

ABSTRACT

Tiffany Hinton, *BECOMING A BETTER ALLY: IMPROVING THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ STUDENTS AT ELIZABETH CITY STATE UNIVERSITY* (Under the direction of Dr. Crystal Chambers). Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2022.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons are largely invisible in historically Black post-secondary education research and discourse. To this end, LGBTQ students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are often ignored and their voices are silenced, thus impacting their feelings of marginality and mattering.

Furthermore, studies report that LGTQ students perceive HBCUs as unfriendly towards LGBTQ persons due to religiosity and their heteronormative climates. This qualitative study explores the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at Elizabeth City State University, a historically Black institution. The focus of this study is to hear and use the stories of the sample population to inform an intervention strategy aimed to improve the campus culture for LGBTQ students.

In this qualitative study, I worked with self-disclosing LGBTQ students at one HBCU in northeastern, North Carolina to understand and improve their social experiences on the campus. Through this narrative inquiry, the participants' stories were collected and analyzed. Data analysis revealed three overarching themes: (1) Daring to Come Out, (2) Cultural Challenges to Acceptance, and (3) Unwelcoming Campus Culture for LGBTQ students. This information was utilized to develop and implement a campus-based initiative. Implications and recommendations for future research are included at the end of the study.

BECOMING A BETTER ALLY: IMPROVING THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN,
GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER STUDENTS AT ELIZABETH CITY
STATE UNIVERSITY

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by

Tiffany Hinton

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STATE UNIVERSITY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to those who pushed me along the way, knowingly and unknowingly. And secondly, to the many Black and Brown LGBTQ students enrolled at Historically Black Institutions... especially those at Elizabeth City State University. Without your participation, this work would not have been possible.

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It takes a village to succeed, and I would not have completed this work without mine:

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I was raised in a black household, in a black neighborhood, attended a black church, went to a black school, etc. The black community and the LGBT community have a long way to go. Being gay isn't nearly as accepted amongst the black community, as it is in other communities. My first instinct was not to go to an HBCU but to go somewhere with more diversity where I would feel more accepted. (Matthew Gates, 2016, quoted in Hause, 2016, ¶. 2).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) traditionally were the cornerstone of education for racial minorities, but they have seldomly been safe or welcoming environments for sexual and gender minorities (Gasman et al., 2013; Lenning, 2017; Patton, 2011; Squire & Mobley, 2015). In a room full of historically Black college and university (HBCU) presidents, Sharon Lettman-Hicks, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) exclaimed that “Black LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) [people] are Black people too...but within Black spaces, they are often regulated to second class citizens...we have to stop otherizing our LGBT community” (Hudson, 2017, p. 16). Lettman-Hicks' declaration emerged amid a national outcry for inclusiveness on HBCU campuses nationwide. Within the last decade, there have been several documented incidents of hostility toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students at HBCUs, including incidents of prejudice, discrimination, and hostility. Examples include the severe assault of a homosexual student at an all-male, HBCU in Atlanta, Georgia (Patton, 2010); the denial of a gay student organization's charter on the campus of a private HBCU in Hampton, Virginia (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, 2017); the allegations that a student's hazing

death was related to his sexuality (Carter, 2013); and the listing of homosexuality as a university policy violation (Hudson, 2017).

HBCUs generally uphold principles that endorse pride in oneself and the Black community (Coleman, 2016), but they also breed anti-LGBTQ sentiments due to religiosity (Carter, 2013). Patton and Simmons (2008) suggested that many religious principles condemn same-sex relationships and teach against homosexual behaviors which are viewed as “deviant” and “unnatural” (p. 199). Despite notable, yet evolving legal protections for LGBTQ persons, conservative backlash persists in Black college contexts (DeVita & Anders, 2018). According to Harper and Gasman (2008), the conservative politics of many Black institutions yield restrictive and heterosexist environments that sustain homophobia within HBCU contexts. Several scholars have attributed homophobia at HBCUs to religiosity, as both the origins of many schools are as religious institutions and African Americans tend to hold deeply religious views (Coleman, 2016; Gasman et al., 2013; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Ward, 2005).

Students who do not conform to the heterosexual dominant ideals of HBCU culture are often ignored and marginalized at HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Patton, 2011; Squire & Norris, 2014). Nancy Schlossberg (1989) described marginality as a sense of not “fitting in” that can lead to self-consciousness, irritability, and depression (Patton et al., 2016, p. 47). The experiences and identities of LGBTQ students are greatly impacted when HBCUs disregard the sexual identity of LGBTQ students. Studies show that feelings of marginality and mattering significantly influences sense of belonging, connectedness, and meaningfulness for some students (Marshall, 2001; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012), thus hindering a student’s engagement, retention, and persistence at their institution, in some instances.

In an era where negative attitudes toward LGBTQ people and issues are shifting, HBCUs grapple with embracing the call for LGBTQ inclusion (Coleman, 2016; Gasman et al., 2013; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015, 2019; Richen, 2014). There are a plethora of factors that impact the ability of HBCUs' to foster inclusive environments for LGBTQ individuals. These factors include their historical missions, campus' conservative and heteronormative climates, and the unwillingness of campus faculty and staff to dismantle tradition for the sake of addressing their increasingly active generation of LGBTQ students (Coleman, 2016; Gasman et al., 2013; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mobley & Johnson, 2015, 2019; Patton & Simmons, 2008).

The focus of practice (FoP) for this study is to investigate the everyday social experiences of students whose sexual expressions vary from social norms at a select HBCU and to implement an intervention strategy to improve the campus climate for the LGBTQ community. The findings from this study may assist HBCU administrators working with LGBTQ students to improve the overall social experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs. The subsequent sections of this chapter will include the background of the focus of practice, the context of the study, the conceptual framework, a statement of the focus of practice, a list of the focus of practice guiding questions, the overview of inquiry, definitions of key terms, assumptions, limitations, and the significance of inquiry.

Background of the Focus of Practice

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have a rich history of providing universal education for all people, regardless of race, class, or gender (Jewell, 2002). HBCUs have not only been recognized as places of access and equality, but these minority-serving institutions have also historically led and defended controversial issues (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Historically Black institutions' faculty, staff, and students have

focused their sociopolitical activism on race issues (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Patton, 2010; Squire & Mobley, 2015) and gender issues (Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton & Simmons, 2008), but seldom have sexual orientation or gender identity been a part of their efforts. Consequently, LGBTQ students' racial identity is depicted to matter more than their sexual or gender identity at HBCUs (Patton & Simmons, 2008). This acuity was introduced by Audre Lorde (1984), a Black lesbian poet, and labeled in Patton and Simmons' (2008) study as "sister/outsider", a notion that being Black is an accepted identity, but being lesbian is "outside" of what is accepted and considered to be "other". In her book, *Sister Outsider*, Lorde (1984) discussed the realities of Blackness and gayness or lesbianism, and she wrote about the homophobic treatment that she and other Black lesbians experienced by Black women. She wrote:

Because of our homosexuality, the Black community casts us out as outsiders...My straight girlfriends...either ignored my love for women, considering it interestingly avant-grade or tolerated it as just another example of my craziness. It was allowable as long as it wasn't too obvious and didn't reflect upon them in any way. At least my being gay kept me from being a competitor for whatever men happened to be upon their horizons (p. 196).

Thus, the decision to reveal one's lesbian identity could lead to loss of support from loved ones and friends and this abandonment and ostracism often forces LGBTQ people to live compartmentalized lives (Patton & Simmons, 2008).

Heteronormalism, heterosexism, and homophobia are forms of oppression that need to be addressed by HBCUs to foster supportive climates for LGBTQ students (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality and a person's complete alignment

with their biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation is normal, and the ideal form of sexuality (Nunn & Bolt, 2015). Heteronormativity is reinforced by people and policies, and it is linked to homophobia and heterosexism (Herek, 2004; Nunn & Bolt, 2015; Rankin et al., 2013). Homophobia is understood to be the fear of and intolerance for homosexuals, whereas heterosexism is an ideology that privileges heterosexuality and actively diminishes homosexual relationships, identities, and behaviors (Nunn & Bolt, 2015). Lorde (1984) articulately conveyed her personal experiences of sexual marginality and discrimination in *Sister/Outsider*, she shared “I was constantly encouraged to pluck out aspects of myself and present them as a meaningful whole, eclipsing and denying the other parts of myself (p. 120). The eradication of Lorde’s sexual identity, in order to confirm to heterosexual norms of society, highlights the privileges of one identity and the marginalization of another.

African Americans who are attracted to the same sex tend to face more disapproval from their families and straight friends than do similar Whites (Lewis, 2003). Lorde (1984) shared her personal experience with a close friend: “Rhea did not know that I was gay, and I did not tell her. Homosexuality was outside the party line at that time; therefore, Rhea defined it as “bad” and her approval was important to me” (p. 197). Some authors (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1998) have discussed anti-gay sentiments within the Black community suggesting that homosexual relationships are tolerated as “open secrets” as long as they are not given too much public attention. This “pick and choose” mentality is used among heterosexual African Americans to accept queer Blacks but only within prescribed roles, such as church choir directors, hairstylists, or fashionistas (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). Outside of these roles, homosexual men in the Black community are often degraded by ostracism and derogatory terms like “sissy” or faggot”.

Several men and women have challenged normative beliefs about what it means to be a man or woman, resulting in the rejection of traditional notions about masculinity and femininity (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). However, many members of the Black community are deeply committed to silencing these challenges and preserving monolithic ideologies of manhood and womanhood through persistent homophobia. Scholars suggest that heterosexism breeds homophobia and fosters extreme expressions that target nonheterosexuality for abuse (Rankin et al., 2013). The research shows that many LGBTQ students enrolled at HBCUs report verbal and physical abuse, harassment, discrimination, and emotional duress caused by institutional policies, faculty, staff, and other students (Ford, 2015; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Black campus environments are constructed to disregard the presence of LGBT students, and heterosexual students behaved accordingly (Harper & Gasman, 2008, p. 346). Visibly, HBCUs are clear: discrimination of any kind is not tolerated but LGTBQ students experience distinct challenges to inclusion within HBCU environments, as one HBCU president has said:

I would be lying if I said that we have done everything in our power to stamp out the vestiges of bigotry based on sexual orientation. We have a long way to go, and there is a lot of resistance from senior administrators, members of the board, and many of our alumni, who are now parents (Hudson, 2017, p. 16).

While the social acceptance of individuals who identify as LGBTQ in America has increased, HBCU climates (Renn et al., 2015), nationwide, continue to be described as hostile and unwelcoming for LGBTQ students (Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Patton, 2010). Historically Black institutions are far behind predominantly White institutions (PWIs), as it relates to providing supportive and affirming spaces for queer students (Lenning, 2017). Unlike many PWIs, HBCUs do not ensure that institutional programs and spaces are available to serve

their LGBT student population or educate campuses on matters pertaining to the LGBT community (Coleman, 2016). Simply put, historically Black institutions have dropped the ball in supporting their sexual minority students, also referred to as LGBTQ students (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017). The purpose of this study is to explore the social experiences of LGBTQ students attending a historically Black institution and implement an intervention to improve the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at the university.

FoP Guiding Questions

The questions guiding this FoP inquiry are:

1. What are the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at Elizabeth City State University?
2. What are the effects of a selected campus initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at Elizabeth City State University?

Context of the Study

This study will take place on a single HBCU campus. Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) is a small-sized, public, four-year university in northeastern North Carolina. ECSU is a rural-serving postsecondary institution. As of Spring Census 2022, the total student population is approximately 2,100 students, and the majority are full-time (1,663), undergraduate (1,956), and Black (67.3%). Demographic information about gender identity or sexual orientation is absent from the enrollment data. This is typical because there are no federal or accreditation data collection requirements for this data. Similarly, there is no available data regarding LGBTQ student experiences or the campus climate for LGBTQ persons at the institution. The target population for this study is collegiate students who identify as LGBTQ and are enrolled at the historically Black university in the northeastern United States.

Like other HBCUs, ECSU has made strides to support its LGBTQ student population, through the establishment of a diversity and inclusion center and a gay-straight alliance. In Fall 2018, the selected institution of study hosted an inaugural opening for its diversity center. The center was dedicated to diversity and inclusion on campus and worked to educate students on diverse issues (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d). According to the Director of the center:

The office is an expanded version of the University's women's center. Where the women's center focused on issues of sexual assault, date assault, and stalking, the diversity center goes further to address issues that relate to members of the LGBTQIA community, and any group on campus that represents diversity (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d).

The PACE center is responsible for racial, cultural, sexual orientation, and gender identity programming and awareness initiatives. Since its grand opening, there have been six LGBTQ awareness trainings sponsored by the diversity Center. Additionally, in October 2018, the PACE center worked with the University's homecoming committee to preserve a platform to discuss sexuality and LGBTQ issues. While these efforts are strides towards a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment for LGBTQ students, campus administrators could partner with LGBTQ students to implement other LGBTQ-specific initiatives that promote institutional inclusiveness for LGBTQ students.

Statement of Focus of Practice

Research on the experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs remains scarce. Recent scholarly literature concerning the LGBTQ community at HBCUs (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Pomeranz, 2018), reports that sexual minorities experience unwelcoming, hostile environments (Coleman, 2016; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015;

Pryor, 2018). Specifically, the climate at HBCUs for LGBTQ students has been described as “non-gay-friendly” (Lewis & Erickson, 2016). Verbal and physical abuse, discrimination, and emotional duress caused by campus members, institutional policies, and society at large contribute to the hostile climate for LGBTQ students at HBCUs (Carter, 2013). Historically Black institutions are struggling with providing support for and addressing the needs of their LGBTQ students (Mobley & Johnson, 2015).

Campus leaders must improve the campus climate for LGBTQ persons and increase inclusion on their campuses (Renn, 2010). Gasmen et al. (2013) challenged historically White and Black institutions to create inclusive environments for all persons on their campuses, regardless of their race, ethnicity, class, disability, gender, or religious affiliation. The focus of practice (FoP) for this dissertation study is to investigate the lived social experiences of LGBTQ students attending Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), a small historically Black Institution in Northeastern North Carolina. This FoP intends to investigate the social experiences of students whose sexual identities or practices do not conform to dominant norms or ideals at ECSU and to implement an intervention strategy to improve the campus climate for this community of students.

Overview of the Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, I will explore the everyday experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ collegiate students and attempt to provide a platform to a community whose voices are often silenced in a heteronormative and homophobic campus environment (Blumenfeld, 2012). This study is grounded by Nancy Schlossberg’s (1989) Marginality and Mattering Model and Edgar Schein’s (1991) organizational culture theoretical frameworks. These specific theoretical frameworks are used to study, interpret, unpack, and reveal individual stories, and lived

experiences, of a group of individuals (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). Schlossberg's theory on marginality and mattering and Schein's organizational culture frameworks will guide this study's framing and data analysis, as well as the implementation of a campus intervention aimed to improve the campus culture for LGBTQ students.

Marginality and Mattering

According to the marginality and mattering framework, students are vulnerable to feeling marginalized on their campuses (Schlossberg, 1989). The concept of marginality was described by sociologist Robert Park in 1928 as a personality type, specifically "the marginal man". Park (1928) labeled the marginal man as

One who is living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break, even if permitted to do so, with past and traditions, and not quite accepted, because of prejudice, in the new society in which the individual seeks to find a place (p. 892).

Park's descriptions regarding "the marginal man" can be applied to any person or group existing in two discrete cultures. The aspiration of marginalized persons to feel that they matter is synonymous, although marginality and mattering exist on opposite ends of the spectrum. Those who feel marginalized believe that their experiences are not congruent with their environment (Chaves, 2006). Schlossberg offered marginality and mattering as a concept for shaping community (Rosati et al., 2019).

Schlossberg (1989) furthered Astin's (1984) involvement theory by hypothesizing that "involvement creates connections between students, faculty, and staff that allow individuals to believe in their own personal worth" (p. 5). When a student does not have these connections, they do not feel central or important to the university community and they may feel marginal. As

students transition into college or university life, the infinite amount of new experiences can induce an intense loss of centrality or importance (Rosati et al., 2019). Feelings of marginality can also lead to feelings of invisibility, higher levels of self-consciousness, and depression (Schlossberg, 1989).

Over time, students, generally, make friends and adjust to campus life. A student's successful transition reduces marginality and encourages mattering. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) were the first to conceptualize mattering to others. In their theoretical model, they examined adolescents' feelings of mattering to their parents and found that interpersonal mattering is an integral component of a person's self-concept and their connection with others. Schlossberg (1989) adopted the concept of mattering to college students and described mattering as a person's feeling of appreciation or value by others. She believed that creating communities where students feel as if they matter is vital to the satisfaction and retention of students (Schlossberg, 1989). Given the importance of community, LGBTQ students must have social support from campus members. Such support can impact LGBTQ students' feelings of mattering and retention. In a study examining campus climate perceptions for LGBTQ students across gender and non-gender confirming students, Garvey and Rankin (2015) revealed that several LGBTQ participants reported that they considered leaving their institution because they did not feel supported by others at their institution.

At HBCUs, LGBTQ students exist within cultures that do not support or affirm who they are. These students find their identities omitted from campus norms, traditions, programs, and services. Students who feel unvalued or unimportant to their institutions are less likely to achieve their desired educational goals (Tinto, 1993). This is also valid when they do not feel central to the environment (Schlossberg, 1989). The concepts of marginality and mattering can be used to

explore the campus climate for LGBTQ students and acknowledge the community's existence within its own environment.

Organizational Culture

Historically Black institutions foster nurturing and familial environments for minority students (Harper & Gasman, 2008). Research concerning the experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at HBCUs shows that these minority-serving institutions are not supportive of homosexuality. Campus culture and climate are discrete terms often used interchangeably in discussions related to student retention and persistence (Bauer, 1998). Culture examines institutions from a holistic view whereas climate focuses on a specific part of the campus (Bauer, 1998). To change the conservative and heteronormative climates for LGBTQ students at historically Black institutions, it is important to address their culture. Edgar Schein (1983) defined organizational culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 14).

Organizations do not form accidentally; instead, they are usually created by leaders who have a vision of how a concerted effort could create a new service (Schein, 1996). HBCUs were created to provide religious teaching and basic skill training to Black Americans (Jewell, 2002). Through the years, HBCUs have preserved their religious foundations. HBCUs have struggled to adjust their moral compass when it comes to working with LGBTQ students (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Schein (1996) provides a theoretical approach to examining and addressing the campus cultures of HBCUs. In his model, Schein (1996) contends that an organization's culture

is represented at three levels: artifacts, adopted values, and basic assumptions. These three elements will be used to address the social needs of LGBTQ students within the campus environment and create change.

Definition of Key Terms

The following operational definitions were used throughout this study:

Bisexual: an individual, male or female, attracted, emotionally, physically, romantically, and/or sexually to both males and females (Renn, 2010).

Gay: a male who is exclusively attracted, emotionally, physically, romantically, and/or sexually to other males. Gay is also an umbrella term used to refer to the entire LGBTQ community (Renn, 2010).

Gender Identity: The sense of being male or female, somewhere in between, or neither. It is not dependent on whether the individual conforms to social or cultural expectations regarding gender (American Psychological Association, 2011).

Historically Black College or University (HBCU): any college or university that was established before 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation (Department of Education, 2018).

Lesbian: a female who is exclusively attracted, emotionally, physically, romantically, and/or sexually to other females (Renn, 2010).

Predominately White Institution (PWI): Any college or university in which over 50% of the student population is identified as White (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011).

Queer: includes all the sexual and gender identities (Renn, 2010).

Sexual Minority: An individual or social group who, by virtue of their sexual orientation or gender identity, has historically been placed on the outer edge of the accepted social and economic hierarchy (Cross & Atinde, 2015).

Safe Zone: A safe space on campus where LGBTQ students can seek support and affirmation and express their feelings and concerns without fear of harassment or violence (Mobley & Johnson, 2015).

Sexual Orientation: refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted to. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals) (American Psychological Association, 2011).

Social Experience: "provide cues to the overall quality of a given environment and the status of an individual within that environment" (Champagne & Curley, 2005, p. 707). For this study, social experiences are student experiences that include interpersonal interactions with faculty, staff, and other students on campus.

Transgender: An individual who identifies as a gender other than the gender assigned sex at birth (Renn, 2010).

Assumptions

Subjectivity is essential to the reader's ability to determine research credibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This section reveals the assumptions of the study in an effort to ensure research credibility. First, the practitioner assumes that the participants of this study have experienced unwelcoming interactions with campus faculty, staff, and other students which

impacts their feelings of marginality and mattering. The practitioner also assumes that all participants will trust the practitioner and participate willingly and openly.

Limitations

Limitations refer to the conditions that may impact a research study's results (O'Leary, 2005). There will be limitations to this study. To begin, homosexuality is a sensitive, under-examined phenomenon for both HBCUs and LGBTQ students. To this point, the recruitment of participants will be difficult to gain due to the nature of the topic, therefore, potentially, limiting the full participation of participants. Additionally, this study will recruit participants through the university's diversity center and its affiliated gay-straight alliance. Therefore, responses will be limited to self-identifying LGBTQ students who are actively engaged in the aforementioned student organization.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

Narrative researchers examine their own experiences to address their beliefs and philosophical assumptions and consider how these perspectives influence the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As the scholarly practitioner, I must reflect on my role in the study and how my background, culture, and experiences hold potential to shape my interpretation of the themes and meaning I ascribe from the data (Gardner et al., 2017). I must recognize my own position to ensure that I honor the similarities and the differences between my participants and myself. Thus, I must address my positionality.

I identify as an African American, heterosexual, cisgender Christian woman and supporter of LGBTQ people and issues, as well as HBCUs who is personally and professionally interested in understanding the lived experiences of LGTQ students at HBCUs. I believe in the Christian moralities of heteronormativity, but I do not condemn or discriminate

against LGBTQ individuals. This topic stems from my pursuit of social justice and a desire to improve the HBCU climate for historically marginalized groups such as LGBTQ students. I am an alumna of two Historically Black institutions, and I currently serve in a professional role that supports, assists, and advocates for LGBTQ students and issues at an HBCU. I am also an internal researcher, and my perspective and evaluation of students' experiences on the campus can be different or biased compared to an external researcher (Spaulding, 2013, pp. 11-12). An internal researcher is a person who is currently affiliated with the organization, whereas external researchers are from outside of the setting (Spaulding, 2013).

