever told that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or that you are sexually attracted to others of the same sex.

[PICK ALL THAT APPLY]

Mother

Father

Sister

Brother

Extended family member

Friend

Partner/Boyfriend/Lover

Formal adult (e.g. teacher, coach)

Other

[SKIP IF NOT MOTHER]

DISCMOMSS1 You indicated that you have told your mother that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT FATHER]

DISCDADSS1 You indicated that you have told your father that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that his reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

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Accepting

DISCSISSS1 You indicated that you have told your sister that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

DISCBROSS1 You indicated that you have told your brother that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that his reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

DISCFAMSS1 You indicated that you have told another extended family member that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that his or her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT FRIEND]

DISCFRNSS1   You indicated that you have told your friend that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that his or her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT BOYFRIEND]

DISCBFSS1   You indicated that you have told your boyfriend, partner or lover that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that his reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT FORMAL ADULT]

DISCFRMSS1 You indicated that you have told a "formal adult," like a teacher or a coach, that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be, or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Did you feel that his or her reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

[SKIP IF NOT OTHER]

DISCOTHSS1 You indicated that you told someone else that you are gay, bisexual, think that you may be or are sexually attracted to others of the same sex. Who is this person?

[TEXT RESPONSE]

Did you feel that this person's reaction was rejecting, neutral, or accepting?

Rejecting

Neutral

Accepting

LGBTQ+ Attitudes Inventory (Rosario)

Tell me the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements using this scale:

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Somewhat Disagree

3. Somewhat Agree

4. Strongly Agree

- Most problems that lesbian and gay people have come from being a disliked minority group, and not from being lesbian or gay by itself.

- Homosexuals should be allowed to have or adopt children if they want to.

- When I think about coming out to a straight friend, I am afraid they will pay more attention to my body movements and voice than to me, the person.

- I am afraid people will harass me if I come out more publicly

- I am glad to be (lesbian/gay/bisexual)

- I do not want straight people to know that I am (lesbian/gay/bisexual)

- When I am sexually attracted to a (lesbian/gay) person, I do not mind if someone else knows how I feel.

- My (homosexuality/bisexuality) does not make me unhappy

- If I were outed, I would be extremely unhappy.

- I wish I were straight.

- If others knew about my (homosexuality/bisexuality). I would be afraid that they would see me as being (masculine / effeminate)

- Whenever I think a lot about being (lesbian/gay/bisexual), I feel sad or depressed.

- If my straight friends knew of my (homosexuality/bisexuality), I would feel uncomfortable.

- Homosexuality' is a natural expression of sexuality in people.

- Homosexuals do not dislike people of the opposite sex any more than straight persons dislike people of the opposite sex.

- I would not mind if my neighbors knew that I am (lesbian/gay/bisexual)

- Gay men are overly promiscuous.

- If people knew of my (homosexuality/bisexuality), I am afraid they would begin to avoid me/

- Gay marriage should remain legal.

- Whenever I think a lot about being (lesbian/gay/bisexual), I feel critical about myself

- Homosexuality is a sexual perversion

- It is important for me to conceal the fact that I am (lesbian/gay/bisexual) from most people.

- Lesbians are overly promiscuous

- When people know of my (homosexuality/bisexuality). I am afraid they will not treat me as a (woman/man)

- Homosexual lifestyles are not as satisfying or fulfilling as straight lifestyles

- 'Whenever I tell my straight friends about my (homosexuality/bisexuality), I worry they will try to remember things about me that appear to fit the stereotype of a homosexual

- I am proud to be part of the lesbian and gay community

- If people my age knew of my (homosexuality/bisexuality), I am afraid that many would not want to be my friends

- I am confident that my (homosexuality/bisexuality) does not make me inferior

- I would not give up my (homosexuality/bisexuality) ever, if I could

- Homosexuality is not as good as heterosexuality

- When I think about coming out to a straight friend, I worry that she or he might watch me to see if I do things that are stereotypically gay

- Straight people have it easier than lesbian and gay people

Invitation to Participate

Dear Student,

My name is Brendan Csaposs, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas in the Department of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. I am currently working on writing my dissertation and will be conducting my research with students and alumni of your university's LGBTQ+ Mentor Program. Based on a strong recommendation from Dr. Vega, I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

The purpose of my research is to investigate LGBTQ+ college students' experiences in the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program as well as their reasons for participating. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that uses open-ended questions to ask you to share your story and make meaning of your experience as a LGBTQ+ student in the mentorship program.

Throughout the interview, follow-up questions may be asked to verify my understanding of your experience in the Program. We will also close with a series of demographic and quantitative questions regarding your LGBTQ+ identity and your experiences. Your total time commitment will be about 110 minutes maximum. All interviews will occur online using Zoom, and will be recorded for later transcription.

Please note that your name and personal information and anyone you happen to mention in the interview would never be revealed to anyone in or out of school; your name in all transcripts of interviews, comments, observations, and documents would appear in written reports under a different name -- a pseudonym. You may also keep your webcam turned off during the interview to protect your privacy if you prefer.

Thank you very much for your consideration. I sincerely hope you will volunteer to participate. Please let me know by clicking on this link to email me if you would like to participate in an interview as part of this study. You may also contact me by telephone or email if you have any questions or would like more information.

To sign up for a timeslot for your interview, please use this link:

https://calendly.com/brendan-csaposs I look forward to meeting you!