While I have never faced discrimination due to my sexuality, I currently work with LGBTQ students on an HBCU campus. Through my work, I was able to establish relationships with many LGBTQ students, and I subsequently came to realize their marginalization on the campus. Throughout this research study, I engaged in self-reflection. I kept a reflective journal to write out my beliefs and address my personal biases and emotions (Creswell, 2007). I also used journaling to acknowledge my HBCU experiences to avoid manipulating the participants and the research process (Creswell, 2007).

Significance of the Study

Historically, LGBTQ persons in higher education systems have been invisible; however, within the last decade, these sexual minority students have increased their visibility and openness on college campuses nationwide (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2010; Renn, 2010; Sanlo, 2005). The information gathered from this study may provide direction for student affairs professionals working with LGBTQ students at HBCUs that will assist in developing resources and initiatives designed to enhance the experiences of LGBTQ students on their campuses. HBCUs have dropped the ball in ensuring that institutional programs, activities,

and spaces are available to serve and address the needs of the LGBTQ persons, and they have failed to educate their community members on matters that pertain to this student population (Coleman, 2016).

Campus climate plays a critical role in the student experience. Students who are engaged on campus and develop relationships outside of the classroom are more likely to persist and graduate (Rankin et al., 2010). Equally, students who do not have connections on campus and are not engaged with campus activities, programs, or services are less likely to feel connected, and therefore less likely to persist (Evans et al., 2010). It is important to assess the campus climate for LGBTQ students because it allows campus administrators, faculty, and staff members to better understand the factors that support or obstruct student success and retention (Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010).

The information produced by this study is significant because it seeks to enhance the campus experience for LGBTQ students enrolled at HBCUs. The results of this research contribute to the body of knowledge regarding LGBTQ college students by providing an understanding of the lived social experiences of homosexual students at one HBCU campus. There are very few studies that focus on the social experiences of homosexual students that attend HBCUs. This study will provide a voice to a community that has traditionally been silenced by its minority status on HBCU campuses. In addition, this research can be potentially useful for college administrators, faculty, and staff at HBCUs to evaluate and address the unique needs of LGBTQ college students. Lastly, the information collected from this study can be used to train faculty, staff, and students and create a more inclusive, welcoming campus environment for students who identify as LGBTQ.

Overview of the Inquiry Method

A detailed explanation of this study's methodology will be included in Chapter 3. However, a brief overview is shared here. The methodological approach for this study is a narrative inquiry. Creswell (2013) described narrative analysis studies as "experiences as expressed by lived and told stories of individuals" (p. 70). This method is used in this research study to analyze the experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at Elizabeth City State University, a historically Black institution. The primary aim of this methodological approach is to shed light on the social experiences of the participants. According to Riessman (1993), "narrative research is useful for what it reveals about social life—culture speaks itself through an individual's story" (p. 5). Thus, this study focuses on listening to the stories of LGBTQ students and their social experiences with their peers, faculty, and students.

Summary

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction of the current research on the attitudes towards homosexuality and the experiences of LGTBQ individuals. The chapter established a rationale for the need to explore the experiences of LGTBQ college students at HBCUs. Included in this chapter were a list of research questions used to guide this study, the significance of the study, the purpose of the study, the definition of terms used throughout the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. I will provide a more in-depth review of the literature regarding the experiences of LGBTQ college students in Chapter 2. This chapter has been divided into sections that address the climate in higher education for LGBTQ students, the climate in higher education for LGBTQ students at HBCUs, the experiences of LGBTQ students, and the attitudes and perceptions of non-LGBTQ persons toward LGBTQ students. I will discuss the research method employed in this study in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Operating within a social justice lens, this literature review seeks to explore the experiences of and attitudes towards LGBTQ students in higher education, particularly at HBCUs. Research that explicitly pursues the experiences of LGBTQ students who attend HBCUs and the attitudes toward homosexuals enrolled at HBCUs is limited (Jenkins et al., 2009; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature pertaining to this study of understanding the social experiences of and attitudes towards LGBTQ students at HBCUs. I will catalog this literature review into three segments: the history of LGBTQ students and issues in higher education, campus climate in higher education for LGBTQ students, and campus climate in higher education for LGBTQ students at HBCUs. I conclude this review by summarizing how this body of literature applies to the study of LGBTQ students at HBCUs.

Historical Overview of LGBTQ Students in Higher Education

Social systems in America are predominately organized for the benefit of heterosexual, White males. Institutions of higher education have perpetuated heteronormative and conservative customs, since their formation, by restricting student admission requirements and the course curriculum (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

American colonial colleges were established in the 1600s to acculturate young White men into clergymen and public servants. In the 1800s, colleges grew more diverse but remained conservative as religious groups of various denominations vigorously developed colleges to spread their faith (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

These orthodox institutions debarred women, students of color, and even limited access for poorer White males. For women particularly, exclusion was attributed to their assumed social

role as caregivers. Women were seen as weak and unreliable in doctrinal matters; furthermore, education was not considered to be a remedy for such tendencies (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Moreover, there is no discussion about LGBTQ students in early higher education. Religious doctrine declares homosexuality as an abomination to God and a sin (Coley, 2018; Whitley, 2009).

The assumption of heterosexuality as the norm places LGBTQ persons in the margins and makes them targets for prejudice, discrimination, and violence. LGBTQ persons are considered a marginalized group due to their non-compliance with the expectations of society (Duffy, 2011). Despite efforts to increase access to higher education for all social identities, sexual minorities remain marginalized in collegiate environments.

In 1932, Willard Waller authored *The Sociology of Teaching*, which served as a blueprint for all, but mainly scholars and educators, on homosexuality and homosexual teachers before the 1970s (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). According to Waller (as cited in Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 51), “homosexuality was a deviant, contagious, and dangerous disease that could and should be avoided in the schools by firing teachers who demonstrated homosexual traits including carriage, mannerisms, voice, speech, etc.”. College and university administrators followed this approach by routinely expelling male and female students caught in—or suspected of engaging in—compromising same-sex activities (as cited in Tierney & Dilley, 1998). In the mid-1900s, student affairs emerged as a specialized field, and student affairs professionals began to think about homosexual college students differently.

According to the literature, campus deans of students aligned their practices of addressing homosexuality with those of the behavioral health profession (Drescher, 2015; Renn, 2010; Renn et al., 2015; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Specifically, homosexual students were referred to campus

counseling professionals to be treated for their “illness” as an alternative to expulsion (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). This approach was rooted in counseling psychology and followed the standard practice of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM –II), published in 1968, which documented homosexuality as a disease (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Tierney and Dilley (1998) indicated that treating mentally ill students was within the mission of the college counseling profession and a way to retain students.

Scholars noted that mental health professionals departed from their stance that homosexuality was a disease or “condition deviating from normal” in 1973, as research began to recognize homosexuality as “normal” (Drescher, 2015; Ivory, 2005; Renn, 2010; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) reversed its stance on homosexuality, more than 200 campus gay and lesbian groups formed on college campuses nationwide (Renn, 2010). A few years later, the University of Michigan established the first resource center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (Ivory, 2005). In addition to the practices of professionals, Renn et al. (2015) recognized a linguistic shift in the terminology used to describe homosexuality in higher education; it also mirrored and was influenced by the social movements of the time. Specifically, the term “homophile” was replaced with the word “gay”, as the Gay Liberation Front of the late 1960s shifted mainstream culture (Renn et al., 2015). The word “gay” became a blanket term to reference a diversity of non-heterosexual and gender-nonconforming identities (Renn et al., 2015).

Campus Climate in Higher Education for LGBTQ Students

Campus climate, relating to sexual orientation in higher education, has been described differently by research scholars. Rankin (2006) defined campus climate as the attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, and students regarding the level of respect for LGBTQ

individuals' needs, abilities, and potential, whereas Pryor (2018) suggested climate is the extent that LGBTQ people feel a sense of safety, belonging, and value as a community member.

Despite these differences in the definition of climate, scholars are clear that LGBTQ college students often experience and perceive college and university environments as hostile (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Ritchie & Banning, 2001), chilly (Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2007; Vaccaro, 2012), less inviting (Garvey & Rankin, 2015), unwelcoming (Blumenfeld, 2012; Lenning, 2017; Pryor, 2018) and unsafe (Johnson et al., 2013; Renn, 2010; Sanlo, 2005; Schrimshaw et al., 2018; Squire & Mobley, 2015).

College students are inundated with the expectations to fulfill and manage a successful balance between their academic and social responsibilities. Sexual minority college students grapple with common collegiate concerns, such as college adjustment, balancing academic responsibilities and developmental trajectories like competence, purpose, and integrity (Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Sanlo, 2005), but they also experience dilemmas unique to their sexual identity. The literature proposes that these challenges include difficulty establishing relationships, coping with being “different” or the opposite of dominant culture, and facing harassment, violence, and discrimination (Coleman, 2016; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Sanlo, 2005). Coleman (2016) stated that LGBT students are often bullied and harassed based on sexuality or perceived sexuality by other students (pp. 1-2). Much of the literature imitates Coleman's sentiments.

Evans and D'Augelli (1996) documented the prevalence of harassment of sexual minority students on college campuses and found that sexual minorities are victimized at higher rates than other populations on campus. Specifically, the researchers reported that LGBTQ college students experienced some form of victimization (physical or verbal abuse) four times more often than

their non-LGBTQ peers (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996). In another study, Bowling et al. (2019) documented the prevalence of harassment of sexual minorities at one large institution in North Carolina and found that sexual minorities reported experiencing verbal, sexual, and internet harassment at higher rates than other populations on campus. Franklin (2000) conducted a study of community college students who were perpetrators of anti-gay harassment. The participants of Franklin's study reported that anti-gay harassment occurred for four general reasons: so that the perpetrator could impress friends; because a person perceived to be gay made what the perpetrator perceived to be a sexual advance and therefore deserved to be beaten up; because of anti-gay ideology regarding religion and/or morals; and/or because the perpetrator needed to prove to friends that he was not homosexual (as cited in Sanlo, 2005).

College and university administrators have spent a significant amount of time assessing and addressing racial minority issues on their campuses (Lewis, 2003; Sanlo, 2005), but sexual minority students have received little attention (Renn, 2010; Sanlo, 2005; Schrimshaw et al., 2018). Campus climate surveys are tools used to assess how welcoming colleges are to diverse student populations (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Sanlo et al. (2002) explained that climate studies provide "baseline data" on the experiences of and attitudes about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people and that climate surveys provide evidence for creating, improving, or expanding LGBTQ programs and services. LGBTQ campus climate scholarship in higher education has focused on three main areas: the perceptions and experiences of LGBTQ people (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Renn, 2010; Squire & Mobley, 2015; Vaccaro, 2012), the perceptions about LGBTQ people (Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Patton, 2010; Pryor et al., 2017; Renn, 2010), and the campus' services, initiatives and student groups designed to improve the climate for LGBTQ persons (Coleman, 2016; Gasman et al., 2013; Lenning,

2017; Palmer & Young, 2012; Patton, 2010; Pryor, 2018; Pryor et al., 2017; Squire & Mobley, 2015; Renn, 2010).

Experiences and Perceptions of LGBTQ Students

College and university campuses have historically subscribed to a heteronormative culture. Heterosexist behavior, both verbally and physically, negatively impacts the campus climate for LGBTQ students. College and university environments can either enhance a student's education, life, and social skills or hinder and isolate it (Evans et al., 2010). Literature focusing on the campus climate for LGBTQ college students report that their experiences are of the latter (Coleman, 2016; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lenning, 2017). In a recent study with trans- and queer-spectrum students, Garvey and Rankin (2015) found students with higher levels of "outness" reported more negative perceptions of campus climate, classroom climate, and curriculum inclusivity than those who were less out. In another study, Herek (1993) reported that 27 out of 37 graduate students surveyed had concealed their sexual orientation from faculty because of fear of harassment or unequal treatment (as cited in Waldo, 1998, p. 747). Waldo (1998) found that LGB undergraduate students indicated that they feel less accepted and respected than their heterosexual counterparts on campus and that graduate LGB students perceived that they were treated less fairly and had fewer positive relationships with faculty and advisors in their academic departments.

An LGBTQ individual's decision to reveal or disclose their sexual identity is known as "coming out" or acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity to themselves and others (Waldo, 1998). Persons who identify as LGBTQ and have come out are often referred to as "out" whereas, persons who have not come out are considered to be "in the closet" (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Gortmaker and Brown (2006) found that LGBTQ students who

were “out” or “in the closet” perceived and experienced their campus in very different ways. Research on the experiences of LGBTQ out persons reveals that these students experience higher rates of physical, emotional, and social harm than less out-LGBTQ students (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Vaccaro & Newman, 2017; Waldo, 1998). D’Augelli (1992) found that 77% of a sample of lesbian and gay undergraduates had been verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation, 27% had been threatened with physical violence and 3% had been punched, hit, kicked, or beaten.

Rankin (2003) reported that LGBTQ college students who reveal their sexual identities more openly experience harassment and victimization at higher rates than those students who do not. Consequently, many homosexual students in higher education have been invisible, and their presence and experiences are known only anecdotally (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Pryor et al., 2017; Renn, 2010; Renn, 2017; Sanlo, 2005). The research shows that many LGBTQ college students limit their identity expressions to ensure their sexual orientation or gender identity remains unknown (Evans & D’Augelli, 1996; Sanlo, 2005; Schrimshaw et al., 2018). Scholars report that LGBTQ students’ fears of feeling unsafe, unwelcomed, and excluded are correlated with non-disclosure and confidentiality of sexuality (Evans & D’Augelli, 1996; Schrimshaw et al., 2018). Similarly, Lucozzi (1998) reported that “out” or openly expressive LGBTQ college students experience the consequences of intolerance and worry about unsupportive environments and harassment, and this impacts their ability to focus on academic and co-curricular learning.

The experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ college students who encounter violence, discrimination, and harassment regularly within institutions of higher education have been documented by many researchers (Johnson et al., 2013; Sanlo, 2005; Schrimshaw et al., 2018;

Squire & Mobley, 2015). Within the last decade, campus climate literature has demonstrated the importance of identifying the experiences of LGBTQ college students (Blumenfeld, 2012; Pryor, 2018; Rankin et al., 2010). Squire and Mobley (2015) reported that LGBTQ college students face higher levels of victimization and violence than their non-LGBTQ peers. Approximately 25% of LGBTQ students and 33% of transgender students had experienced harassment or violence on campus because of their sexual and/or gender identity (Rankin et al., 2010). These findings were supported by another recent study conducted by Rankin (2003), who studied over 1,000 sexual minority college students and found that 33% of the participants experienced some form of harassment on campus.

Inside the Classroom

The experiences of LGBTQ college students in the classroom have been documented by several scholars (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin, 2003; Renn, 2010). The literature shows that LGBTQ college students often feel silenced, invisible, and apart from the classroom dynamics (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Pryor et al., 2017; Rankin, 2003; Renn, 2010). Rankin (2003) described the classroom environment as heterosexist and claimed that the climate not only inhibited the acknowledgment and expression of LGBTQ perspectives, it has also “limited curricular initiatives and research efforts, as seen in the lack of LGBTQ content in the university course offerings” (p. 3).

According to Garvey and Rankin (2015), LGBTQ students have expressed the need for more courses addressing LGBTQ topics and content in higher education classrooms, but LGBTQ issues have not been a priority of department foci. Results from the qualitative study of LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ student classroom experiences revealed that less-inclusive curricula and poor institutional support significantly related to more negative perceptions of classroom

climate. Often, classroom decisions and discussions about curricula and social events are based on the conventions of heterosexual human beings (as cited in Dodge & Crutcher, 2015, p. 97). Dodge and Crutcher (2015) claim that this not only devalues LGBTQ college students' voices and opinions in the classroom but that it also stifles their confidence and visibility in the classroom. According to Garvey and Rankin (2015), classes that do not have inclusive curricula of diverse individuals demonstrate to minority students (including LGBTQ individuals) that their identities and experiences are nonexistent at best and disdained at worst (p. 1,346).

Yost and Gilmore (2011) surveyed 274 university employees and found that faculty reported very little sexual prejudice; in general faculty, prejudice did not differ between heterosexual and non-heterosexual faculty. However, of the total surveyed employees, only 38 made comments regarding equality and respect for all people and 26 employees expressed support for LGBTQ rights and positive attitudes and opinions about LGBTQ people (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). In another study, faculty explained that there was not a need to incorporate LGBTQ issues or information in their disciplines (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Specifically, a business professor claimed that "accounting is a straightforward discipline that focuses on procedures and theories of accounting and this is not a subjective course of study." Similarly, a social sciences professor indicated that "[i]n my field of study, sexual orientation issues are not relevant" (Yost & Gilmore, 2011, p. 1,346).

While faculty generally have control over their classrooms, Garvey and Rankin (2015) argued that classroom dynamics and culture are no longer the sole responsibilities of faculty members. The researchers proposed that all campus community members must recognize the unique contexts of the classroom experience for LGBTQ college students (Garvey & Rankin, 2015, p. 192). Reece-Miller (2010) explicated that LGBTQ college students experience an array

of difficulties in the classroom from their classmates. Garvey and Rankin (2015) investigated the classroom climate for gender non-conforming and gender-conforming LGBTQ students. Among the sample of LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students, the study showed a significant difference in classroom climate for gender-conforming students (non-LGBTQ students) than their non-gender-conforming peers (LGBTQ students). Specifically, Garvey and Rankin (2015) found that gender-conforming students reported a more positive classroom climate than non-gender-conforming students.

Garvey and Rankin (2015) found that students who are more out and open about disclosing their LGBTQ identity experience a less accepting classroom climate. The authors found that LGBT students who were more open about their identities were most likely to confront bias. Many students report discomfort when asked about their openly gay classmates (Reece-Miller, 2010). Rankin et al. (2010) identified high rates of harassment among LGBTQ undergraduate and graduate students, with the majority (42%) occurring in the classroom. Many of these students did not disclose their identities in the classroom for fear of mistreatment.

Squire and Mobley (2015) also reported that LGBTQ college students are more prone to experience verbal and physical abuse, elevated mental health issues, and poor academic achievement. The Association of American Universities (AAU) conducted a climate survey in 2015. The results of the AAU survey indicated that 20% of LGBTQ college students in the sample reported fear for physical safety based on their gender identity or their perceived sexual orientation (as cited in Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2017). Researchers agreed that LGBTQ college students are more likely to drop out of college or face academic challenges when they experience chronic stress related to discrimination and harassment (as cited in Sanlo, 2005).

Outside of the Classroom

The experiences of LGBTQ college students' co-curricular involvement on campus have been documented by several scholars (Lenning, 2017; Pryor, 2018; Pryor et al., 2017; Sanlo, 2005; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). The literature shows that LGBTQ college students experience microclimates (Vaccaro, 2012), such as fraternities (Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Rankin et al., 2013), athletic facilities (Pryor, 2018; Worthen, 2014), and residence halls (Dilley, 2004), that are unwelcoming and hostile. For example, a quantitative study conducted by Yost and Gilmore (2011) revealed that non-LGBTQ students were more likely to be involved than their LGBTQ counterparts in athletics (27% vs. 9%), intramural sports (33% vs. 10%), Greek organizations (28% vs. 12%), and religious groups (16% vs. 6%).

Pryor (2018) conducted a campus climate survey of LGBTQ student experiences. The LGBTQ college students were asked to photograph spaces of discomfort. Notably, the participants documented that certain campus microclimates were unwelcoming, particularly relating to Greek Life, recreation sports, and athletics. According to Pryor (2018), these climates have historically been appropriate along gender binary traditions, and that these systems are perpetuated in campus housing facilities, locker rooms, and Greek membership requirements (p. 40). Worthen (2014) studied the attitudes of collegiate athletes and Greeks relating to their LGBTQ colleagues. Specifically, the research looked at how being affiliated with LGBTQ persons impacted their membership on an athletic team or in a Greek-lettered organization. The results showed that male athletes and fraternities had more negative attitudes about LGBTQ persons than female athletes and sororities and that LGBTQ affiliation impacted an LGBTQ individual's likelihood to join a fraternity or masculine sport, such as football or basketball.

Attitudes and Perceptions towards LGBTQ Students

Research regarding heterosexuals' attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ people in higher education revealed high levels of hostility (Waldo, 1998) and homophobia (Nunn & Bolt, 2015). For example, in 1992 the Committee on Lesbian and Gay concerns at Pennsylvania State University surveyed faculty, staff, and students to assess their attitudes towards homosexuality. The survey reported remarkably high levels of antigay attitudes among the participants. Specifically, roughly 50% of the students surveyed disclosed that they believed that "homosexuals are disgusting" and 50% of the participants agreed that "homosexuality is immoral" (Waldo, 1998, p. 747).

Research conducted on the morality of homosexuality reports that more religious people tend to hold more negative attitudes toward LGBTQ persons because of their religious belief system (Anand, 2016; Whitley, 2009). Whitley (2009) claimed that doctrines of many religions condemn homosexuality and that fervent religious people internalize their religions' objections and view homosexuality as immoral. Wolff et al. (2012) assessed the attitudes of Christian college students and found that students with traditional views (conservatives) held traditional views of masculinity and had more negative attitudes toward gay and bisexual individuals. Similarly, Anand (2016) found that the more religious and conservative people were, the less favorable views and less accepting of homosexuality they were.

Studies exploring the attitudes toward LGBT individuals by race indicate significant racial differences (Anand, 2016; Lewis, 2003; Whitley et al., 2011). For example, Bonilla and Porter (1990) compared the attitudes of Whites, Blacks, and Latinos towards homosexuality. The study found that Latinos were more accepting of homosexuality than White and Black

participants, yet Latino participants did not differ in attitudes from whites regarding the morality of homosexuality. However, Latinos were less tolerant of homosexuality regarding civil liberties than Whites and Blacks (Bonilla & Porter, 1990). In another study, Lewis (2003) discussed the racial differences among black and white people relating to their attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals. The findings reported that blacks were more likely than whites to oppose and condemn homosexuality.

In an article, Worthen (2012) explored the attitudes of heterosexual attitudes toward LGBT college students by gender. Worthen (2012) discussed two studies of undergraduate students that showed that heterosexual men were less tolerant of bisexual men; however, heterosexual men and women reported similar and more positive attitudes toward lesbians and bisexual women (p. 287). However, Worthen (2012) furthered that heterosexual women were more inclined to report more negative attitudes toward lesbians and more positive attitudes toward gay men (p. 287). According to Worthen (2012), the research suggested that the possible reasons why gender played a significant role in attitudes toward LGBT individuals included that “heterosexuals are homophobic toward homosexuals and bisexuals of the same gender because they are fearful of unwanted sexual advances” (p. 287).

In another study, Nunn and Bolt (2015) presented students with an opportunity to explore their prejudices toward homosexuality and homophobia on campus. The researchers tasked the participants at a mid-sized, religious institution to wear an LGBTQ rainbow sticker for 24 hours and to reflect on their experience. The student self-reflection activity revealed that 17 of 27 students consistently described fear and anxiety over wearing the sticker because they expected to encounter homophobia; however, several students were excited and eager to participate in the activity (Nunn & Bolt, 2015, p. 286). The study also revealed that “of the participants who

identified as straight, 79% either agreed or strongly agreed that the activity helped them recognize some of their heterosexual privileges and that 79% of the entire sample agreed or strongly agreed that it helped them empathize with people who do not have normative sexual identities. In addition, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that it helped them recognize how homophobia influences conformity to heterosexual norms” (Nunn & Bolt, 2015, p. 293). This activity highlighted the implicit privilege that heterosexual individuals possess. It is the privilege of not experiencing fear and discomfort of being judged or labeled as “different,” “deviant,” or queer.

Campus Climate in Higher Education for LGBTQ Students at HBCUs

HBCUs are recognized as places of equality and access in American higher education (Carter, 2013; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Established to challenge general practices of exclusion based on race in higher education (Jewell, 2002), HBCUs were structured similarly to early colonial colleges by White philanthropists affiliated with various religious denominations (Jewell, 2002). The first HBCU is Cheyney State University, founded in 1837 by a Quaker philanthropist (Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, 2019; Jewell, 2002; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.; Office of Civil Rights, 1991; Patton, 2010). Lincoln University of Pennsylvania is the second oldest HBCU, founded in 1854 by leaders in Oxford Presbyterian Church (Lincoln University, 2019). Later, Wilberforce University was founded in 1856 by the Methodist Episcopal Church in Ohio (Office of Civil Rights, 1991; Wilberforce University, n.d.).

After the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, more HBCUs were established mostly in southern states by black churches, white religious groups, and federal funding. The mission of HBCUs was to educate African Americans, although other racial groups were

admitted (Department of Education, 2018). HBCU campuses have a rich history of religious ideals and defending controversial issues, especially those related to marginalized populations (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Traditionally, HBCU faculty, staff, and students' sociopolitical activism efforts concentrated on race (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Patton, 2010; Squire & Mobley, 2015) and gender issues (Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton & Simmons, 2008). But, LGBTQ issues have not been absorbed (Ford, 2015; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2019).

Scholarship central to the experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs is scarce (Coleman, 2016; Patton, 2011; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). However, the current body of literature regarding LGBTQ persons' experiences at HBCUs intersects with race, gender, and religion. Homophobia exists in all racial communities, but Lewis (2003) reported that Black Americans are more likely than White to oppose and condemn homosexuality. In another study, Black people reported being less tolerant of homosexuality due to the "centrality of the church in Black culture" and a "strong religious condemnation" (Bonilla & Porter, 1990, p. 441).

Gender is also consistently linked to anti-gay attitudes. Men are reported to be more likely to express negative views of homosexual behavior than women (Anand, 2016; Breen & Karpinski, 2013; Tillapaugh, 2016). A research study showed that men were more homophobic than women due to their stake in maintaining the status quo of gender roles and views (Fishbein, 1996). Equally, there is a strong relationship between religion and homophobia. Scholars note that persons who frequently attend religious services and exhibit higher levels of religiosity tend to be more homophobic than persons who seldom attend religious services and demonstrate lower levels of religiosity (Coleman, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2009; Mobley & Johnson, 2015).

Experiences and Perceptions of LGBTQ Students

LGBTQ college students are becoming increasingly visible on HBCU campuses (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Pryor et al., 2017; Renn, 2010; Renn, 2017; Sanlo, 2005). The research proposes that LGBTQ college students enrolled at HBCUs face unique challenges related to campus culture and climate because of their sexual identity (Lenning, 2017; Patton, 2010). Lee (2015) stated that “HBCUs have traditionally fostered conservative religious environments that have been restrictive for LGBTQ students” (p. 28). Mobley and Johnson (2019) declared that sexual minority students experience self-expression restrictions on HBCU campuses (p. 870).

In a study of black males enrolled at 12 HBCUs, one student at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University described the experiences of gay students on campus: “This campus is like the rest of Black society; it is not accepting of gay culture. And so, they are definitely on the outskirts of this campus. They are not included” (Harper & Gasman, 2008, p. 342). Other participants in the study noted how LGBT students had been rendered invisible despite the presence of gay Black males who outwardly express themselves through feminine aesthetics (Harper & Gasman, 2008).

Harper and Gasman (2008) also noticed this type of exclusion at Morehouse College, the only single-sex HBCU in the study. Participants in a Morehouse study group noted that a significant number of homosexual men attended the college, but they were routinely avoided by heterosexuals. For example, “Ross, a senior at the College described the environment as “a very heterosexual place, and he observed that gay male students were not befriended by many heterosexual males on campus” (Harper & Gasman, 2008, p. 343, as cited in Coleman, 2016, p. 5). Overall, several participants reported that structured conversations about LGBT issues were

not facilitated by administrators or faculty unless a student was harmed, or the issue received a lot of media attention. For example, Morehouse College, an all-male, private HBCU in Atlanta, Georgia, made news headlines after LGBT students protested their restrictive experiences on the campus.

Morehouse's spotlight arose after an unofficial student organization on campus, known as *The Plastics*, protested the dress policy. According to Mobley and Johnson (2019), *The Plastics* were a group of male LGBTQ students who wore feminine clothing and exhibited mannerisms distinct to their identities. The first targeted incident on the campus involved an LGBTQ student who was severely beaten by a non-LGBTQ student after an alleged sexual advance (Patton, 2010, p. 77). Shortly after, Morehouse implemented a strict dress code that suppressed student expression by prohibiting items "worn by women", like dresses, purses, and heels in the classroom and at formal events (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015).

Morehouse received national news, but it is not the only HBCU with restraining policies that outline appropriate attire for students. Other HBCUs, such as Oakwood University, Edward Waters College, Paul Quinn College, Norfolk State University, Virginia Union University, and Hampton University, have conservative, gender-specific dress codes as well (Coleman, 2016). Patton and Simmons (2008) described the experience of a student's challenge with her college's annual induction ceremony where female students were expected to wear a white dress.

According to Patton and Simmons (2008), the respondent shared that she was upset and that she "felt so uncomfortable in that. It was something that just disgusted me. I just couldn't do it. So, I didn't go to the induction. I know I missed out on the experience of inducting myself in the college, but I feel like something had to give" (Patton & Simmons, 2008, p. 209). Lenning

(2017) posited that even traditional events, such as graduation, convocation, and pinning ceremonies have restrictions on student expression.

Dress code guidelines are not the only campus norms that limit and impact LGBTQ students' expression. Lenning (2017) noted that an unnamed HBCU listed "homosexual acts" as a violation of university policy. Coleman (2016) suggested that HBCUs have failed to ensure institutional policies, activities, and spaces are available to serve LGBTQ college students and educate the campus community on matters concerning this population. HBCUs rarely have LGBT-devoted student services and resources (Patton, 2010; Patton & Simmons, 2008).

Patton (2011) stated that new headlines suggest HBCUs are unwilling to address LGBT student concerns. Incidents that range from discrimination because of sexual orientation to denying LGBT student organizations from forming are examples of the reasons gay and lesbian students attending HBCUs may feel forced to keep their sexual orientation a secret (Patton, 2011). When HBCUs do not address their discriminatory and unwelcoming climate, it creates a less positive experience for LGBTQ students.

The research shows that many LGBTQ students enrolled at HBCUs report verbal and physical abuse, harassment, discrimination, and emotional duress caused by institutional policies, faculty, staff, and other students (Ford, 2015; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Furthermore, LGBTQ students struggle to find spaces that affirm and welcome their sexual and or gender identity at HBCUs. This negotiation for a place and space within unreceptive environments can be detrimental to the LGBTQ students' success at HBCUs (Coleman, 2016). Incidents of LGBTQ student violence and discrimination at HBCUs present cultural considerations for administrators.

Hudson (2017) proclaimed that “publicly HBCUs are clear: We do not tolerate discrimination of any kind”, but one HBCU president said:

I would be lying if I said that we have done everything in our power to stamp out the vestiges of bigotry based on sexual orientation. We have a long way to go, and there is a lot of resistance from senior administrators, members of the board, and many of our alumni, who are now parents. (p. 16)

Examples of HBCU campus members’ resistance have been well-documented. Mobley and Johnson (2015) argue that HBCUs must work toward creating more inclusive and supportive campus environments for their diverse student bodies. For change to be effective, HBCU faculty, staff, and students must examine their part in perpetuating heteronormative practices and reexamine campus traditions and policies that restrict student expression for LGBT students (Mobley & Johnson, 2015, p. 82).

HBCUs have work to do pertaining to acknowledging and supporting homosexual students. Lenning (2017) stated that “HBCUs are notoriously perceived as unwelcoming toward LGBTQ students and are considerably behind PWIs in regard to providing supportive and affirming environments” (p. 283). Although these institutions have rarely been places of solace for LGBTQ students, HBCU administrators must recognize the need to create more supportive climates on campus.

Influence of Religiosity

Religion and places of worship are and have always been important to the Black community and historically black institutions (Jenkins et al., 2009). The historical alignment between HBCUs and the Black church (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016) sheds light on the Black church’s influence on HBCU life which preserves homophobia, leaving LGBTQ students

harassed, afraid, and feeling unwanted (McIntosh, 2017). The Black church, which refers generally to organized Christian religious institutions to which African Americans have been attached since slavery (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003), is the most influential institution in the Black community and a pillar of resistance to the pursuit of inclusion for LGBT students at HBCUs (Coleman, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2009).

Many HBCUs were formed by and affiliated with religious organizations and leaders (Coleman, 2016; Gasman et al., 2013; Jewell, 2002; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). These minority-serving institutions still retain a strong religious orientation today (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016). Harris (2010) found that LGBTQ students at one HBCU reported fear of rejection from people on campus who believed that homosexual people were an “abomination”, as described in Leviticus 18:22 of the Holy Bible. In a qualitative study, LGBTQ participants shared that “Church people...don’t understand how I can be gay and love Jesus. I hear... “keep praying to Jesus, you will go straight” (Carter, 2013).

The robust influence of religion and conservatism on HBCU campuses often induces LGBTQ students to experience a sense of otherness, explicitly and implicitly, during their interactions with their peers, administrators, and faculty (Mobley & Johnson, 2019). In 2006, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund released a report on gender at public Black colleges in which surveyed students reported discriminatory treatment from faculty due to their sexual orientation (Harper & Gasman, 2008). Although the faculty’s prejudiced behavior toward the funds participating gay students was intolerable, the students reported attributing the faculty’s actions to their conservative religious convictions (Harper & Gasman, 2008). HBCUs are highly conservative regarding sexuality (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lenning, 2017; Means & Jaegar, 2013). Conservatism is nurtured when HBCUs evade challenging the status quo and restrict

student expression (Harper & Gasman, 2008). Conservatism within HBCU culture is also portrayed in campus traditions, norms, and climate (Means & Jaegar, 2013).

Influence of Black Culture

Negative attitudes exist towards homosexuality within African American communities (Crawford et al., 2002; Sutton et al., 2009; Ward, 2005). Such antipathy has been attributed to cultural milieu in which homosexuality has been associated with plaguing the African American community with HIV/AIDS (Lewis, 2003), undermining traditional perceptions of gender roles, including Black male masculinity or traditional femininity (Whitley et al., 2011), and destroying the Black family by shorting the “marriageable pool” for Black men and women (Battle & Lemelle, 2002, p. 135). Another scholar, in his article entitled *Homophobia, Hypermasculinity, and the U.S. Black Church*, identified three explanations for homophobia within the Black community: Historical sexual exploitation, race survival consciousness, and the Black Church or one's religious beliefs (Ward, 2005, p. 494). Each of these explanations presents a valid case for exploration, however, the relationship between historically Black institutions and religiosity is emphasized in this research.

The African American community, of which HBCUs are a part, has deeply planted roots in the Black church. According to Ward (2005), the Black church is the oldest and most influential institution in the African American community. Religion and places of worship, e.g. churches, are important to the Black community and historically black institutions (Jenkins et al., 2009). Surveys conducted by the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 1994-2000 reported that four out five African Americans belong to a faith tradition and that 97% of African Americans identify with some religious affiliation (U.S. Centers for Disease Control,

2001). In this vein, the church is more than a place of worship for African Americans. The Black church is the root of cultural, social, and political values for African Americans (Ward, 2005).

Many African Americans retain strong religious orientations, and they submit to the church's ideology that homosexuality is a sin and should be condemned. Crawford et al. (2002) reported that more Black people, than other races, viewed homosexual relationships as immoral and unacceptable. To this point, anti-gay sentiments have mostly been attributed to the Black church. Given the historical alignment between HBCUs and the church, it is plausible that HBCUs embody the Black culture and beliefs of the Black church today (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

LGBTQ Supportive Programs and Spaces

Numerous studies have demonstrated the negative relationship between LGBTQ students and campus climate at collegiate institutions (Ivory, 2005; Nguyen et al., 2018; Rankin et al., 2010). Ivory (2005) studied LGBTQ students' experiences at two-year colleges. Ivory (2005) suggested that the invisibility of LGBTQ students made it difficult for college administrators to "identify and address the needs of sexual minority students" (p. 482). Other researchers have documented similar concerns at four-year institutions (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Pryor et al., 2017; Renn, 2010; Renn, 2017; Sanlo, 2005). Regardless of these issues, many LGBTQ college students persist.

College administrators and professional staff have attempted to resolve the negative experiences of LGBTQ students by implementing student-centered LGBTQ-specific resources. Mobley and Johnson (2015) stated that LGBTQ support services are vital for homosexual college students, especially for the students who come out or disclose their sexual identity to others. Scholars recognize that students who conceal or disclose their sexual

identity experience challenges that can contribute to distress and other negative outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2018; Patton, 2011; Schrimshaw et al., 2018; Squire & Norris, 2014). These outcomes combined with campus experiences and life circumstances “work in concert to place these students in the margins” (Squire & Norris, 2014, p. 196).

Nguyen et al. (2018) proposed that “LGBTQ students often seek specific resources to contribute to their success and counteract pervasively homophobic, heterosexist, and transphobic campus environments” (p. 784). Campus-based LGBTQ resource centers and LGBTQ-focused student organizations often provide sociable and accepting spaces for sexual minorities on campus (Lenning, 2017; Linley & Nguyen, 2015; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Such resources help LGBTQ students feel supported in terms of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Pitcher et al., 2018; Woodford et al., 2014).

LGBTQ Resource Centers

Scholarly literature and research support the need for establishing campus LGBTQ resources. Many scholars have researched the impact of campus LGBTQ resource centers and found that these spaces are dedicated to the holistic success of sexual minority students (Fine, 2012; Ritchie & Banning, 2001). Pitcher et al. (2018) stated that within the last three decades, LGBTQ resource centers have been formed to provide specialized support for LGBTQ college students. Studies report that LGBTQ resource centers help to foster a positive campus climate and promote LGBTQ student success (Fine, 2012; Lenning, 2017; Westbrook, 2009). Ritchie and Banning (2001) described these spaces as professionally staffed offices that support diverse student groups and foster tolerance and acceptance on campus for sexual minorities (p. 483).

Pitcher et al. (2018) proposed that the main functions of campus LGBTQ resource centers are to provide physical spaces and community and professional support for LGBTQ students and

to serve as symbols of LGBTQ support and inclusion (p. 123). Similarly, Westbrook (2009) contended that LGBTQ resource centers provide a place for LGBTQ college students to meet like-minded people, fight against discrimination, and increase awareness and support of the LGBTQ community on campus. Pitcher et al. (2018) added that “the physical spaces, and the people (peers, professionals) within them, facilitate support processes for college students’ success” (p. 123). The literature shows that LGBTQ students find these resource centers to be welcoming and affirming environments, unlike the rest of the campus environments surrounding them (Nguyen et al., 2018; Pitcher et al., 2018; Westbrook, 2009).

Nguyen et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine the availability of LGBTQ resources at a two-year institution and how the available LGBTQ resources impacted student success. The results from 936 survey respondents suggested that LGBTQ resource centers have an important role in the support, assistance, activism, and advocacy for LGBTQ students (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 789). Respondents’ narratives also indicated that campus LGBTQ resource centers helped to foster positive relationships between LGBTQ students and staff at the university. A transgender queer student shared that the director of the LGBT Center, “was really supportive, even though it might be tough with family or other things, to keep going to school and keep progressing”; another participant explained that “there’s not a lot of people that are as accepting and can talk about that kind of stuff and feel as comfortable as the professionals working in the resource center” (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 789).

Pitcher et al. (2018) conducted a study to understand the effect of LGBTQ resource centers on LGBTQ students. One respondent from the study shared his experience with the campus resource center:

It's a very close-knit community. Everyone knows everyone...it's kind of a safe haven... that was the first place that I found on campus that I actually felt very comfortable...I have a hard time making friends, and being social, and... the fact that I had that one place on campus where they have this group...that helps me a lot (p. 124).

Another respondent from the study stated:

At DSU, they have the LGBTQ resource center, and the people there are cool. If you are having a problem, come to us and we'll walk you through the steps to try and fix it—like a problem with a teacher or a problem with student dorms or whatever (p. 124).

Of the nearly 5,500 American institutions, only approximately 100 institutions offer LGBTQ resource centers (Rankin, 2006). According to Fine (2012), these centers typically exist in Western, more politically liberal environments. While these centers do exist, they mainly serve homosexual students; however, the dedicated staff of these spaces also work to assist and educate other identities on LGBTQ-specific issues and events. Pitcher et al. (2018) stated that LGBTQ resource centers offer advocacy, advising, and leadership development for LGBTQ students, as well as education and training for the larger campus community about LGBTQ issues. Many LGBTQ resource centers sponsor safe zone training or programs that are designed to introduce concepts, terminology, and resources related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Those who complete safe zone training display some type of visual placard to indicate they are a “safe” person or “ally” with whom to talk about LGBTQ issues (Linley & Nguyen, 2015; Woodford et al., 2014).

Mobley and Johnson (2015) referred to a safe zone (or safe space) as “an on-campus space where LGBT students can seek support and affirmation and express their feelings and concerns without fear of harassment or violence” (p. 83). Evans (2002) asserted that safe zone

programs help LGBTQ people develop allies who foster acceptance and support for sexual minorities and the challenges they face, on campus, and off-campus. According to Burgess and Baunach (2014), heterosexual allies are individuals who are members of the privileged group (heterosexuals), who actively support the rights of LGBTQ people (p. 938).

Evans (2002) analyzed the impact of a safe zone project initiated on a large, majority White and conservative campus by the campus' resource center. The project's participating students, faculty, and staff were provided LGBTQ pride stickers and asked to wear or post them in their space with no formalized training. According to Evans (2002), the stickers were used to promote visibility for LGBTQ people and increase awareness and support around the issues that the population experienced (p. 525). Evans (2002) reported that the campus climate did change as a result of the LGBTQ pride stickers. As a result of wearing the stickers, some participants experienced negative feedback, but the majority reported positive changes in their attitudes toward the LGBT community.

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs)

LGBTQ college students report their challenges of feeling isolated and having very little support in their educational environments. Westbrook (2009) argued that LGBTQ student organizations or groups reduce social isolation and stigmatization by offering LGBTQ college students support, socialization, and the opportunity to engage in community activist work. Pitcher et al. (2018) acclaimed that LGBTQ student organizations provide substantial and significant support for some homosexual students who do not have a dedicated LGBTQ resource center on campus, (p. 124). Nguyen et al. (2018) supported this idea and shared that LGBTQ-specific student organizations have an important role in supporting and advocating for sexual minority student needs on campus.

The founding of the earliest LGBT organizations, Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, in the United States in the 1950s prompted the first campus-based LGBTQ student organization at Columbia University in the 1960s (Beemyn, 2003, p. 206). Stephen Donaldson, an active member of the New York City chapter of the Mattachine Society, entered Columbia University as an openly bisexual student. Donaldson formed a “Mattachine-like” organization on campus after meeting other gay students at Columbia who had been forced to move out of the residence halls after some students complained about living with bisexual students. Deeply affected by this incident, the bisexual students established the Student Homophile League to advocate for LGBTQ students’ rights on campus (Beemyn, 2003, p. 207).

Student-led organizations, such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs) mirror the Student Homophile League on Columbia’s campus. GSAs are student-led organizations that are open to all sexual orientations to support sexual minority students and their heterosexual allies, as well as reducing prejudice, discrimination, and harassment within schools” (Goodenow et al., 2006, p. 575). According to the literature, GSAs contribute to a healthy school environment for LGBTQ students. Studies show that GSAs provide a safe space for sexual minority students and increase awareness and visibility of homosexuals on campus, decreasing the likelihood of negative attitudes toward homosexual students (Porta et al., 2017; Worthen, 2012).