Brendan Csaposs

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Adult Education & Lifelong Learning, University of Arkansas

Phone: (415) 706-4224 * Email: bccsapos@email.uark.edu

Introductory Biography (Requested by Dr. Vega for Introduction Emails)

Brendan Csaposs is in his thirteenth year in education, serving as the Dean Development Lead for Kenya with NOVA Pioneer Schools in Nairobi. Prior to this, he spent three years working as a Principal-in-Residence with IDEA Public Schools in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he helped found two public charter primary schools serving historically underserved students. His journey in education, however, started in his undergraduate years at Hobart College in Geneva, New York, where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in LGBT Studies & Music. Volunteering in a local Headstart, he saw early on what inequity and injustice mean in schools. This path led him to Baton Rouge & New Orleans, where as a special education teacher, his students consistently academically outpaced both expectations and their peers, leading him to enter school administration by the age of 24.

Brendan has since gone on to earn a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from the George Washington University, and is in the final stages of completing dissertation work to earn his Doctorate in Adult Education from the University of Arkansas. Working in high-need schools in Louisiana, Texas, and California, and even during stints outside of schools as a Professor, Community Organiser, and candidate for public office, Brendan has always believed in the power of love & high expectations to help children change their world, which is work that he continues today on the African Continent as a Board Member of the Ghana Educational Collaborative and in volunteer work in Kenya.

Brendan also knows the importance of community and support for LGBTQ+ people. Having participated in a mentorship program in college and run his school's Pride Alliance for a number of years, he knows this type of support and community is critical to the success of LGBTQ+ students. For these reasons, he is very excited to be undertaking doctoral research in this area, to highlight the importance of these programs for university systems.

Overview of Study (requested by Dr. Vega)

Much of my life has been a long pattern of 'firsts'; particularly when it comes to my sexuality. 'First Openly Gay _____ [insert moniker here]' has become somewhat a constant: from joining a fraternity in college, to delivering the valedictory address at my undergraduate Commencement, to running for local political office. However, I have rarely paused to interrogate the events in my life that may or may have not directed this pattern.

During the course of my doctoral studies in adult education, two things became apparent: firstly, that analyses within the adult education field from an LGBTQ+ perspective are woefully underrepresented, and secondly, that there likely were experiences in my own education journey that contributed to the aforementioned pattern.

In considering the specifics of what might have led me to this new space of learning, I found the search regularly leading me back to my participation in a particular minor program during my undergraduate studies: Peer Education in Human Relations. The program started with a Freshman year class; Making Connections, rooted in the teachings of Paolo Freire. This became my introduction to the concepts of heterosexism and institutionalized homophobia. In combination with the major I ultimately declared in LGBT Studies, I developed key mindsets

that encouraged me to step into the space surrounding this moniker: the "First Gay ____,". For

better or worse, this decision has underpinned many of my accomplishments.

As this awareness grew, I found myself more incensed by the lack of research in the area

of exploring LGBTQ+ students' experiences in collegiate education. I knew I had found

something invaluable and worth exploring once I met experts in the field who directed me to the

Miami LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. I am excited to be able to undertake this study; to help

begin filling this important gap in the literature and LGBTQ+ history.

Informed Consent

Making Meaning of Experiences in an LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Principal Researcher: Brendan Csaposs, M.A.
Faculty Advisor: Kenda S. Grover, Ed.D.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
You are invited to participate in a research study about how LGBTQ+ students make meaning of
their experience in an LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program. You are being asked to participate in this
study because you are a student or alumni of this program, and were identified as a strong
potential research candidate by the director of the program, Dr. Gisela Vega.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?
Brendan Csaposs, M.A.
Doctoral Student
Adult Education and Lifelong Learning
University of Arkansas, College of Education & Health Professions
415-706-4224 (cell)
bccsapos@email.uark.edu

Who is the Faculty Advisor?
Kenda S. Grover, Ed.D.
Associate Professor
Adult and Lifelong Learning
University of Arkansas, College of Education & Health Professions
479-575-2675
kgrover@uark.edu

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this study is to describe what it means from the point of view of LGBTQ+ students to participate in an LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program.

Who will participate in this study?
We are seeking 15-20 participants who are currently enrolled in or have previously graduated from the LGBTQ+ Mentorship Program.

What am I being asked to do?
Your participation will require the following:
Complete a brief demographic questionnaire. Meet with the principal investigator or another member of the research team for a Zoom interview that would take approximately 1.5-2 hours. Interviews will be audio & video recorded. Participants will receive an emailed summary of responses and have the opportunity to submit feedback or changes. You might be contacted after the initial interview if we need additional information, and/or you might be asked to review our findings for accuracy. If follow-up is needed, it is anticipated to take no longer than an additional 2 hours.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
There are no anticipated risks to participating.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
There are no anticipated benefits to the participant.

How long will the study last?
The demographic questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The initial interview will be scheduled for 2 hours to ensure adequate time. If you are contacted for additional follow-up, it is anticipated to take no longer than an additional 2 hours.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study? No, you will not receive compensation for your participation.

Will I have to pay for anything?
No, there will be no cost associated with your participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?
If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Audio or audio/video recordings will be transcribed, and all files will be stored in a password protected environment. During transcription, documents will be coded so that the identity of the speaker is removed. Only the researchers will be able to identify the speaker(s) once recordings have been transcribed. Participant names will be changed in the written report. Recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed.

Will I know the results of the study?
At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Kenda Grover (kgrover@uark.edu) or Principal Researcher, Brendan Csaposs (bccsapos@email.uark.edu). You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?
You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Brendan Csaposs (bccsapos@email.uark.edu)
Kenda Grover (kgrover@uark.edu)

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Integrity & Compliance
University of Arkansas
 109 MLKG Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2208
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by participation. I have been given a copy of the consent form. By participating in this interview, I am giving my consent for my responses to be used in this research.