Szalacha (2003) conducted a study of 1,646 students across 33 schools that aimed to compare the experiences and perceptions between students who were enrolled at institutions with GSAs with those of students who attended an institution where a GSA was not offered. The findings indicated that students at institutions with GSAs reported hearing fewer anti-gay slurs and felt that GSAs had a somewhat positive effect on the campus climate (as cited in Worthen,

2012). In Nguyen et al.'s (2018) qualitative study, GSA-affiliated participants explained the benefits of joining the club on campus. One student participant stated that:

Being in my GSA, I have at least six really close friends that I trust more than any other friend that I've made in my lifetime. They're good people. I like it. It's like, our GSA is more like a family than anything (p. 791).

Another respondent stated that

I'm more comfortable with being out because there's a club there to back me up. When I was thinking about quitting, I guess it was really a pretty big mixture of a few things, which weren't completely unrelated to my identity here. I really do think that if it weren't for that group, that I seriously might have ended up taking a different direction (p. 791).

The participants in Pitcher et al.'s (2018) study reported similar experiences. A queer student at a Jesuit University said that he “draws support primarily from friends in GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance]” (p. 124). In the same vein, a student at a small, private, non-religious institution stated that he drew from friends and that:

The Gay-Straight Alliance kept me at Unique, whereas leaving was more just because I felt like—I always felt like I was the only gay person before [the GSA] came around. They really brought people out of the shadows and finding the camaraderie and the support system and the events and everything... after the group started, there was some camaraderie for—there was enough camaraderie for me to wanna stay (Pitcher et al., 2018, p. 124).

The literature shows that peer support, through these LGBTQ student organizations, not only impacts their sense of belonging (Nguyen et al., 2018), but it also influences retention for some LGBTQ students (Pitcher et al., 2018). These narratives suggest that LGBTQ campus

resources are vital for LGBTQ college student success and persistence. LGBTQ-specific resources, such as resource centers and student organizations can lead to a higher sense of belonging and ultimately stronger LGBTQ student outcomes (e.g., graduation, increased academic performance, well-being (Rankin et al., 2010, as cited in Pitcher et al., 2018).

The narratives are complemented by Toomey et al. (2011) who found that the presence of and participation in GSAs were related to reported improvements to students' wellbeing and educational achievement. Specifically, researchers found that the presence of a GSA was associated with a greater likelihood of college completion, less depression, reduced mental health, and substance abuse issues, higher self-esteem, and positive educational outcomes among LGBTQ students (Mathies et al., 2019; Porta et al., 2017; Toomey et al., 2011; Walls et al., 2010). Although GSAs are not uniform across educational contexts, most provide various types of social support (e.g., peer group support, queer prom, movie nights, Facebook pages), counseling (e.g., individual or small group session with GSA adviser/school counselor), and advocacy (e.g., Day of Silence, classroom presentations) (Porta et al., 2017).

The relationship between a GSA and the school climate is complementary and mutually informative. Porta et al. (2017) argued that LGBTQ youth who attend a school with a GSA, in comparison to those without a GSA, report safer school climates, more supportive teachers and school staff, better grades, and a lower likelihood of skipping school because of fear. GSAs most certainly impact campus climate and positively influence the physical, social, emotional, and academic wellbeing of LGBTQ students.

Theoretical Framework

Marginality and Mattering

The continued invisibility and marginality of LGBTQ students and their needs in HBCUs programs and services is problematic. There are 107 HBCUs nationwide, but only 21 of them have student clubs or organizations dedicated to LGBTQ students or issues, three have formal offices or centers dedicated to serving LGBTQ college students, and three HBCUs include gender identity and expression in their nondiscrimination statements (Coleman, 2016; Gasman et al., 2013; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). In a study exploring the experiences of Black first-year lesbian students attending an HBCU, one participant explained that on their HBCU campus, “we don’t have a center or a special counselor or someone we can call if we feel we have a problem” (Patton & Simmons, 2008, p. 208). The scarcity of LGBTQ resources facilitates discriminatory experiences for LGBTQ students (Garvey & Rankin, 2015) and contributes to marginality.

Nancy Schlossberg (1989) described marginality as a sense of not “fitting in” that can lead to self-consciousness, irritability, and depression (Patton et al., 2016, p. 47). Marginality causes individuals to question whether they matter or not (Schlossberg, 1989). Mattering is “our belief, whether right or wrong, that we matter to someone else” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 9). HBCUs in general have been slow in responding to the needs of the LGBT community on their campuses (Coleman, 2016). Thus, it is plausible that LGBTQ students feel like they do not matter at HBCUs. The lack of safe and supportive spaces for LGBTQ students leads to isolation, discrimination, and stress (Coleman, 2016) which heightens the feeling of marginality.

Schlossberg (1989) stated that the feeling of marginality often occurs when an individual assumes a new role, especially when the individual is uncertain about the norms of the new role

(as cited in Patton et al., 2016, p. 47). For LGBTQ students, navigating their outness or disclosure can lead to marginality (Moradi et al., 2010). Scholars suggest that LGBTQ people experience conflict when disclosing their sexual identity to their family and community connections (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996; Garvey & Rankin., 2015; Moradi et al., 2010; Schrimshaw et al., 2018). Helfer and Voeten (2014) found that the marginal effects of judgment are especially high when public acceptance of sexual minorities is low. Accordingly, when LGBTQ students decide to disclose their sexuality, they may experience marginality. Moreover, the feeling of marginality persists when appropriate institutional resources and services are minuscule, and the campus climate does not welcome or affirm one's sexual identity. These factors impact a student's belief that they do not matter.

Mattering is considered to be a motive in a student's behavior that facilitates persistence and academic success (Schlossberg, 1989). Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) originally proposed the concept of mattering in subsets, including attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence. Schlossberg (1989) expanded Rosenberg and McCullough's work by considering a fifth aspect of mattering, appreciation, and introducing marginality (Patton et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 1989). Students who feel included and appreciated are more likely to feel like they matter at and to their institution. The inverse is also true.

Schlossberg's (1989) aspects of mattering are pertinent to improving HBCUs' climate for LGBTQ students. Attention is one aspect of Schlossberg's marginality and mattering model. According to Schlossberg (1989), attention is the feeling that an individual is noticed. HBCUs can create climates that allow LGBTQ students to feel seen. HBCU environments emphasize conservatism, and this marginalizes the voices of LGBTQ students (Bonilla & Porter, 1990; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Recognizing these vulnerable voices in

university services and programs, such as LGBTQ-focused resource centers, counseling services, and student organizations, can decrease marginality and demonstrate that LGBTQ students matter on their respective campuses.

Importance is another aspect of Schlossberg's marginality and mattering model. According to Schlossberg (1989), importance is the belief that an individual is cared about. HBCUs can set clear standards for the acknowledgment and treatment of LGBTQ students, including addressing harassment and physical abuse on their campuses. Research has shown that the best practices, such as the implementation of nondiscriminatory school practices, personnel using students' preferred names and pronouns, inclusive curricula, communication of anti-bullying expectations, and personnel intervention in support of LGBTQ students positively impact the climate for LGBTQ students (Boyland et al., 2018; Steck & Perry, 2018).

Schlossberg's aspect of ego-extension, in the marginality and mattering model, also influences an individual's concept of mattering. According to Schlossberg (1989), ego-extension is the feeling that someone else will be proud of what an individual does or will sympathize with their failures. To establish this aspect on HBCU campuses, student affairs professionals must demonstrate pride in their LGBTQ students' accomplishments, via Lavender graduations or PRIDE celebrations, and be available when LGBTQ students experience a crisis or challenging moments during their tenure. Steck and Perry (2018) acknowledged that a non-hostile and inclusive environment provides for the belonging and safety needs of students. Campuses can provide a safe space for LGBTQ students, i.e., university personnel, administrative offices, or gay-straight alliances.

The final aspects of Schlossberg's mattering model are dependence and appreciation. According to Schlossberg (1989), dependence is a feeling of being needed and appreciation is

the feeling that others recognize the value of an individual's efforts. It is equally important that HBCUs appreciate and depend on the LGBTQ community. These aspects can be fulfilled by creating a space for LGBTQ students to be recognized during campus policy and initiative planning. To improve the climate and demonstrate that LGBTQ students matter at HBCUs, campuses must invite LGBTQ people to the table and depend on them to help inform policy and practice. We must appreciate their diversity and recognize it in our work. Successful reform is dependent on leaders to disrupt and deconstruct the heteronormative culture by communicating and modeling nondiscriminatory behavior and embedding in the school culture acceptance of diversity and the equitable treatment of students who identify as LGBTQ (Steck & Perry, 2018).

To be successful at improving the campus climate for LGBTQ students, HBCUs must provide positive environments that remove LGBTQ students from the margins and facilitate mattering. Campus support services and initiatives should focus on demonstrating that LGBTQ students matter to the institution. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) contended that mattering is a motive: “the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercise a powerful influence over our actions” (p. 165). Intrinsically, mattering can dictate behavior. HBCUs should utilize Schlossberg’s aspect of mattering to acknowledge their LGBTQ community as significant and existing. By doing so, HBCUs foster a more supportive and safer environment for self-identifying LGBTQ students which theoretically, should motivate LGBTQ students to feel like they matter and result in student involvement and persistence.

Organizational Culture

According to Schein (1996), “culture manifests itself at three levels: on the surface are artifacts, underneath lie values, and at the core are basic assumptions” (p. 11). The first level of

Schein's organizational culture model is artifacts. According to Schein (1996), artifacts are the physical and observable traits of the organization. Elements of ECSU's artifacts include its logo, campus buildings, and offices, as well as programs. Over the years, ECSU has created a culture of Viking Pride by adopting official colors and a mascot, implementing celebratory ceremonies (e.g., Founders' Day, Pinning Ceremony and Honor Convocation), and forming campus initiatives and departments to improve the student experience. These symbolic artifacts and rituals contribute to the culture and tradition of ECSU.

Institutional artifacts that impact the campus climate for LGBTQ students are the True Colors student organization and the Prevention, Awareness, and Cultural Education (PACE) Center by providing an intuitive perception of ECSU's culture of inclusion for LGBTQ people. These campus resources are the most accessible or visible elements of ECSU's attempt to create a positive and inviting culture for LGBTQ individuals. True Colors is a student-led, gay-straight alliance organization and it was formally registered on the campus of ECSU in Fall 2018. This organization was initiated to maintain a supportive environment for LGBTQ students on the campus (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d). There are 12 members of this organization among an estimated student population of 1,800 and over 600 faculty and staff.

Furthermore, the PACE Center is dedicated to diversity and inclusion and works to educate the campus on diverse issues (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d). According to the Director of the PACE Center, the office of one is an expanded version of ECSU's Women's Center, "where the Women's Center focused on issues of sexual assault, date assault, and stalking, PACE goes further to address issues that relate to members of the LGBTQIA community, and any group on campus that represents diversity" (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d). Since its grand opening, there have been four LGBTQ awareness trainings sponsored by

the PACE Center. The minimal participation speaks volumes about the campus culture. It can be theorized that the organizational culture of ECSU is not inclusive of LGBTQ students. To resolve this problem, internal stakeholders will need to collectively support and provide attention to these visible artifacts and teach new members to do the same.

The second level of Schein's organizational culture model is adopted values. The espoused values of an organization are the articulated or publicly announced principles that the group aims to achieve (Schein & Schein, 2016). In other words, the values of an organization are its stated rules of behavior. Elements of ECSU's values are found in the University's mission and non-discrimination policy.

Schein (1991) argued that culture implies stability over time. This infers that culture is not developed instantaneously; it is a lasting part of the organization's life. Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) is a historically Black institution that was founded in March 1891 by Hugh Cale, an African American representative in the North Carolina General Assembly, who sponsored House Bill 383 which established a State Colored Normal (teaching) School in Elizabeth City, North Carolina to train "colored" to teach in the common schools in North Carolina (Johnson, 1978). The institution grew from 23 students (in its founding year) to 1,772 students in Fall 2019 (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.a; Johnson, 1978). Today, the University's mission has transformed, like its name, to meet the needs of the region, state, and nation. This specific goal has transitioned through the years, but the University remains committed to providing all students with quality education and promoting economic, social, and environmental progress for the people of northeastern North Carolina, the state, and the nation (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.b).

Linley and Nguyen (2015) stated that an institution's mission is a statement about the organization's vision for itself, communicating purpose and values to internal and external audiences. ECSU shows its value for LGBTQ persons through the adoption of its Policy on Sex and Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment, Interpersonal Violence, and Stalking. This policy prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.c). This document was drafted in Fall 2014 and amended in Fall 2016 and Spring 2018. These drafts were pursued after the United States Departments of Education and Justice issued guidance to public schools nationwide summarizing the school's Title IX of Educational Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) obligations and how both departments would handle discrimination complaints regarding transgender students.

According to the 2016 Dear Colleague Letter, Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs and activities operated by recipients of Federal financial assistance. This prohibition encompasses discrimination based on a student's gender identity, including discrimination based on a student's transgender status (Department of Education, 2016, p. 1). ECSU consulted the 2016 Dear Colleague Letter and amended its nondiscriminatory policy in December 2016. The policy reads "This Policy prohibits all forms of Discrimination and Harassment based on sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.c). In February 2017, the 2016 guidance was withdrawn by the United States Departments of Education and Justice. The 2017 guidance informed schools that the 2016 guidance did not "contain extensive legal analysis...nor did it undergo any formal public process" (Department of Education, 2017, p. 1). However, the United States Departments of Education and Justice suggested that students, including LGBTQ individuals, remained

protected as a matter of institutional policy from discrimination, bullying, or harassment in schools. According, ECSU's policy remains as adopted with protections extending to a student's sexual orientation and gender identity.

This policy is one example of ECSU's value for diversity and inclusion. Another example of the institution's values can be found in its statement of core values. ECSU's core values' statement indicates that it is committed to diverse "viewpoints, experiences, and backgrounds" (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.b). Schein's second proposition of organizational culture emphasizes conceptual shared meaning. This suggests that culture is not solely shaped by behaviors but how members of the organization feel, think, and process things as a group. This statement allows LGBTQ students to see themselves as valued members of the university community. Apart from drawing inferences, the institution could include sexual orientation or gender expression in its diversity core value language. Burgess (2007) argued that when expressions of sexuality other than heterosexuality are stifled because of homophobia, it prevents LGBTQ persons from expressing their sexual and gender identities and heteronormativity pervades as the dominant discourse of sexuality (p. 27). As homosexuality is included and eventually normalized at ECSU, LGBTQ-identifying students may perhaps feel valued or a part of the organization.

The third level of Schein's model is basic assumptions. Assumptions are firmly held beliefs by members of the organization that cannot be seen or known by individuals outside of the organization (Schein, 1996). These assumptions may be reinforced by experience with critical events or perceptions of success and failure. Hatch (1993) suggested that assumptions are inferred from human values and provide "a sense of what ought to be" (p. 663). As a result, the values of the culture become based on aspirations and what members assume as normal.

ECSU, like other HBCUs, nationwide has ties to the Black church. ECSU's founding father, Hugh Cale was a church leader and religious activity was an integral part of the training for its first enrolled students. According to Johnson (1978), "attendance at all religious programs was compulsory. To be absent was considered a misdemeanor. Scripture and prayer appeared on each program. Students were required to learn Bible verses..." (Johnson, 1978, p. 23).

Comparable to its historical founding, ECSU maintains its ties to the religion and the church today. For example, university ceremonies, like founders' day (celebrate the founding fathers of ECSU), the pinning ceremony (freshmen convocation), and graduation, began with a prayer from leaders of local churches. During these ceremonies, members of the university choir sing Negro spirituals that originate from the slavery and Black church principles.

Moreover, the unconscious beliefs of religious philosophies also exist in the universities' heteronormative culture. Nunn and Bolt's (2015) assertion that heteronormativity is reinforced by people and policies is viewed in ECSU's Mister & Miss requirements. According to the guidelines, "candidates for Mr. ECSU must be of male gender; Miss ECSU must be of the female gender. This must be the original gender at birth" (Elizabeth City State University, 2020, p. 168). Another example is are the gender-specific locker rooms and bathrooms at the institution. In the campus recreation center, there are no gender-neutral restrooms or changing areas for individuals who do not identify with their birth sex.

Schein's work is used to guide this study, but it does not account for alternative perspectives of organizational theory. Many would consider his work classical organizational theory, whereas Joanne Martin (2002) offered a contemporary approach. Her three cultural perspectives, including integration, differentiation, and fragmentation, provide a broader view of culture and would organize Schein's model into the integration perspective. The integration view

says that the organization possesses a unified culture that its members subscribe to and is guided by the beliefs, values, and norms. Whereas the differentiation view assumes that organizations have subgroups, and these subgroups have cultures that are comprised of different characteristics and interests. Lastly, the fragmentation perspective proposes that consensus among members is ambiguous and that there is no single culture within organizations.

Student affairs professionals can utilize these theories to guide their practice and to meet the needs of LGBTQ students on their campuses. Roper (2005) claimed that student affairs personnel must “develop, articulate, and lead by a philosophy that supports the education, well-being, and success of LGBTQ students” (p. 83). Such strategies can improve the campus climate for LGBTQ students, moving them out of the margins and showing this community that they matter.

Summary

Since their inception, HBCUs have provided a welcoming, safe environment for African Americans. These minority-serving institutions offered a high level of education during a time when PWIs denied racial minority students access to higher education (Palmer & Young, 2012). HBCUs remain equipped to handle racial discrimination, but they struggle with supporting and affirming sexual minorities. LGBTQ college students experience higher rates of discrimination, harassment, and violence due to their sexual identity and gender orientation than their heterosexual peers. Research suggests that these negative experiences are consistent across various types of institutions, including religious schools (Wolff & Himes, 2010), community colleges (Beemyn, 2003; Ivory, 2005; Sanlo & Espinoza, 2012), and HBCUs (Carter, 2013; Coleman, 2016; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Lenning, 2017). The unwelcoming, hostile climate at HBCUs for LGBTQ students stems from heteronormality, homophobia, and heterosexism. These

environments are the result of personal bias and religious disapproval and intolerance for homosexuality.

This literature review described the hostile campus climate in higher education for LGBTQ students across the nation and at HBCUs. This section also provided a basic review of the social experiences of and attitudes towards LGBTQ students in higher education. This study is designed to explore the social experiences of LGBTQ students attending one HBCU. There is a gap in the narratives concerning the social experiences of LGBTQ students attending HBCUs. Specifically, there is a need for the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs and how the campus climate impacts their social experiences with faculty, staff, and other students.

This study seeks to close this gap and extend the knowledge regarding LGBTQ students' experiences at HBCUs. To cultivate a positive campus climate for sexual minorities at HBCUs, administrators, faculty, and staff must understand the experiences of their enrolled LGBTQ student population (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). In the next chapter, I will present the methodology for this study. The implementation of this qualitative study to address the lack of empirical inquiry regarding the social experiences of LGBTQ students who attend HBCUs will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived social experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) students within a historically Black university environment. Media reports portray historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as actively suppressing LGBTQ students' expression and identity (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). This study aims to accumulate the narratives of a select group of students who self-identify as LGBTQ to provide insight into the experiences of non-heterosexual students at one HBCU.

This chapter discusses the methodology used to address the purpose of this study. In this chapter, I explain the research design and a rationale for the qualitative methods used for this study. Next, I describe the research site and sample participants, data analysis procedures, and design credibility and rigor. This chapter concludes with the study's methodological assumptions and limitations.

FoP Guiding Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the lived social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU?
- RQ2: What are the effects of an initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU?

RQ1 allowed me to hear the stories that LGBTQ students enrolled at the select HBCU shared about their social interactions with their peers, faculty, and staff. The purpose of this question is to learn about the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at a historically Black institution and assess the university's climate for LGBTQ individuals. RQ2 allowed me to assess the impact of the initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students at the institution and ultimately progress the campus climate for LGBTQ students. The purpose of this

question is to determine the extent to which the initiative influenced the participants' social experiences at a historically Black university.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

This study aims to investigate the lived social experiences of a select group of students who identify as LGBTQ and are enrolled at an HBCU. To examine the lived social experiences of LGBTQ students attending an HBCU, I will employ a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry focus. Qualitative research explores the meaning that people or groups attribute to a social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It assumes that individuals and groups have different perspectives and contexts, thus there are many meanings in the world, and neither is necessarily more legitimate or factual than the other (Gay & Airasian, 1996). This approach describes the participant's experience using their meaning.

Methodologically, the qualitative method will allow me to collect narratives from the sample population to garner insight into the campus climate for LGBTQ students at the selected HBCU and to implement a campus initiative to improve the campus experiences and climate for LGBTQ students. The experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs is an underexplored topic in the literature. Creswell (2007) argues that qualitative researchers explore social problems to increase understanding. These studies offer an understanding of experience from the perspective of the individual who lived it (Schwandt, 1994). Thus, this research method will address the purpose of this study by providing an opportunity for the marginalized, unacknowledged and often silenced population to be heard (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research provides information about the participants' beliefs, perspectives, and experiences (Peck & Seeker, 1999). Using a narrative inquiry approach, I will be able

to collect stories from individuals, stories telling of the individual's experiences, and the shaping of these stories by the researcher into a thematic narrative (Clandinin et al., 2018).

Narratives give voice to minority and/or discriminated groups (Elliott, 2005; Halberstam, 2005). The focus of this methodology was to make the stories of LGBTQ students at a select HBCU visible so that more knowledge could be garnered.

Qualitative narrative inquiry is the most fitting for this study because this research seeks to collect descriptive narratives regarding the lived experiences of the sample population and use those stories to draw meaning. These studies offer rich descriptions of an individual's experience intended to understand a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The central focus of qualitative studies is to understand the experience of another (Ary et al., 2014). Qualitative research offers a point of view from the participant's perspective.

Narrative research is a design of inquiry that studies stories, narratives, or descriptions of a series of events that explain human experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). This design of inquiry is rooted in the humanities (Creswell, 2007) and can be beneficial in educational research (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). This useful approach allows the researcher to study the lived experiences of one or more individuals, the stories of these experiences, how meaning is made, and the social context in which these experiences occur (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Context of the Study

This study will take place on a single HBCU campus, Elizabeth City State University (ECSU). The institution is a small-sized, public, four-year university in northeastern North Carolina. The total student population is approximately 1,800 students, a majority are full-time (1,544), undergraduate (1,695) and Black (68.5%). Demographic information about gender

identity or sexual orientation is absent from the enrollment data. This is typical because there are no federal or accreditation data collection requirements for this data. Similarly, there is no available data regarding LGBTQ student experiences or the campus climate for LGBTQ persons at the institution. However, three major events occurred within the 2018-2019 academic year. These events included the creation of a diversity center on campus, the initiation of an LGBTQ student organization, and campus education regarding this sexual minority population.

In Fall 2018, ECSU hosted an inaugural opening for the Prevention, Awareness, and Cultural Education (PACE) Center. The center is dedicated to diversity and inclusion on campus and works to educate students on diverse issues (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d). According to the Director of the PACE Center, the office is an expanded version of ECSU's Women's Center. Where the Women's Center focused on issues of sexual assault, date assault, and stalking, PACE goes further to address issues that relate to members of the LGBTQIA community, and any group on campus that represents diversity (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d).

Since its grand opening, there have been six LGBTQ awareness trainings sponsored by the PACE Center. In addition to the grand opening of the PACE Center and its educational efforts, True Colors, an LGBTQ student-led organization was formally registered on the campus of ECSU in Fall 2018. This organization seeks to maintain a supportive environment for LGBTQ students on campus (Elizabeth City State University, n.d.d). There are less than 20 members of the gay-straight alliance on campus, all of which are students.

Participants were recruited based upon the following criteria: (1) a currently enrolled undergraduate or graduate student at ECSU; (2) self-identify as LGBTQ. The participants in this

narrative inquiry will be selected because they have lived through the experience being investigated and can share their feelings regarding it (Ary et al., 2014).

Inquiry Partners

To explore the social experiences of LGBTQ students at Elizabeth City State University, I will engage with several stakeholders, including students and staff. Students who identify as LGBTQ will be heavily involved as a partner. A select group of self-identified LGBTQ students will serve as key inquiry partners. This sample population of students will be invited to share their stories and to participate in the development of an intervention strategy. I will also collaborate with campus staff within the Division of Student Affairs. The Director of the PACE Center, the Director of Student Counseling Services, the Title IX Coordinator, and the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs are vital stakeholders to this study. Each of these Student Affairs professionals will be engaged in this process.

The Director of the PACE Center is responsible for campus diversity and inclusion initiatives. This person also advises the gay-straight alliance on campus and will be able to identify sample participants and assist with the determined intervention. The Director of Student Counseling Services works to help students adjust to the demands of college life and promotes culturally sensitive services that address the holistic needs of students. This person will be able to provide confidential services and resources to the LGBTQ student community, during the study and after the intervention strategy is implemented. The Title IX Coordinator oversees the University's administrative response to all reports of discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation. This person will be able to provide ongoing education, prevention, awareness, and training programs for the intervention. Precisely, the Title IX Coordinator will be key in educating the campus community on the nondiscriminatory policy, responding to Title IX

complaints relating to sexual orientation, and offering assistance and support to LGBTQ students. The Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs is committed to the holistic success and inclusion of LGBTQ students on the campus. This person will serve as a resource and advocate during this study to ensure that the student experience for LGBTQ students is welcoming. This person is a champion for the inclusion of LGBTQ students.

Ethical Considerations

The protection of the research participants' identity and data is paramount to this study. Creswell (2013) indicated that researchers must consider their ethical responsibility which includes receiving informed consent and ensuring privacy and identity protection of participants. Several steps will be taken to ensure that ethical responsibility is upheld in this study. First, I obtained certification from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) to safeguard the integrity of the research and its participants. Also, I aimed to safely and securely store all data collected during the study on a personal, password-protected device for three years following the completion of the study. Moreover, the purpose of the study and all associated risks will be disclosed to the participants through an informed consent form. Disclosing the purpose of the study will allow me to safeguard against deception and doing harm (Jones et al., 2014).

Before conducting research, I had to obtain formal permission to access the participants and the research site (Creswell, 2013). I first received permission to conduct my research from the institutional review board (IRB) at East Carolina University (see Appendix A). I then completed a collaborative research authorization agreement at the research site which granted me access to conduct my research at Elizabeth City State University (see Appendix B). The IRB exists on campuses to address regulations that protect against human rights violations (Creswell,

2013). As such, I will need to gain approval from IRB and adhere to all of the University protocols, this may include making changes to my study and document, as well as ensuring that no harm is posed to the participants of the study. I must also receive permission from the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University to conduct and implement the intervention strategy.

Finally, as I work with participants of this study and key inquiry partners, I must acknowledge my ethical guidelines. I must examine the sensitive and ethical issues of this study and address them (Jones et al., 2014). To be clear, I am committed to ensuring that our campus climate is inviting for LGBTQ students and to ensuring the ethical treatment of my participants. I will work to collect and hear the narratives of the sample participants and strive to do no harm, respectfully and diligently.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Rigor is necessary for scholarly inquiry. Rigor is evaluated by the care and practice of data collection and analysis procedures (Tracy, 2010). Rigor generally refers to the trustworthiness of the data collected from the participants and in the interpretation of that data as well as the ability to produce similar results within a similar context (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research, trustworthiness implies confidence in the research findings (Jones et al., 2014). To establish trustworthiness, a study must unveil credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 256).

I pursued credibility and transferability by member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address credibility, I conducted transcript verifications with each participant before restorying their narratives. Following this, I asked the participants to review the reconstructed descriptions for accuracy. Afterward, the participants provided feedback on the interpretation of their stories

and the developed themes. I achieved transferability by providing detailed, thick descriptions of the collected data and research context so that potential readers could determine the transferability of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To attain dependability and confirmability, I utilized an interview protocol and maintained trustworthy data collection and analysis procedures. I also maintained a reflectivity journal to avoid researcher bias throughout the research process.

Assumptions

There are assumptions associated with this study. First, I assumed that the participants' experiences on the campus were adverse. Secondly, I assumed that all of the students in the study trusted me and provided candid responses to the interview questions.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study, specifically relating to data collection. To begin, it was difficult to recruit participants for this study due to the nature of the topic. For both HBCUs and LGBTQ students, homosexuality is a sensitive topic. Therefore, limiting the participation of participants.

Additionally, the coronavirus (COVID-19) impacted the campus operations and prevented face-to-face interviews with the research participants. The participants were flexible in scheduling phone and virtual interviews, however, there were technological issues involving cellular service strength. Poor signal and/or Wi-Fi connections impacted my ability to understand the participants' responses and the participants' ability to hear the answer to the interview questions. Furthermore, I spent additional time repeating myself and asking the participants to repeat their stories which extended the interview times.

Inquiry Procedures

The study in its totality followed a three-phase action research design. This approach was identified as appropriate because it is an “investigation conducted by a person...empowered to take action concerning their action, for the purpose of improving their future actions” (Sagor & Williams, 2017, p. 6). The research in this study is used to inform and assist higher education practitioners in creating an inclusive environment for LGBTQ students on their campuses.

This section consists of three phases. The first phase details a pilot study that was conducted to examine the social experiences of a sample population of LGBTQ students enrolled at one HBCU. The second phase outlines the research study and answers research question one. The third phase focuses on the implementation of an initiative and answers research question two.

Phase 1: Pilot Study

Phase one entails a pilot study that intended to collect the narratives of a small group of LGBTQ students who could provide insight into research question one. The preliminary study explored the lived experiences of a sample population of LGBTQ students enrolled at a select HBCU. The pilot study was important because it established baseline data that was used as a snapshot into the social experiences of LGBTQ students on the campus, specifically, the pilot sample shared their perceptions of the campus culture for LGBTQ students, and they made recommendations for campus initiatives that could improve the campus culture for LGBTQ students. Significantly, this phase also allowed me to test the research protocol, data collection instruments, and sample recruitment strategy in preparation for phase two (Hassan et al., 2006).

Data Collection

A purposeful sample was conducted to collect data for this pilot. This data collection strategy allowed me to select individuals or sites that can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 300). There were two criteria of participant eligibility for this phase of the study: (1) be enrolled as a degree-seeking student at ECSU, and (2) identify as LGBTQ. This cycle of data collection was initiated in Spring 2020 with a small sample of students.

Three participants participated in the pilot sample. All participants met the criteria of attending ECSU and self-identifying and fully disclosing as lesbian or gay. Each participant was enrolled as an undergraduate student. The pilot sample consisted of one female student who identified as lesbian and two male students who identified as gay. Originally, four students agreed to participate in the pilot study, however, one student encountered a personal issue and did not reschedule the interview. All of the participants were engaged in one interview via telephone. In-person interviews were not possible due to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Through these interviews, I was able to capture the essence of their lived experiences as LGBTQ students at ECSU.

The participants were recruited through an email invitation, sent to members of ECSU’s True Colors, Gay-Straight Alliance. The email invitation included the aim of the study, the rights of the participants, and a link to register for participation in the study. The link connected the potential participants to a demographic questionnaire that asked them to disclose their sexual identity, classification at ECSU, and availability for an in-depth interview.

Upon confirmation of participation, each participant received and signed an informed consent form. The consent form outlined the study’s purpose, criteria, and procedures of the

study, to include the risks and benefits of participating in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stage & Manning, 2015). The participants were asked to review the consent form before the first interview. The participants were also asked to share any concerns or questions before the interview. After the participant signed the consent form, they participated in an interview.

In the pilot, interviews were an essential source of data collection. Interviews allow the researcher to explore a topic in a way that yields rich and detailed qualitative data, impossible to obtain through other methods (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Stage & Manning, 2015). Precisely, interviews allow the researcher to understand the participants' experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 811). The goal of qualitative interviews is to "understand the participants' perspectives relating to the research problem to obtain a deep understanding of the interaction between participant, setting, and topic under study" (Stage & Manning, 2015, p. 47).

Data were collected virtually through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded. The interviews were recorded because it is impossible to take notes on everything that transpires during an interview (Stage & Manning, 2015). All the participants consented to the audio-recording of their interviews. This practice allowed me to focus on the participants' stories and reflect fully on the experiences expressed by the participant to make meaning of their experience (Yin, 2003). Stage and Manning (2015) cautioned researchers to never solely rely on recording devices (p. 57). As a result, detailed notes were taken, documented each participant's response to the interview questions throughout the interview.

I utilized an interview protocol to guide each interview (see Appendix C). This tool allowed me to have the flexibility to adjust to the responses of the participant as needed (Bryman

& Bell, 2011) and to obtain unexpected data that may emerge during the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) According to Stage and Manning (2015), narrative inquirers create interview protocols with an understanding that the interview will be directed by the participants based upon aspects central to their experiences. Each participant was asked a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions during the interview. The semi-structured interview format affords the researcher flexibility and the opportunity to “better grasp how the participants made meaning of their experiences (Yin, 2003). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by me after each interview session. A copy of the transcript was provided to each participant for review. This ensured that the information collected and transcribed was accurate. The audio recordings were saved in a secure folder, only accessible to me.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process involving data reflection, analytical questioning, and the review of written notes by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of data analysis is to reduce the data into meaningful constructs that best represent the experiences and understandings of the study’s participants (Stage & Manning, 2015). Following each interview, the audio recording was transcribed verbatim, and the field notes were reviewed for completion and reflection on the interview experience. Within narrative research, data analysis examines the participants’ experiences to reconstruct meaning through their personal stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

To analyze the pilot data, I foremost reflected on the participants’ experiences. I reviewed the field notes taken during each interview. I also listened to the audio recordings of each interview which were recorded synonymous with the field notes. Next, I transcribed each interview verbatim. The transcribed interviews and the detailed notes from each interview were analyzed to generate relevant commonalities in the experience of the participants, using the

coding process. Codes are units of meaning that generate descriptive commonalities (Creswell, 2007). These commonalities formed themes that will be used to construct a sense of meaning from the participants' stories of their lived experiences. The commonalities were derived from the theoretical framework and will be refined by the literature.

Results

The participants were open with their discussion about the impact of their gay or lesbian identity on their social experience on campus. Although many topics were covered, the data from the interviews were analyzed and coded into three emergent themes. These themes included: (a) the challenges with coming out, (b) the impact of peer interactions on living out, and (c) a demand for more knowledge. Each of the themes presented shed light on the participants' social experiences and needs on their HBCU campus.

The first theme, "the challenges with coming out", focused on the participants' acceptance of their sexual identity and how they disclosed their sexuality to others. The interview responses revealed that each participant had accepted their sexual orientation or gender identity, as a gay male or lesbian female, before enrolling at the university and that they did not have a problem with revealing their sexual orientation to others on campus. In the interviews, the participants defined their 'coming out' experience before enrolling on campus which helped them to develop an apathetic attitude, as a coping mechanism to accept their sexual identity and live openly as their true gay/lesbian selves.

All participants communicated self-acceptance and a level of comfort with their sexuality. The participants commonly revealed that campus members often assumed their sexual orientation before their disclosure. While no participant depicted anger by these assumptions, they each detailed how their disclosure, indirectly or directly, impacted their social experiences

as queer students on campus. Most of the participants referenced the inquisitiveness and judgmental perceptions of their peers on campus. These experiences were similar to the social experiences of LGBTQ students described in the literature.

The second overarching theme that emerged from this study was the “impact of peer interactions on living out”. This theme addressed the positive and negative exchanges between the participants and their peers on campus that transpired because of the participant’s sexual orientation or gender identity. The participants spent time explaining their interactions with peers on campus. All participants were able to recall an encounter with other students on campus, and they were able to describe its impact on their campus experience.

The revealed social experiences, relating to peer interactions, suggested that the campus culture for LGBTQ students was hostile. Despite these experiences, all participants expressed contentment with and confidence in their sexuality. The participants did not allow the exchanges with their peers to impact the self-acceptance of their sexual identity. The participants’ experiences aligned closely with the literature reviewed for this study.

The last theme that emerged from the interview data was “a demand for more knowledge” on campus about the LGBTQ community and the issues that the community faces. Each participant was asked, “if you could speak to the administration at ECSU and ask for or demand something be done to better the climate for the LGBTQ student population, what would you ask for”? At the core of the participants’ narratives was a desire for LGBTQ inclusion on campus. Each participant indicated that they felt a part of the campus community, but they wanted to see campus programs and activities that affirmed and shed light on the diverse spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities.

Summary

The purpose of the pilot study was to collect baseline data for the main study. Using a purposive sample, three self-identifying lesbian and gay students participated in semi-structured interviews. Through these interviews, I was able to capture the stories of this group's social experiences on campus. The narratives collected from the sample revealed that these students experienced marginalization and homophobia from faculty, staff, and their non-LGBTQ peers. The participants also provided obtainable suggestions for improving the campus culture for LGBTQ students at Elizabeth City State University. The experiences and suggestions of the pilot participants will be used to inform the next phase of data analysis and the intervention strategy for the main study.

Phase 2: Research Study

The pilot study produced qualitative data relative to the social experiences of LGBTQ students at one HBCU campus. However, the research study data collected in phase two provided depth into the social experiences of LGBTQ students within their HBCU campus environment. The overall aims of this phase were to (1) collect the narratives of LGBTQ students attending a select HBCU and (2) identify a supportive resource or program that could improve the social experience for LGBTQ students attending a select HBCU. To this point, phase two sought to hear the stories of LGBTQ students on a particular campus and to use those narratives to identify sources of marginalization and determine an initiative aimed at bettering the social experiences of LGBTQ students at the select HBCU.

Data Collection

I employed a purposeful strategy to obtain a sample with the direct knowledge and experience needed to answer the research questions for this study using two methods of data

collection. These included a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions. The demographic questionnaire assessed the students' ability to participate in the study. Due to the purpose of this study, all participants were required to (1) self-identify as LGBTQ, (2) be at least eighteen, (3) be enrolled at the select HBCU site. Eight participants met these criteria and participated in this research phase.

The recruitment of participants began after IRB approval was obtained. Institutional approval was sought from East Carolina University and the research site campus. Following IRB approval, I publicized an invitation to participate in the research project through two campus-based tools, including a student email listserv and engagement application. The invitation included the purpose of the study, the rights of the participants, and a link to register for participation in the study.

Data collection began in early Spring 2021. Initially, only four students responded to the research invitation. Due to the low response rate, I extended personal invitations to student groups on campus and placed research flyers in high traffic areas on campus, including the residence halls, student center, library, and cafeteria. These efforts yielded four additional participants. Each student received and completed a demographic questionnaire. All of the respondents met the inclusion criteria for the research study and were contacted to schedule a virtual interview.

At the time of data collection, the research site had transitioned its operations to a virtual format due to the coronavirus (COVID-19). To maintain compliance with the health and safety mandates of the institution, each participant participated in one virtual semi-structured interview via Zoom video conferencing. Data collected from the semi-structured interviews were used to capture the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at the historically Black institution

and identify a campus intervention. Each interview lasted approximately 45-70 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent using Otter audio recording and transcription software. Immediately after each interview, the audio recording transcripts were downloaded to my private laptop and transcribed verbatim by me. Each transcript was member-checked by the appropriate participant for accuracy, credibility, and validity.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this phase consisted of two coding cycles. I began the data analysis process using provisional coding and in vivo coding methods (Saldaña, 2015).

Provisional coding generated codes based on their relevancy to the research study; inherently, these codes were derived from the literature review and the pilot study, whereas the in vivo codes precisely developed from the participants' own words (Saldaña, 2015). The first cycle of data analysis was completed using NVivo, a qualitative data management software.

Following the initial organization and analysis of the data, I conducted a second cycle of analysis to review the codes and uncover patterns, categories, and themes (Phillips & Lu, 2018; Saldaña, 2015). For the second cycle of analysis, I employed axial coding as a mechanism for coding the data. I initiated this process by reviewing the first cycle's codes for relationships (Saldaña, 2015). Subsequently, the codes were condensed into patterns and the patterns were characterized by the frequency of an experience and the similarities and differences among each pattern (Hedlund-de Witt, 2013; Saldaña, 2015). From the patterns, categories formed based on their relevancy to each other, and then themes were identified.

Inquiry Initiative

The collected social experiences from the research participants in phases one and two of the research study revealed that the campus culture at ECSU was unaffirming toward LGBTQ

students. Each participant was asked, “what campus initiative could advance the experiences of LGBTQ students on campus?” Unanimously, the research participants, in phases one and two, said that more campus events for the LGBTQ community would improve their campus experience and possibly the campus climate for LGBTQ students. Thus, I collaboratively worked with several inquiry partners, including the participants of this study, the Director of the institution’s PACE Center, and the Senior Associate Director of an LGBTQ Center at a system institution to implement a semester-long calendar of events that aimed to celebrate and support the campus’ LGBTQ student population, as well as educate all campus members about the issues and needs of LGBTQ student population at the research site.

The semester-long initiative was implemented at the research site in Fall 2021(see Appendix D). There were two main components of the campus-based initiative: educational workshops and interactive activities. Each component utilized Schlossberg’s (1989) mattering model as a platform to move LGBTQ students from the margins to mattering by creating spaces on campus for LGBTQ students to be recognized and commemorated as valuable members of the campus community.

The educational workshops consisted of monthly safe zone trainings. They were offered to all members of the campus community to promote awareness and support for LGBTQ individuals. The safe zone participants were exposed to sexual orientation and gender identity spectrums, inclusive terminology, LGBTQ issues, and practical ways to promote inclusion on campus. During the training, the participants engaged in activities that focused on identifying prejudices, assumptions, and privileges and examining subconscious biases and stereotypes of the LGBTQ community. Special groups like employees, student staff members, and student

organizations received the training. These workshops were sponsored by the PACE Center and facilitated by an off-campus partner who was a member of the LGBTQ community.

After each session, participants were asked to provide feedback on the training by completing an open-ended survey. The feedback form asked what did you enjoy about today's workshop? What is something you think could be improved? Would you recommend this workshop, and to who? Participants were also provided a space to provide additional comments. Most of the participants noted that they enjoyed the "open conversation", "vocabulary review" or "terminology", and "open discussion on the subject matter". One workshop participant wrote: I enjoyed the open conversation and vocabulary review". When asked about improvements, most participants wrote "n/a" while some participants recommended, "add food to increase participation". A majority of the participants said that they would recommend the workshop to new employees, faculty and staff, campus sports teams, student organizations, and the student body. Overall, the participants of the trainings shared positive feedback about the workshop.

Phase 3: Implementation

The purpose of this phase was to discuss the effects of the campus initiative on participants' social experiences within the selected HBCU's culture. This phase addressed research question two: What are the effects of a selected campus initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at a historically Black University in northeastern North Carolina? Semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine the effects of the campus-based initiative on LGBTQ students' social experiences on campus.

I employed a purposeful strategy for this phase. All of the participants from phase two were invited to participate in phase three because of their expertise and experience with the project. Data collection began in late Spring 2021. At the time of this phase, three of the

participants were no longer enrolled at the institution. However, the remaining five participants agreed to participate in this research phase. Each participant attended at least one safe zone training and more than three of the initiative's programs.

At the time of data collection, the research site had transitioned its operations back to in person. However, to protect the health and safety of the participants and myself, each participant was invited to discuss their thoughts about the campus-based intervention and its effects on their campus social experiences virtually.

I collected data by interviewing each participant individually. During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on the initiative's events and discuss its effects, if any on their social experiences at the institution (see Appendix E).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the sampling methods utilized for data collection and to discuss the process for data analysis. The discussion for this chapter focused on the procedural steps taken to conduct the three-phased study. This research study utilized a qualitative design to capture the individual experiences and stories of self-identifying LGBTQ students enrolled at one HBCU campus. The findings of phase one revealed that the participants generally experienced an unwelcoming campus culture and that they wanted more educational programs and support for the LGBTQ community on campus. The findings of phases two and three of this research are provided in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: INQUIRY FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at one HBCU and to use those experiences to develop a campus-based initiative to positively impact the campus climate for LGBTQ students. As documented in phase one, I conducted a pilot study to collect preliminary data on the campus climate for LGBTQ students at a historically Black institution in northeastern North Carolina. In this phase, I interviewed three self-identifying LGBTQ students about their campus experiences with faculty, staff, and their peers. The information gleaned from this sample revealed that the campus climate was unwelcoming and homophobic toward non-heterosexual and gender-nonconforming identities. In phase two, eight self-identifying LGBTQ students shared insight into their lived social experiences. I then drew from participants' lived experiences to develop a campus-based initiative to improve campus life for LGBTQ students. In phase three, I implemented the campus-based initiative and examined its effects on the participants' social experiences. The findings from phases two and three are presented in this chapter.

I begin this chapter with each participant's profile. Introduced in the profiles are the participant's background and their self-identified disclosure status, the degree they are "out." Next, I discuss the overarching themes that emerged from the participants' responses during their individual semi-structured interviews. Finally, in phase three, I used the participants' lived on-campus social experiences to develop a campus-based initiative that sought to positively effect LGBTQ-student experiences at the institution; this initiative is briefly discussed herein. This chapter will conclude with a discussion about the effects of the campus-based initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at the institution.

Participant Profiles

This section introduces the biographical profiles of each student. The participants interviewed for this research study were selected based on the following criteria: (a) self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, (b) at least the age of eighteen, and (c) enrolled at the HBCU. Eight students met the inclusion criteria for this study, and they each participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted for 60-90 minutes. Table 1 displays demographic information for each participant, including their chosen name, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender identity, age, classification at the institution, and religious affiliation. Each student was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Following this, I provide biographies for each student that depict their background and disclosure status, relative to their families and others on campus. This information was collected during the participant's interviews.

Participant 1: Ally

Ally earned a bachelor's degree from the institution site and reenrolled as a Graduate degree-seeking student. She is a native of North Carolina. Ally is a member of a Greek-letter organization. During her undergraduate tenure at the institution, she served in many student organizations on campus within Student Affairs. Ally 'came out' as a lesbian to her mother, but not her father, before coming to college. Ally is "out" on campus.

Participant 2: Dutch

Dutch is a first-year student at the University. She is the oldest child to her parents and has one sibling, a sister. Dutch is from Virginia. She is involved with student athletics and volunteers with Campus Recreation and Wellness. Dutch was "outed" by her sister to her mother, but she disclosed her lesbian identity to her father. She shared that she has a closer

Table 1

Demographic Information of Research Participants

Name	Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Age	Classification	Religious Affiliation
Ally	Lesbian	Black	Female	23	Graduate Student, 1 st year	Christianity
Dutch	Lesbian	Black	Female	19	Undergraduate, Freshmen	Christianity
Elizabeth	Lesbian	Black	Female	24	Graduate Student, 1 st year	Christianity
France	Lesbian	Black	Female	26	Graduate, 2 nd year	Christianity
Cameron	Gay	Black	Male	22	Undergraduate, Junior	Christianity
Jamal	Gay	Black	Male	20	Undergraduate, Sophomore	Christianity
Lauren	Bisexual	Black	Female	20	Undergraduate, Junior	Spiritual
Bella	Queer	Black	Female	19	Undergraduate, Freshmen	Christianity

relationship with her father than her mother, although she lived with her mother and her stepdad before college. Dutch expressed that she is “out” on campus.

Participant 3: Elizabeth

Elizabeth earned a bachelor’s degree from the institution site and reenrolled as a Graduate degree-seeking student. She was born and raised in North Carolina. While matriculating at the university as an undergraduate, Elizabeth joined a Greek-letter organization on campus. She expressed her love for the institution several times throughout the interview. Elizabeth ‘came out’ as a lesbian to her family and she is “out” on campus.

Participant 4: France

France earned a bachelor’s degree from the institution site and reenrolled as a Graduate degree-seeking student. She is originally from North Carolina. During her undergraduate tenure at the institution, she worked with other students to start an LGBTQ group on campus. She was also a member of the University’s Pep Squad, a participant in the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated pageant, and a math tutor. France was “outed” by a stranger to her mother after she publicly displayed her relationship with another woman while enrolled at the University. France explained that her outness on campus got back to her mother; hence, France is “out” on campus.

Participant 5: Cameron

Cameron is a third-year student at the University. He is from North Carolina. He transferred from another institution after one year. Cameron explained that after he transferred, he advocated for a gay-straight alliance group on campus, like the one at his previous institution; he now holds a leadership role in True Colors, a gay-straight alliance group on his campus. Cameron shared that he came out to his parents, first his mother in a private setting, and then his

father and siblings at a family meeting, following his disclosure to his mother. Cameron says he is happily and boldly “out” on campus; he self-describes as “flamboyant” and is openly gay.

Participant 6: Jamal

Jamal is a second-year student from North Carolina. He is a transfer student. Jamal models in one of the campus modeling troupes and he is a member of True Colors. Jamal identifies as gay. He shared that he came “out” to his mother at first and then to his dad. Jamal described both of his parents as homophobic, but he stated that he has a better relationship with his mother than he does with his dad, mainly because of his dad’s personality. Jamal is “out” on campus but expressed that he is not “flamboyant”.

Participant 7: Lauren

Lauren is a third-year student. She is originally from North Carolina. She identifies as bisexual. Lauren is actively involved on campus; she serves as a Peer Ambassador and a member of True Colors. She also participates in the campus substance abuse group, as an advocate, and she is a member of one of the campus modeling troupes. Her family was not initially accepting of her sexuality, but they have come around after seeing that she “won’t gone change no matter what anyone thought”. Lauren lives “out” on campus.

Participant 8: Bella

Bella is a first-year student. She resides in North Carolina. She identifies as a queer. Bella shared that her mom “knows a little bit about her sexuality”. She disclosed that she has told her mom that she likes other women and included the caveat that her sexuality did not mean that she would marry a woman. Bella further revealed that her mom is not happy about her sexuality, but they have an understanding. Bella is “out” on campus.

Emergent Themes from Interview Data

The following section highlights the themes and findings of phase two. Table 2 depicts three overarching themes and six subthemes that emerged from the participant's semi-structured interview data. Each of the presented themes shed light on the social experiences of the participants who engaged in the interview process. The overarching themes for this study were (1) Daring to Come Out, (2) Cultural Challenges to Acceptance, and (3) Unwelcoming Campus Culture for LGBTQ students.

Within the overarching theme of *Daring to Come Out*, I identified two subthemes: Self-Acceptance of Sexuality and the Acceptance from Others. In the overarching theme of *Cultural Challenges to Acceptance*, I discovered the following subthemes: The African American Household and Religious Doctrine and Scripture. Lastly, one subtheme emerged from the overarching theme of *Unwelcoming Campus Culture for LGBTQ students*: LGBTQ-student experiences, both inside of the classroom and outside of the classroom.

Daring to Come Out

At the time of this inquiry, all of the participants were openly 'out' to their family members and others on campus. The students reported a strong sense of pride in their sexual and gender identity, but they each acknowledged some apprehension about coming out. For example, Lauren disclosed that she refrained from disclosing to everyone at first because "it was a process that I was going through...". Lauren furthered,

I wasn't going to be as open coming out to everybody, especially when I wasn't accepted by everyone... I felt a sense of distance from them [friends and family members] because they didn't accept me as gay.

Table 2

Overarching Themes and Subthemes

Overarching Theme	Sub-Themes
Daring to Come Out	Self-Acceptance of Sexuality The Acceptance from Others
Cultural Challenges to Acceptance	The African American Household Religious Doctrine and Scripture
Unwelcoming Campus Culture for LGTBQ students	LGBTQ-student Experiences

Likewise, Ally shared:

I was out before college...I was going to eventually tell my parents, but I didn't feel like it was ever the right time. I mean, they [parents] already knew anyway, I think...I needed time to get myself together and come to grips with it [her sexuality].

Similarly, Cameron explained that his experience with coming out was initially predicated on his fear of rejection. He said:

I actually kissed a boy in first grade, so I kind of already knew growing up. But it was kind of something that I didn't want to express to my family or others, based off fear. Because in the Black community it's [homosexuality] treated as taboo; things that people wouldn't talk about or things that you would probably see at the family reunion and hear your auntie, momma, or grandma talking about other people in the family that might identify as LGBTQ in a bad manner, so I kind of just kept it [his sexuality] close to the chest until my freshmen year of high school.

Cameron furthered that he finally admitted to being gay to his family and he immediately felt like "people weren't really talking to me as much...but I expected that".

These experiences were common among the participants and occurred on campus as well. Jamal said, "...I intentionally didn't tell a lot of people because I know how Black folk act. Some [are] cool with it but most aren't. So, it was a stretch for me to even tell the few folks [that] I did". Additionally, Bella shared, "If you know [about her sexuality], you know because you're in my circle. I've seen how gay people are treated here and I'd rather protect my peace". From the students' narratives, it became clear that coming out was a desirable outcome for the participants. Yet, doing so could result in legitimate social isolation, ridicule, or violence.

Although participants grappled with coming out, they each developed the wherewithal to do so, with their families and others on campus. *Daring to Come Out* was an important theme that emerged from the data. This theme described the participants' ability to accept their sexuality and have the courage to come out. Within this theme were two subthemes: self-acceptance and acceptance from others. *Self-acceptance of sexuality* represented the student's internal process of identifying as LGBTQ and being able to openly acknowledge themselves as such. *Acceptance from others* described how other people received their acceptance and disclosure.

Self-Acceptance of Sexuality

This subtheme described how the students found comfort and confidence in their sexuality, despite their struggles with the fear of rejection. All of the participants were able to recall specific moments in which they came to recognize and openly express their sexuality. For each student, this happened before enrolling in college. The interview responses below detail the participant's acceptance of self [their sexuality].

Dutch shared,

Before college I knew, I just didn't share it with my folks because I know how judgmental they are towards it [homosexuality]. As I got comfortable with it [her sexuality], I told my sister first. My sister told my mom a couple [of] weeks into college actually. I tried to be smart about it, but my sister had already asked her how she would feel if one of her daughters were gay. And I was her only other daughter, so she called me and it [the conversation] didn't go as planned...I'm not allowing anyone to change how I feel about who I like though.

Bella expressed comparable sentiments. She responded,

I've always loved men but found some women attractive. In high school, that's when I started taking it [her sexuality] like kind of serious. My mom knows a little something, something, but she don't support it, I would say. You know how that go in the Black household... Well, I was raised to like men... but you know, I'm uh veer off... I'm going to do what I do. Period.

France spoke about her upbringing as well. She stated that,

I had this military mindset of don't ask, don't tell. I wasn't afraid to tell her [her mom], but I just didn't tell her. Sometimes, I know my mom can be judgmental. Even though I say, you know, it doesn't get to me, it does... I just didn't want to hear it. But since I was out of her house and on my own, she [her mom] couldn't say or do anything to stop me [from being gay] ... people can tell me like in the Bible it says Adam and Eve...the Bible is really just a book of words that people interpret the way they want to. You can't really down me because of my sexual preference because of what you believe something that the Bible said...people lie, they steal, they have kids outside of wedlock, you know all that stuff. So, I just do me.

Jamal too expressed this point. He said,

To be honest, I actually always knew... I knew I was gay when I was in the sixth grade... I knew I was gay, but I was still hiding it from my parents and whatnot, but it's like everyone around me, like in school and stuff knew. I felt comfortable there [school]; I grew into myself and began to speak up more about what makes me comfortable and uncomfortable.

Moreover, Lauren added to this subtheme by explaining her stance. She stated, “I don’t feel like anyone could make me feel less than because of my sexuality because it’s no one’s business but my own, and no one can make me run away from my identity.”

Elizabeth expressed another approach. She asserted,

I came out before I came to college. I grew up in the church and I try to focus on the main thing and that’s God. I don’t focus on my sexuality being in the way of who I am...I don’t feel like He [God] looks at me like, oh you’re gay, so I’m not going to do this for you. That’s not true because he has done things for me recently, and I’m still gay. That’s really how I came to love myself and live in my truth. Like, if God don’t judge me, who cares about what other people got to say.

The Acceptance from Others

A commonality in the data was acceptance or lack thereof from others following the participants’ disclosure. All of the participants described how other people, on campus and within their households, received the news of their sexual orientation. Most of the students experienced heteronormative, homophobic, and heterosexist reactions. The interview responses below detail how others accepted the participant’s disclosure.

The responses of Ally, Dutch, France, and Lauren revealed that their family members were generally unwelcoming towards their disclosure, but campus members were mostly warm towards them. Ally said,

... They [her parents] are Christians and stuck in their ways. So, they did not really agree with it [her sexuality] ... when my ex [girlfriend] told my mom... she [her mom] took it kind of bad. After choir rehearsals, she [her mom] was like such and such just told me that y’all were dating. And I wasn’t going to argue. We didn’t talk for a week, two weeks

maybe. Now it's still kind of hard for her [her mom] ... sometimes, she'll say her little comments, but I've learned to ignore her because I'm not going to waste my energy going back and forth. It is what it is.

When discussing her campus experience, Ally shared,

They [others] pick up on how I dress and carry myself. Some people are kind of scared to ask me, and some people just put it together. Everyone, to my face, has just accepted it [her sexuality]. I haven't really seen a time where I was looked down upon for my sexual orientation here. I can't say the same for others though.

In terms of Dutch's coming out experience, she stated,

... My sister had already asked her [mom] how she would feel if one of her daughters were gay. And I was her only other daughter, so she called me and it [the conversation] didn't go as planned. My mom doesn't like it [her sexuality]. I just stopped talking to my mom about it because at this point... I'm not allowing anyone to change how I feel about who I like though. However, my dad's okay with it [her sexuality]. My dad is more understanding.

When speaking about her social interactions or experiences with others on campus related to coming out, Dutch shared,

A select few [people on campus] know. I had a girlfriend actually [at] the beginning of [the] semester but... she broke up with me... before [the breakup], I posted my girlfriend on social media and that's how people knew [that] I had a girlfriend on campus. I haven't received anything bad from nobody, but I'm the [sports team] manager for the girls and when we hang, I hear students talking badly about their sexuality. Some of them are out

too, and students talk so badly about them being gay... I guess because I'm not in the light, folks don't really care about whether I am gay or not.

France expressed similar sentiments about her mom's acceptance. She never personally disclosed to her mother; she was outed as well. While discussing disclosure on campus, France expressed,

So, I really don't know how to put me coming out on campus, because it was like, once I was on campus, I became known and [everyone] was like, ok. That's France and France likes women, but I wasn't like, hi, I'm France and I like women. I guess, people picked it up. Me and this girl was messing around publicly...I was also actively involved in True Colors, plus it [her sexual orientation] was on my social media account. Folks just knew and accepted me. I've really never had a negative impact like nobody ever came to me sideways on campus because I'm a lesbian.

Lauren shared, "I wasn't accepted by everyone... I felt like a sense of distance until they [her family] seen how I was comfortable in my sexuality and it [her sexuality] wasn't going to change, and their opinion didn't matter". Lauren furthered, "most students are accepting of my sexuality, but I have encountered some students who were disrespectful toward my sexual identity too". According to Lauren, disrespect manifested in several ways to include the disparagement of her sexuality and disregard for her same-sex partner.

Participants Cameron, Jamal, and Bella provided relevant examples of acceptance and discontentment, about their disclosure, as well. Within his family unit, Cameron explained,

My mom took it as a joke [laughed it off and didn't take seriously] ... I have a young sister and brother. They're cool with it. My dad's reaction was a little bit more like... he was disappointed. He said that he wanted to see me graduate, get a girlfriend, and have

kids on my own...then it came to a point where I couldn't do certain things, like get my hair done or makeup...

As he reflected on his on-campus experience with acceptance, Cameron highlighted the impact of gender expression in regard to others accepting his sexuality. He said,

When I first got here [ECSU]... sometimes, I [would have] no nails on, or no makeup on... and a lot of people didn't know that I was [gay], so I had to tell them. So, it was like coming out... every day. What let people know that I was [gay] without [them] asking or [me] telling, was when I got the blue braids. The reactions that I got from the staff were good. [They gave me] a lot of compliments [and] a lot of uplifting statements. And I enjoyed it and I definitely appreciated the love. On the other hand, a few of the students were a little drawn back, I would say. It was a few comments that I let fly through the wind. I wasn't trying to let that get to me... when I first walked into the café on fried chicken Wednesday, it was a bunch of these dudes, they were like, yo, what's that: They called me a thing.

Cameron alluded to non-acceptance by his peers due to his appearance. The blue braids, nails, and make-up are socially epitomized as feminine expressions. Cameron's dress didn't match what is considered the 'norm' based on his sex. Another participant reported similar experiences. Jamal shared his experience with acceptance, at home, and on-campus, respectively. He said,

Their [his parents] initial reactions were actually good. I told my mom. I didn't want to tell my dad. I wanted my mom to tell my dad, just because. [So] I told my mom, she was like, well we still love you, blah, blah, blah, and then my dad ended up calling me a day or two later, and I had asked him if he had talked to my mom; he said, Nah... so I was

like, okay so I have to say it myself then. So, I did, and he was like, well, we love you either way; you're still our son, blah blah, blah. So, I'm thinking everything's going to be okay... Fast forward to Christmas Break last year, umm, it was something that my mom had said, and it just threw me off. I was [thinking] like, you just said [that] you ain't have no issue, so why all of a sudden am I getting backlash?... Ever since then, I feel like me and my parent's relationship has been rocky.

Jamal went on to describe his social experiences with others on campus, following his disclosure. According to him, Jamal had good relationships with staff and female students. "Good relationship" centered about being able to live outwardly as a gay male. Jamal described being able to discuss his romantic feelings and partners with his female friends. He also stated that campus staff members and his female friends accepted his gay identity. While Jamal expressed good relationships among some members of the campus, he did describe challenges that he experienced from his peers. He said,

When I came to campus, I only told a few people that I became close with. They were all girls and cool about it. I've had plenty of negative interactions with other students. Guys will roll their eyes at me and shake their heads [dissent of his lifestyle]. You can tell when they [students] don't agree with my sexuality because they'll [students] move away from me. One time, a girl got up and moved seats after I sat down next to her.

Similarly, Bella discussed her mom's feelings about her lesbian identity, in which Bella said, "she doesn't support it. When I told my mom, she kind of spazzed and started asking me all these questions." Like other participants, Bella explained that she had come out to a few people on campus, and they embraced her sexuality. However, Bella has experienced and witnessed

negative remarks by non-LGBTQ students whenever she would engage with other “out” LGBTQ students.

Elizabeth’s disclosure experiences were different than the other participants. She expressed that other people were accepting of her sexual orientation. She did not experience unwelcoming remarks from other people. Elizabeth said,

None of my family members held my sexuality against me once I told them. They just took me as I am. And that’s a blessing because I know other people who grew up in the church and their families didn’t, but mines were cool.

On-campus, Elizabeth described a similar experience. She said,

I’ve never [been] welcomed in a bad way from teachers, staff [or] students. What I identify as helped me like I stayed true to myself... I never [verbally] came out to anyone on campus. I think because of the way I dress, these masculine clothes, they [others] automatically think lesbian; and everyone on campus is cool with it.

Cameron acknowledged the impact of his disclosure to others on his self-acceptance. He shared,

At one time she [his mother] said it’s just probably a phase, and I’ll grow out of it... She said pray and it will change. And I feel like that’s contributed to that voice in my head that just makes me doubt stuff; it makes me doubt my actions and like my decision-making.

Like Cameron, the other participants described similar experiences of homophobic, heterosexist and heteronormative reactions from others seemingly stemmed from religion and cultural stigma. Participants spoke about gender roles and how males are supposed to be “manly” and “carry the legacy of the family”. Similarly, the female masculine-presenting participants received critiques about their demeanor and clothing choice. For example, one participant stated

“she [her mother] told me that I’m supposed to wear more fitting [attire], not baggy clothes like men. So, she [her mother] would always buy me dresses and tight skirts, but I wouldn’t wear them. I would bag them for goodwill.” Such responses further mainstream society’s norms of gender binaries and marital relations; they do not extend choice to gender-fluid, non-binary, other identities, or homosexual persons. These experiences impacted their self-acceptance and their disclosure, as well as how others experienced their disclosure.

Cultural Challenges to Acceptance

Another common and significant theme among the participants was *Cultural Challenges to Acceptance*, representing the intersectionality of the participant’s cultural values and their sexuality. Coming out to others was an important but frightening experience for some of the participants, as many of them faced homophobia. Within this theme, the students discussed the challenges that they faced due to attitudes toward homosexuality from the Black community and Church.

The African American household and religious doctrine and scripture also emerged as subthemes. The *African American household* depicts the values of the Black family and how the participants were raised to view homosexuality. *Religious doctrine and scripture* refer to the Christian principles and beliefs that dictate behavior and interactions with the LGBTQ community.

Each participant told stories that cited Christianity (i.e., the Bible or religious beliefs) and its impact on their interactions with others, both at home and on campus. Overall, the participants revealed that religion affected the way others treated them. The treatment described by the students revealed that religious doctrine influenced homophobic attitudes towards homosexuality. Most of the participants indicated that their family’s views on homosexuality

stem from *religious doctrine and scripture*. For instance, Cameron, who is Christian, said, “They [his family members] have stated “*Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve... and it’s [homosexuality] a sin*. One time she [his mom] said “it’s just probably a phase, you’ll grow out of it...”

Similarly, Bella asserted, “They [her family] don’t accept a woman dating another woman because they [her family] feel like it’s wrong; they [her family] feel like that’s not how it’s supposed to go. But really, it ain’t no right [way]...well it is a right way, but I’m kind of in the middle with it...it all goes back to religion and how [she was] brought up in the household and stuff”. Bella’s reference to what is right and wrong is found in the Bible. Jeremiah 22:3 reads,

Thus, saith the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. (KJV)

Ally, whose parents “are religious”, also acknowledged the espousal of Christian values from her parents as she explained that her mom found out about her sexuality, in church, after choir practice. Ally said that her mom, “took it [the news] kind of bad”. Ally furthered,

We [didn’t] talk for a week [or] two weeks, maybe. It’s still kind of hard for her, but... I try not to bring it up to her. Sometimes she’ll say her little comments, but I’ve learned to ignore her because I’m not going to waste my energy going back and forth. It is what it is.”.

Likewise, Dutch asserted,

My folks don’t fool with it [homosexuality] because of our [Christian] beliefs, but my dad is more understanding. My mom doesn’t like it. I just stopped talking to my mom

about it because, at this point, it's not something that she should care about anymore. Since my dad stays in Maine. I had to text him...I asked him to support me. I told him that I liked girls...he was more understanding, whereas my mom said, that's stupid! Yeah, and then she was like, so why do you like girls... And [she] just starts questioning me, but not even ready to talk [hear me out]. She ended with Lord, Jesus help me and forgive her [referring to Dutch].

In contrast, both Lauren and Elizabeth explained that their families were accepting of their sexual identities and that they believed that their loved ones expressed the love of Christ as written in Matthew 22:36-39:

³⁶Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses? ³⁷Jesus replied, you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (NLT).

These scriptures translate into the Golden Rule, a maxim that is found in Christianity and emulated in Black culture. Elizabeth provided a relevant example of this. She said, "none of my family members held the Bible over my head, nobody. They just took me as I am and loved on me."

The church has traditionally been a source of leadership for many African Americans. It has historically dictated the community's stance on homosexuality — either you don't talk about it, or you condemn it. Unlike the previously mentioned participants, Jamal shared that his parents are not religious. He discussed the impact of African American cultural beliefs on his sexual identity. Jamal said, "I [am] reserved when I [am] around my family, because I [am] more so worry about how they [will] react to it. Like Lauren and Elizabeth, Jamal explained that after

coming out to his parents, they said, “we love you either way; you’re still our son...”. Jamal furthered that although his parents’ initial response was supportive, his parents quickly revealed their true feelings concerning his sexuality. He talked more about how his parents ignored and condemned his sexuality and gender expression by challenging his mannerism and clothing choices.

Although Jamal’s parents were not religious, according to him, they retained strong religious ideologies around homosexuality, and they believed that it should be condemned. Jamal continued by explaining that growing up in his household caused him to reduce his lifestyle to appease his parents. For example, he said, “so, it made me nervous to actually come out and be like, well yeah, I am gay, because I was scared of what would happen”. Similarly, Cameron recalled coming out to his mother in passing in the hallway. Cameron said,

I kind of already knew [that he was gay], growing up, but it was kind of something that I didn’t want to express to my family or others, based on fear because in the Black community, it’s [homosexuality] treated as taboo, things that people wouldn’t talk about or things that you would probably see. Like at the family reunion, you might hear your auntie or your momma or grandma talking about other people in the family that might identify as LGBTQ in a bad manner, so me growing up, it made me think like, well I don’t tell want to tell them [his family] this because I don’t want to be treated liked that. So, I kind of just kept it close to the chest, until [my] freshmen year of high school. The first time my mom ever asked me, I was in the hallway of the house, and she just asked me out of the blue, are you gay, and I just said yes. And we had a whole family meeting about it... and after that, it was kind of like a rough patch with my parents... so I kind of went into a dark place.

Bella added to this theme by sharing that she “was always raised to like men and stuff”. She furthered,

But you know, I’m uh veer off, you know. So last semester, she [her mom] found [out] that I had intercourse with a [female] student in this building, and she spazzed. She was like, you like women; are you looking at women? [Researcher: and what was your response to your mom?] I was like, I mean I won’t say that I will marry a woman but I’m going to do what I do. [Researcher: so, what was her response?] She wasn’t happy about it. [Researcher: Have you had a conversation with her relating to your sexuality since that moment?] Nope. She’s not having it.

Each of the students discussed experiencing homophobia and heteronormative remarks from others. Most of these sentiments stemmed from religious principles that reject homosexuality. Also, most participants voiced frustrations with the Black community’s beliefs because of the culture’s lack of support for homosexuality.

Unwelcoming Campus Culture for LGBTQ Students

The final theme that emerged from the interview data was the *Unwelcoming Campus Culture for LGBTQ students*. This overarching theme refers to the participants’ perceptions of the campus community’s attitudes, values, and assumptions towards LGBTQ persons. Within this theme, *LGBTQ-student experiences* emerged. *LGBTQ-student experiences* represented the interpersonal interactions that the participants had on campus with faculty, staff, and other students and the subsequent perceptions of the campus culture towards homosexual students.

Initially, the participants conveyed a positive campus climate narrative. The participants declared that the campus culture for LGBTQ students is welcoming and inviting. But when probed for examples of the welcoming climate, all of the participants overwhelmingly expressed

having and observing negative interactions with others due to their sexuality on the campus. This was counterintuitive. The participants expressed support from faculty and staff members and marginalization from their peers. Each of the participants described some level of participation with campus life; five out of eight of them were involved in two or more student organizations on campus and spoke about the culture from these lenses. Some participants mentioned observations and experiences inside of the classroom that impacted their view of the campus culture.

The initial remarks concerning the participants' out-of-the-classroom experiences and perceptions of the campus culture suggested that the culture was inclusive and that the participants believed that they mattered to the campus community. They discussed campus resources like the PACE Center and True Colors as examples. However, further dialogue around their out-of-classroom experiences and perceptions proved to contradict a positive campus culture for LGBTQ students. Precisely, most of the participants indicated that they believed that the campus community valued their LGBTQ identity; however, all of the participants provided at least one on-campus experience and or observation with homophobia that implicated a heteronormative campus culture.

Experiences Inside the Classroom

Only three participants discussed their interactions with others inside of the classroom. Jamal talked about an encounter that he had with another student in his biology course. He said:

I mean, it was something that my teacher had said the other day, but we [were] going over something... and its biology so, I didn't think of it in any type of way but....um, he [the professor] said something about... a Homosapien. And a student was like, what?

They better not call me no homo. [Jamal rolls his eyes and pauses] I was thinking, are you dumb? Like, did you not just hear what he just said? Like what is wrong with you?

Jamal went on to discuss the lack of respect that he believes his peers exhibit at times towards members of the LGBTQ community. This encounter aligns with the documented heterosexist classroom environments mentioned in the literature (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Reece-Miller, 2010). Bella described a similar encounter but with her professor. She said:

Um, a professor of mine thought [that] I was gay... I guess the way [that] I present myself, in like sweats and stuff, but I mean it be 8 a.m., and I'm not dressing up. [One class] when she saw me dress up [in a dress with make-up on], she was like, hmm, you're not gay.

Bella explained that before her professor's remarks, the professor observed Bella staring at another female student's body parts in the class. Bella said, "she caught me looking at [another female student's] butt." Bella made a joke out of the situation and said that she "didn't pay her [the professor] no mind."

Unlike Bella, Lauren talked about a positive experience with her professor. Lauren said:

No, I haven't disclosed to my professors. The only time [that] my sexuality has been brought up in class was [concerning] a program... We were basically discussing pronouns and my Psych professor asked us [for] our pronouns and he do try to refer to us using our correct pronouns [throughout the remainder of the course].

Similarly, Cameron spoke about his appreciation for his professor's acknowledgment and recognition of LGBTQ experiences in the classroom. He explained:

...my teacher asks me different questions because I'm a psychology major... if we're discussing developmental psychology and we're talking about, um, different challenges that LGBTQ children might face growing up. She might ask me a question, and I feel like others might feel like they're being singled out, and it might make them feel uncomfortable, but it doesn't make me feel uncomfortable. It makes me feel like, hey she's recognizing that I am LGBTQ; she's asking me a question that's in reference to the academics, and she's wanting my opinion. So that makes me feel special, a little bit, but that's just me.

Experiences Outside the Classroom

All of the participants were actively involved in at least one student organization or club on campus. The participants' involvement in their respective organizations and clubs impacted their experiences and perceptions of the campus culture at their HBCU. Listed below are the significant quotes that describe the out-of-classroom experiences of each participant that connect their experience to the campus culture.

Dutch, Elizabeth, Ally, and France shared positive sentiments about the campus culture. They each calmly recounted out-of-classroom experiences that involved safe spaces to live openly as a lesbian. Dutch said,

I'm a basketball manager for the girls. [Scholar Practitioner: do any of the people who are part of those organizations, know that you identify as bisexual?] Yeah, the basketball folks know... I talk to a lot of them. A majority of the basketball team is either gay or bi. A lot of us are [LGBTQ]. But most of us don't say anything...I think we connect more because we're gay. We all support each other. You know, we look out for one another, relationship issues, school, and family problems, etc.

Elizabeth provided a relevant example of how her out-of-classroom experiences were impacted by the campus culture. She communicated that,

ECSU as a whole is like a family-oriented campus, either way, who you are, you are going to get welcomed in a good way. I've never got welcomed in a bad way by teachers, staff, students. My [sexuality], what I identify as, kind of, helped me. Like I stayed true to myself... I can go in the Chancellor's office, and just talk to her, she's not gonna say anything about me being lesbian.

Ally's experiences were akin to those made by Elizabeth. She said,

Um, the campus has been a very welcoming place for me. I feel like it's kind of like another place, like home. I haven't really seen a time where I was looked down upon for my sexual orientation here. I always pretty much walk around in confidence and get nothing but love, honestly. I'm involved in multiple clubs and organizations on campus. To name a few, National Council of Negro Women, NAACP, and Viking voyage leaders. Um, I'm also in a sorority, one of the greatest, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

When asked about whether the campus culture impacted her involvement in or experiences with these organizations, Ally stated, "If anything, being in those organizations kind of brought me out more, socially. But as far as my sexual orientation, I wouldn't really say that it had much of an impact because it wasn't really that I stood out [talked much about her sexuality].

France said,

When I met my roommate..., I told her, you know, just so she wouldn't feel uncomfortable like okay, you know, I'm France... I like females. I have a girlfriend, and blah, blah, blah. She [the roommate] was heterosexual. She didn't mind, we clicked. I

mean, we became close friends... We were roommates for two years. She didn't have any problems with, you know, feeling uncomfortable or living with me [because of her sexuality or relations with other women].

Similarly, Jamal expressed a positive experience with his suitemates in the residence hall.

He said,

I actually stayed in a room with three Kappas [Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity members] at the beginning of the semester, last year. They were actually pretty cool. I never had any issue with any of them. We actually chit-chatted a little bit. They spoke. I spoke. It was pretty cool [living with them].

Jamal also indicated that the staff were friendly and welcoming towards his gay identity.

Jamal stated that,

I feel like I get along with a majority of the staff. Like I literally go to Ms. Doe's office all the time, just to talk to her. So, I feel like [she's] real welcoming. I never actually felt like any weird energy from anybody... staff wise. Even the people in the café are very nice... I had this purse... and I was walking in the café... and the cafeteria lady had stopped me and was like, that is cute. She was like, you need to give that to me when you're done with it. Like they're really nice and really accepting and whatnot. Um, I never really had any problem out of the staff at all.

These experiences suggest that the campus climate is welcoming and inviting. The participants expressed connections with other students, faculty, and staff that, in some cases increased their worth, which is a staple of mattering according to Schlossberg (1989).

Jamal, Bella, Cameron, and Lauren also discussed their social experiences outside of the classroom however, their experiences were different than those mentioned above. This group of

participants reported several negative interactions with campus members outside of their classrooms and their stories revealed the unique challenges that LGBTQ students on campus face related to culture and climate. The participants pinpointed being victims of name-calling, passive-aggressive behavior, and unacceptance. Below are their narratives.

Jamal shared,

...sometimes it feels like we're [LGBTQ students] being tolerated more than accepted...they'll [students on campus] say...you're really cool for a gay boy...this makes me feel like they [students on campus] don't accept me.

Jamal furthered, "...I don't get too much of the side-eye from people, like most out LGBTQs...most of the time or I guess I just pick and choose who I want to give my full energy to".

Jamal's experience uncovered the greatest taboo on HBCU campuses and within the African American community, that being the stigma of being both Black and LGBTQ. Bella extended this paradigm as she discussed her feelings about the campus culture. She said, "people are just mental out here. They look at you weird because your gay. They are not welcoming. Everybody thinks that everybody is gay, especially if you associate with the [LGBTQ] community".

Jamal shared the details of his peer's generalization of his sexuality. He said:

I then was invited to join Vike Nu [a modeling troupe]. I tried but their energy was weird... [a member] said, we need more gay people on the team. Now, yes, I am gay... but what does that have to do with anything. I felt like they expected for me to act or walk like [another gay member of the troupe] ... I am flamboyant to a certain extent... I don't mind wearing a wig, getting my hair done, getting my nails done. Like I don't mind

doing that stuff, but I don't twerk...that's just not my cup of tea. I feel like since they were so used to him [another gay member of the troupe], they expected me to be the same way.

Jamal described a peer friendship that ended due to a lack of receptiveness towards his sexuality:

Recently I had just cut off a friend because she doesn't know boundaries. So, I feel like if I tell you that I'm gay, I don't like girls, I don't go that way like if I basically make it clear to you about my sexuality but you still proceed to say stupid shit and [ask] do you want to eat my vagina? That's really irritating, and I feel like it is very disrespectful to me, because I made it clear to you what I like and what I like to do. So, for you to even do it in a joking manner... I feel like you're trying to disrespect me, and I do not like that. And when I voice that to you and you continue to do it, it's like you're just playing my face at that point so um, basically that's why I cut her off.

Lauren recalled a similar situation, in which she reflected on her campus friendships. She said, A lot of friends that I had my freshmen and sophomore year...are gone because it [is] always that sexualized piece with me. With men, it's like once they find out [her sexuality] ...they are looking for a certain type of aspect out of that friendship that I'm not willing to offer. With females, I feel like I connect with them more, but that sexual piece...interrupts things as well.

Cameron's experiences mirrored those above. He shared recalled pushback from the student body relating to a social event that he advocated for during Homecoming Week in 2019. He said,

We were supposed to have the drag queens come for the student body pre-game show. I sat through all these meetings with staff and other student leaders, going over homecoming and expressing that the drag queens would be coming for an event that I planned...when it came to the day before, I just remember getting this text message from [staff member] and she was basically explaining to me that Campus Activities Board had basically pulled the plug on the drag queens coming to the show because they didn't know how the students would be accepting to them coming to perform...campus is homophobic, but people don't want to admit it.

Phase 3: Intervention

On August 27, 2021, I met with the inquiry partners mentioned in Chapter 3 to strategically plan a campus initiative that would seek to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for all LGBTQ students. In this meeting, I shared my findings and asked each stakeholder to serve as a committee member on a steering committee designed to promote inclusivity and improve our campus culture for LGBTQ students. Stakeholders were charged to provide advice and support during the planning and implementation of the campus-based initiative. Each person agreed to support the initiative and either serve or appoint a designee from their area to serve on the committee. The committee comprised representation from the Offices of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Title IX, Counseling Services, Academic Affairs, and Student Engagement. Additionally, two of the research participants and one student from True Colors GSA actively participated in the planning phase. The committee met biweekly to discuss event logistics and provide feedback on each event.

Using the research participants' recommendations to increase LGBTQ awareness on campus, the committee developed a semester-long calendar of events that began on September 2, 2021 and concluded on November 18, 2021. Each committee member suggested two programming ideas; the committee voted and approved the final calendar of monthly educational workshops and interactive activities (see Appendix D). These events were designed to improve the participants' campus experience by increasing their feelings of mattering (Schlossberg, 1989). After the calendar was finalized, each committee member (staff) selected a program(s) to execute. The program chairs were responsible for securing facilitators, supplies, event space, and taking care of other logistical items. The students on the steering committee were responsible for working with program chairs to provide student feedback and promote each event.

All of the events occurred on campus and were facilitated by internal and local external partners due to the campus' budget and resource constraints. Given the campus culture and aim of the initiative, I met with the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Chancellor on numerous occasions to discuss appropriate partnerships and provide initiative updates. The Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, also a pastor of a Black Christian-affiliated church, was consulted for guidance on securing external event facilitators and guests, mainly the local ministers. We were able to secure four local ministers who understood the aim of the initiative and wanted to be included in the inclusive conversations that were planned. It was important to have inclusive-minded ministers facilitate the religious-focused programs because our goal was inclusion: respect for others, open-mindedness, cultural competence, and kindness. We also reached out to our state partners who generously provided LGBTQ promotional items and other resources. As outlined in Appendix D, monthly LGBTQ support group workshops were offered to members of the LGBTQ community. These workshops took place in the PACE Center on

campus and focused on different topics: self-care (led by True Colors in September), the intersectionality of race, religion, and sexuality (led by a local minister in October), and mental health (led by the Counseling Center in November). Each workshop began with an introduction of the facilitator. This was followed by an open discussion focused on the topic for the month and a list of resources available to LGBTQ students for support. These workshops provided a space for LGBTQ students to gather in a safe space, with people facing common issues, and an opportunity to offer support and encouragement or build community among the LGBTQ students on campus.

Also offered monthly, were safe zone trainings. These trainings occurred virtually and were co-led by the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and a community partner. The safe zone trainings introduced campus members (faculty, staff, and students) to concepts, terminology, and resources related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. These sessions provided an opportunity to increase awareness and make the campus a more inclusive community by equipping people with the knowledge and skills to foster a supportive and safe atmosphere for LGBTQ persons.

The other events were developed by the students on the committee and embodied Schlossberg's (1989) principles of mattering. These programs included participating in the University's clubs and organizations fair (9/9/21); a paint night, where students painted an inclusive piece of art (9/15/21); a fireside chat with George M. Johnson, an award-winning Black non-binary writer, author, and activist (9/28/21); a spoken word night, where students gathered to hear poetic pieces on sexuality and identity (10/14/21); a pumpkin painting event in celebration of the fall season, students used the colors of the rainbow flag to paint pumpkins in reverence for LGBTQ acceptance, achievement, and pride (10/18/21); speed dating for ally and LGBTQ

persons to meet and greet each other (10/20/21); a concert featuring Saucy Santana, an LGBTQ trailblazer and American rapper (10/22/21); an appreciation luncheon with the Chancellor (10/28/21); a movie night showing *Moonlight*, a 2016 American film about a young African American man grappling with his identity and sexuality (10/28/21); a workout class, where students engaged in a fitness challenge involving workout routines and dances (11/110/21), a roundtable discussion about the intersectionality of race, religion, and sexuality with local ministers (10/15/21); and a thanksgiving dinner with members of True Colors to commemorate the semesters' accomplishments (11/18/21).

To identify the effects of the campus-based initiative on the students' social experiences, the participants were asked to engage in a final interview with me. Five of the eight participants were enrolled at the institution during phase three of the research study. All five students agreed to participate in the final semi-structured interview. They each had attended at least one educational workshop and more than three of the initiative's programs.

The participants were forthright about their social experiences as a result of the campus-based initiative being implemented on the campus. Through general perceptions and participation in the semester-long activities, each participant provided detailed responses to the interview questions asked by me (see Appendix E). Each participant reported that they liked the events conducted over the semester. One participant said,

I wish we had more events like this semester my first year. I think a lot of students would've benefitted from it, including me. I mean, it wasn't that I wasn't myself back then, but I just felt validated seeing the attendance from my peers at these events and how people responded to the flyers and events. It was all love and I felt like it was okay to be myself around gay and non-gay students on campus.

Another participant said, “I liked everything! I couldn’t come to all [of] the training and programs, but I saw the pictures [on social media] and I liked the fact that non-LGBTQ students were present and participating in the activities and discussions”.

A commonality from the participants was that non-LGBTQ persons, in addition to LGBTQ students were attending and involved in the happenings, increasing awareness and acknowledgment of the LGBTQ community within the organization. Cameron said,

The university is working toward building stability for LGBTQ students. When I first got here, I didn’t see anything for the community. Now, the PACE Center is ours, True Colors is officially recognized as a student organization, and there are more programs and workshops that teach people about sexuality, outside of heterosexism.”

In his remarks, Cameron further discussed feeling appreciated and “cared about” during the celebratory luncheon with the Chancellor. All of the participants agreed that the initiative impacted their sense of mattering at the institution. Many of the students reported feeling included and like their voices and experiences mattered to others. Another participant stated,

Having these programs and safe zone sessions really put the community out here. I feel like it made people more aware [of the LGBTQ community on campus]. I felt comfortable being who I truly am. I felt safe showing up to the events and talking about my beliefs and needs. I didn’t feel horrible or like I should be ashamed. I felt like administrators were trying to promote the community more and bring the campus to being more inclusive. And for the most part, students were open too.

Lauren participated in most of the programs and two of the educational workshops. In her final interview, she discussed the impact of the safe zone training. The safe zone workshops lasted approximately one hour and introduced concepts, terminology, and resources related to

sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Safe zone participants engaged in real conversation and activities that increased awareness of unconscious bias and microaggressions towards nonheteronormative identities. Her feedback included:

I've never seen as many events or love towards the gay community before this semester. And the safe zone training was good because it impacted the entire campus. I attended two of them and each time there was a diverse group of staff and students. Everyone was open and welcoming to learn. The training was eye-opening for me, even as a lesbian because I didn't know all [of] the terms and experiences of the community. It was good to hear students being open about their feelings and asking how to be more supportive and respectful.

Jamal also expressed his satisfaction with the semester-long activities. He smiled and declared,

This semester was LIT. Saucy [Santana] performed at homecoming. [This] wasn't just a small concert for the gays; it was for the entire campus and people were singing along and enjoying the performance. I was so impressed. Even the non-LGBTQ students were vibing. To be honest, it was a good feeling for me. I felt like I was a celebrity too. And we [True Colors] got to meet him before the show. I will never forget it.

Acceptance from others emerged throughout the second round of interviews with each participant. Ally said, "The Chancellor's chat and chew made me feel important. I appreciated the fact that she allowed us to eat in her boardroom. It was official, official." Ally added, "That luncheon with the Chancellor was big. I dressed in my best to impress her because it's a lot of students on campus, but she took the day to have us [True Colors] over for lunch. We had a little business lunch..." Ally jokingly discussed the fact that the Chancellor made time for her

(attention and importance), knowing that it was because she was a member of True Colors, the LGBTQ gay-straight alliance on campus. Ally's remarks were similar to the other participants in that she felt like she mattered to the Chancellor.

Students expressed a deepening sense of community through other events. Dutch talked about inviting the basketball team to the Love is Love: Speeding Dating event. She shared,

I went to the speed dating event with my friends from the team and we enjoyed it. There were a lot of LGBTQ people, but also straight people showed up, and they weren't judging or frowning; they engaged and were nice. It was good to see that we're all different but interested in supporting or getting to know each other.

Another participant responded, "I feel like True Colors got closer and bonded through the support group monthly sessions. We counted on each other to show up as we shared our pain and frustrations with one another". Dutch openly shared her feelings about being connected to more people on the basketball team as a result of going to the events together and intentionally living in her truth. She said, "I appreciated the fact that more than just us [LGBTQ students] were there. It helped my crew feel comfortable in going with me to things, and I felt like we could be ourselves without judgment from others".

None of the participants could offer feedback on how the initiative could improve. They all suggested that the initiative continue through the next semester and beyond. When asked "should the initiative be continued? Why or why not? Dutch said, "we have to keep this up. I just feel like stopping the attention will put us backward". Ally asked, "Why not continue? So much love has been shown and bonds made". Jamal responded without hesitation, "yes. Let's keep this momentum going. I know that we may not get to have Saucy Santana perform again, but we need more notoriety on campus. He set it out for all of us". Ally nodded before replying, "These

were great programs for the entire campus. I definitely want to set up the monthly book reading club. I enjoyed the book chat session”. Lastly, Lauren stated that she would like to see the initiative continue, because she enjoyed the mixture of educational and fun programs. Lauren mentioned examples such as safe zone training and the pumpkin painting session.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of this study. Data were collected and synthesized from eight students enrolled at one HBCU who had experience with the social phenomenon being studied. Three overarching themes emerged from the data, including (1) *Daring to Come Out*, (2) *Cultural Challenges to Acceptance*, and (3) *Unwelcoming Campus Culture* for LGBTQ students. Subthemes were also discovered and discussed in this chapter.

An important finding of this study was that the campus culture was unfriendly towards LGBTQ students. During the interviews, the participants openly discussed their social experiences on the HBCU campus, and they indicated that they desired a campus-based intervention that acknowledged the LGBTQ community’s existence on campus and provided more campus programs and education around homosexuality. Such programming was implemented on the campus and the participants reported that this improved their on-campus social experiences greatly.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings of this inquiry and provide answers to the research questions that guided this study. Next, I will examine the results of this study within the context of the existing literature. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for social change and implications for future practitioners.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed in three parts to explore the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at one HBCU and to use those experiences to develop and implement a campus-based initiative that would positively affect their experiences.

A total sample of eleven (three students in phase one and eight students in phase two) courageous students provided insight into their lived campus and familial experiences as self-identifying members of the LGBTQ community. Although it was important to understand the participants' family culture and past experiences for context, I solely considered the participants' collegiate social experiences to achieve the research study's aim. Two focus of practice research questions guided this study. The first question was: What are the lived social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU? The second question was: What are the effects of an initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU?

In phase one, I conducted a pilot study that examined the social experiences of three LGBTQ students. Through the pilot study, baseline data were collected for the main study (phase two), and the interview questions and protocols were streamlined before entering phase two. The pilot provided a framework for phase two by examining the problem being studied which was framed by the literature and an anonymous biased incident that occurred on the campus against the gay-straight alliance, True Colors.

In phase two, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with students who self-disclosed their sexual orientation and gender identity as LGBTQ. The information gleaned from the participants was utilized to develop a campus-based initiative.

In phase three, I implemented the campus-based initiative and investigated the effects of the intervention on the participants' social experiences on campus. I found that the campus-based initiative had a positive impact on the social experiences of the participants.

This chapter contains a summary of the study's findings and a discussion about the research participants' experiences, in relation to the literature and the research questions. It also includes the limitations of this study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

An analysis of the data revealed that overall, the participants faced challenges to inclusion on the HBCU campus because of their sexual orientation. These challenges were mainly a result of their peer interactions. And these interactions ultimately influenced the participant's perception of the campus climate. Although several students were able to identify campus spaces (people, places, and things) where they felt safe to live openly as LGBTQ persons, they each described hostile encounters with others on campus due to their sexual identity.

Heteronormativity (the normalization of heterosexuality), homophobia (the fear of homosexuality), and heterosexism (heterosexual dominance) were significant constructs that impacted the lives and experiences of those interviewed for this study. All of the participants grew up in Black households and were associated with the Black Church. Each participant was aware of and discussed the fundamental cultural values and expectations of them as Black men and women in relation to their sexuality. To this end, they each grew up with an understanding that homosexuality was not the norm, and it played a role in their acceptance and disclosure.

The participants described the campus culture as promoting gender and sexuality into binary identities. Two students cited examples relating to housing assignments (male and female rooms) and the title for Mr. and Miss. Other participants discussed feedback from campus members regarding their attire and expression (men carrying purses or women dressing masculine). From their stories, many of the participants felt that heteronormative gender roles were the norm on campus and that their difference was not openly welcomed. Heterosexism, commonly used as an alternative for homophobia (Nunn & Bolt, 2015; Rankin et al., 2013), granted privilege to heterosexual students. According to Bella, queer students were not granted the same opportunities as straight students. Bella differentiated between the groups, citing examples of unfair treatment from others on campus, including minimal LGBTQ events, no special recognition days to celebrate the community, and people's unwillingness to accept LGBTQ students due to the campus culture's preconceived social norms toward homosexuality.

From a religious standpoint, the students identified spirituality and religiosity as being important in their lives. Seven of the eight participants grew up attending a Black church. But all of the participants were well versed on the perpetuated proverbs of marriage between a man and woman and homosexuality being a sin and abomination to God (Jenkins et al., 2009; McIntosh, 2017). The Black church is one of the most prominent channels for the transmission of values in the Black community and it has been traditionally known as a safe space for African Americans (Ward, 2005). However, all of the participants challenged the Black Church and its religious doctrine which condemns homosexuality. A majority of the research participants recognized the Black church as a homophobic asylum and they believed that God loved them, just as they were no matter their sexuality.

From a cultural standpoint, the research findings coincided with the negative attitudes towards homosexuality within the Black community (Crawford et al., 2005; Sutton et al., 2009; Whitley et al., 2011). Cameron, who identifies as a gay male, explained that his father was upset about his sexuality because he wanted Cameron to procreate. Cameron's father, like other people within the Black community, believes that same-sex relationships destroy the Black family (Battle & Lemelle, 2002). Similarly, Bella shared that her mom made similar assumptions after she disclosed her sexuality to her. Bella extended the conversation to campus by adding that her male friends ostracize her about her sexuality and desire to have children someday.

Despite these mentioned cultural challenges, all of the students had accepted their sexual orientation and lived publicly as members of the LGBTQ community. Based on the student interviews, identity acceptance was a major component of the coming out process for each student. While the coming out process varies for each person, it has been noted that the process starts with self-acknowledgment (Duffy, 2011; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Waldo, 1998). Cass (1979) first described identity acceptance as the start to validating one's sexual identity and preference. Fassinger and Miller (1997) expanded Cass' work and characterized identity acceptance as a deepening or commitment that occurs when a person solidifies their choice to become connected to persons of the same sex with an awareness of the oppressions and consequences of their choice.

Coming out was another commonality among the participants and it appeared to be a layered process. They each explained that they came out to themselves, to their families, and others on campus. Out of these three processes, most of the participants noted that coming out to others was the hardest process for them due to homophobia. A majority of the participants spoke

about suppressing their gay identity while on campus because of their fears of how others would respond.

On-campus, five of eight participants expressed challenges with sharing their sexual orientation with others on campus. These participants reported that they hesitated to disclose their sexuality to others on campus due to fear of being victimized or harassed. These feelings are supported by the literature which reports that LGBTQ students at HBCUs experience fear of rejection and violence from non-LGBTQ individuals on campus (Harris, 2010; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Each of the interviewed participants seemed to employ a defense mechanism to cope with their fears and any victimization or harassment perceived or experienced. Many described subsisting for some time before finally living outwardly as LGBTQ.

When discussing their overall campus experiences, the research participants conveyed a passion for their HBCU. All of the students stated that the campus culture for LGBTQ persons was welcoming. Two participants smiled proudly and said that their experience was great overall. These participants, Elizabeth, and Ally listed the many student organizations and activities that they were involved in on campus, and they discussed finding support from faculty and staff on campus and within their friend groups. While many of the participants started their explanations of their campus experiences on a positive note, they each concluded their experiences with being subjected to or witnessing overt and demeaning verbal attacks and nonverbal cues from their heterosexual peers, in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Despite this, the HBCU seemed to be influential to their lives, social friendships, and social mobility. This appreciation could explain the participant's naming of the campus culture as "welcoming".

During the interviews, the participants were asked “do you feel that LGBTQ students matter or don’t matter on campus? How so?” The participants were asked follow-up questions that inquired about *attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and appreciation*, components of mattering. It became clear, from the students’ answers, that the campus culture was unwelcoming towards LGBTQ students. All of the participants provided recommendations to improve their social experiences on the campus. All eight of the students suggested creating more programming and events. As a result of the student’s feedback, a semester-long calendar of events was developed and implemented on the campus as a campus-based intervention.

Interpretation of the Findings

There were two theoretical frameworks utilized to frame this study. Schein (1983) provided a useful framework for analyzing the organizational culture of Elizabeth City State University. Using the interview data, I explored the organizational artifacts, values, and assumptions. On the campus of Elizabeth City State University (ECSU), there are few safe spaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. A safe space also referred to as a safe zone, is “an on-campus space where LGBT students can seek support and affirmation and express their feelings and concerns without fear of harassment or violence” (Mobley & Johnson, 2015, p. 83). The literature reports that LGBTQ students experience violence, discrimination, and harassment on college and university campuses nationwide, especially at historically Black institutions where they find these environments to be extremely conservative and homophobic (Coleman, 2016; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Though the lived experiences varied from one participant to the next, the collective experienced verbal attacks and social isolation on their HBCU campus due to their sexuality.

Because the students had reached identity acceptance (Cass, 1979), they were able to live in their truth, despite homophobic surroundings.

Additionally, religion and culture were important factors in the participants' experiences and perceptions about campus culture. All of the participants acknowledged that anti-gay ideology stemmed from Black culture and ultimately the Black church. Most of the participants experienced social and emotional harm from their peers, and they accredited the harm to culture and the Black church. The students commonly indicated that they felt unwelcomed and excluded at times because their peers did not accept their sexuality as "conventional". The participants described generally receiving repulsive microaggressions (looks, attitudes, and remarks) from others on campus when they displayed or expressed their sexuality. The cultural stigma attached to homosexuality influenced how others interacted and accepted the participant's sexual orientation. Because religious principles shame homosexual acts, it was normal for the participants' peers to detest their sexuality. Intrinsicly, this behavior was forgiven because homosexual persons were viewed as detrimental to the Black family and an abomination to Christ.

The participants were able to identify campus artifacts that contributed to a welcoming environment for LGBTQ persons. These artifacts included True Colors, the PACE Center, and website acknowledgments depicting the gay-straight alliance and one of the members of True Colors. While artifacts existed, the students believed that the PACE Center was not an LGBTQ exclusive space and that more could be done at the institution to improve the climate for LGBTQ students. The most common recommendation from the students was to create more programs and activities to combat negative attitudes and educate the campus community on sexuality, gender identities, and social issues facing the LGBTQ community. Other proposed interventions

included an LGBTQ living and learning community, a support group for LGBTQ students, a rainbow wall highlighting prominent members of the LGBTQ community, and another center, solely for LGBTQ students and activities.

The participants were not able to articulate any of the adopted values of the institution that spoke to the inclusion of their sexual identity. However, it should be noted that the organization adopted a new strategic plan that declared diversity and inclusion as an adopted value. Additionally, the organization has a non-discrimination policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Although the students were not able to identify the previously mentioned values, their basic assumption was that they mattered to the institution's culture and its members. The proactive actions from staff and administrative leadership to embrace diversity and inclusion as a value and part of the university's mission and to recognize True Colors as a registered student organization on the campus affirmed the participants' sense of belonging at the institution. Through the campus-based intervention, allies emerged. LGBTQ allies were campus students, faculty, staff who fostered acceptance and support for sexual minorities and their issues (Evans, 2002). This network proved to be beneficial. One participant indicated that an ally supported her through trauma following a biased incident that occurred online.

Responses to the Research Questions

In the present study, I used a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry focus to analyze the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the lived social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU?
- RQ2: What are the effects of an initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU?

Research Question One

Research question one asked: what are the lived social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at ECSU? Data collected in phases one and two of this study provided the answer to this research question. Participants in phase one discussed similar challenges as those in phase two. These challenges included the acceptance of one's sexual identity by themselves and others, the intersection of race, religion, and sexuality, and combating homophobia and heteronormativity on the campus.

Impact of Cultural Factors on the Campus Culture

The students shared countless stories about not feeling accepted on campus because their sexual preference for the same sex was viewed by others as unacceptable and morally wrong. The cultural factors that impacted the participants' social experiences on the campus included religion, homophobia, and heteronormativity. Studies have reported that more than 70% of Black adults agree that homosexuality is always wrong (Anand, 2016; Lewis, 2003; Whitley, 2009; Whitley et al., 2011). Literature concerning the Black community and homophobia indict the Black church due to its ideologies that homosexuality is a sin and should be condemned (Crawford et al., 2002; Ward, 2005).

Doctrinally, traditionally Black Christianity teachings advance that every human has a moral sense of right and wrong and that people should exercise good morality by making decisions based on religious doctrine. Because the Black church holds significant value in the lives of Black people, it is conceivable that HBCUs embody the ethos and beliefs of the Black church (Lenning, 2017; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Four of the participants verbalized that religion was used by their peers to justify the end of their association.

Although the participants reported that religion impeded their social experiences on campus, homophobia was also revealed. The students were aware of traditional and conservative campus culture, and they discussed the environments' impact on what Patton and Simmons (2008) referred to as "coming in", a process of accepting one's sexual orientation despite external influences. Specifically, the participants described instances of having to navigate other people's expectations of their sexuality.

Cameron, Jamal, and France talked about the constant contradictory messages that they experienced as a result of their membership in student organizations on campus. Like in the church, the participants felt like they were supported by their peers in certain settings but condemned in other spaces. The conflicting moments of admiration and condemnation negatively impacted how the participants' feelings of mattering and marginality on the campus.

The participants felt compelled to hide their identity in certain spaces. The literature supports this interpretation. Means and Jaeger (2013) found that LGBTQ students suppress one identity to fit in with conservative norms at HBCUs. Lauren mentioned her battles with having to live passively among her male friends on campus to avoid confrontation. Lauren accepted her male counterparts' feelings towards her sexuality as standard and withheld her beliefs to avoid conflict. Throughout the interviews, many of the participants discussed avoidance and assimilation to cope with or respond to the heterosexist and homophobic remarks and behavior from others.

Striving Towards a Sense of Belonging

All of the participants described negative encounters with others on campus, mostly from their peers. These experiences dominated the few positive experiences that some of the participants shared with me during their initial interview. Strayhorn (2012) suggested that

belonging, with peers, in the classroom, or on campus, is critical to student success at college. A student's sense of belonging at an institution can impact their academic achievement, well-being, retention, and persistence. The literature asserted that not "fitting in" can lead to self-consciousness, irritability, and depression (Patton et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 1989).

All of the participants were able to identify at least one ally on campus. These noteworthy connections appeared to have a positive impact on their holistic success. Each participant was able to name individuals within the campus community whose allyships increased the participants' mattering. Cameron spoke about feeling isolated and having little social support before the formation of the gay-straight alliance. The allyships were meaningful relationships for the participants. In essence, these connections were affirming spaces for the students where they felt as if they fit in.

Research Question Two

In research question two I asked: what are the effects of an initiative on the social experiences of LGBTQ enrolled at ECSU? The participants responded to four open-ended questions about the effects of the campus-based initiative on their social experiences at Elizabeth City State University (see Appendix E). All of the participants reported that the initiative had positive effects on their social experiences at the institution. Their responses each illustrated an aspect of mattering as defined by Schlossberg's (1989) marginality and mattering theory in their depiction of impact. The five aspects of mattering are attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence, and importance.

The participants' positive remarks about the campus-based initiative suggested that the semester-long intervention was effective in affirming their sexual identities and improving their feelings of mattering to the campus community. The students revealed that many of the activities

expanded their view of the significance of the LGBTQ community to the campus community. Many of the participants reported feeling like their voices and experiences mattered to others. Schlossberg (1989) explained that students who feel included and that their needs are addressed and heard are more likely to feel like they “matter” at and to their institution. Moreover, the students expressed that they felt noticed and valued by the Chancellor and other students at the events sponsored through the initiative.

It is clear from the participants’ responses that their feelings of marginalization were lessened as a result of the semester-long initiative on the HBCU campus. Recognizing this vulnerable population, through the offered programs and activities, decreased their marginality and demonstrated that LGBTQ students mattered to the organization. Research shows that best practices, such as inclusive curricula and the alike positively impact the climate for LGBTQ students (Boyland et al, 2018; Steck & Perry, 2018). At the Chancellor’s chat and chew, students were presented with gift bags to actualize Schlossberg’s final aspects of mattering, appreciation, and dependence. Gift bags were donated by one of the stakeholders and served as a token of appreciation to the LGBTQ students. It was important to create a space for the students to feel appreciated and needed because they were an important part of the campus community. The chat and chew event invited the LGBTQ students to the table, literally. Steck and Peck (2018) held that successful reform is dependent on leaders to disrupt and deconstruct the heteronormative culture embedded in institutional culture. As a result of the intervention, students acknowledged that the LGBTQ community was “significant” and “okay to exist as LGBTQ”, according to Jamal.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this research study. First, data from transgender identifying students were not reported in this study due to lack of participation. As a result, this identity and experience are absent herein. Secondly, this study was limited due to the coronavirus which impacted data collection and the campus-based intervention. Aspects of both were modified to ensure the health and safety of the participants and myself. Lastly, the researcher who conducted this study was employed at the research site and maintained professional and personal relationships with several key stakeholders. The students that were interviewed as part of the study and several of the campus partners had known me for between one and five years in her professional capacity. As such, a level of trust and accountability existed between me and the stakeholders at the institution. Still, I took precautions to ensure proper permissions were obtained and the appropriate protocols were followed throughout the study.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Current literature on the social experiences of LGBTQ students attending HBCUs is limited (Coleman, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2010; Renn, 2010; Sanlo, 2005). LGBTQ students have historically experienced alienation, marginalization, and victimization at HBCUs due to their sexual identity (Jenkins et al., 2009; Lenning, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Sanlo, 2005). Within the past decade, HBCUs have begun to shift their organizational attitudes toward LGBTQ persons (Gasman et al., 2013). The support of this population on campuses nationwide aid in the advancement of equality and inclusion. Particularly at HBCUs where there is a perceived lack of support for the LGBTQ community (Patton, 2011).

The findings of this study have implications for practitioners working with LGBTQ students. First, there is room for improvement as it relates to acknowledging students with

multiple social identities, especially those with minority sexual identities. In this study, I found that LGBTQ students existed on the campus, and they needed to be recognized as members of the campus community. Secondly, student affairs professionals should seek opportunities to meet with LGTBQ students and inquire about the campus climate and their needs to enhance their experiences. The participants from this study were willing to share their social experiences and recommendations for campus-based initiatives to better their tenure. Thirdly, programming and educational opportunities can be impactful for students of all sexual backgrounds. Providing cultural competency including unconscious bias training for all students and employees at the institution can decrease marginality and increase mattering and sense of belonging among LGBTQ students, as well as lead to more acceptance of LGBTQ identities on campus. Walters and Hayes (1998) asserted that homophobia is so ingrained that many individuals fail to confront it because they may not identify themselves as biased against same-sex attraction. Educational training relating to the LGBTQ community and safe zone or pronoun workshops help combat homophobia and increase awareness for the challenges and experiences of LGBTQ students. It is important for all who interact with this community of students to have at least a foundational understanding of the community with which they interact.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study provided a glimpse into the students' social experiences of LGBTQ students enrolled at one small, rural serving HBCU and how a campus intervention could affect those experiences. It is imperative that historically Black institutions make diversity and inclusion a priority. Few HBCU campuses have dedicated LGBTQ centers, LGBTQ affinity groups, or resources dedicated to LGBTQ programming and services. Research indicates that these initiatives have a positive impact on sense of belonging and mattering for LGBTQ students

which impact retention and persistence (Goodenow et al., 2006; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Pitcher et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2018; Szalacha, 2003). HBCU administrators should seek to create a stand alone office of full-time staff dedicated to educating students, faculty and staff and promoting inclusivity. HBCU campus leaders should actively promote welcoming and affirming spaces on campuses by working collaboratively with LGBTQ students and key stakeholders, such as Title IX, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion staff, Counseling Services, Academic Affairs, and Student Engagement to continually support this community of students.

To improve on the limitations of this study, it is recommended that this study be expanded to examine the social experiences of LGBTQ at other HBCUs. First, the university setting was in northeastern, North Carolina, at a small, rural serving campus and situated along the Bible Belt in the South, however, it is an important space to have these dialogues due to expected resistance in such intimate communities. Intrinsically, conducting a qualitative study in an urban or southeastern region may yield different experiences. Additionally, no transgender student voices were represented in this study. It may be fruitful to hear from this perspective (gender identity). Next, it is suggested that other intersecting social identities be explored. The participants in this study all identified as African American and mostly Christian. It would be noteworthy to examine the experiences of LGBTQ students who hold other intersecting social identities on HBCU campuses.

Finally, based on the researcher's findings, further research into the correlation between mattering and retention, persistence, or completion of LGBTQ students at HBCUs is proposed. This study did not explore the effects of mattering on these measurable concepts. Although the importance of mattering was demonstrated in this research study, further investigation on the

impact of mattering on retention, persistence, or completion for LGBTQ students should be examined.

Conclusion

This research study was designed to explore the social experiences of LGBTQ students on an HBCU campus and to use those experiences to develop an intervention aimed to improve the social experiences for these students. The findings of this study accentuate the existing body of literature on this community of students' experiences at HBCUs which reports that LGBTQ students experience abuse, harassment, and homophobia at historically Black institutions (Gasman et al., 2013; Lenning, 2017; Patton, 2011; Squire & Mobley, 2015). Previous literature has indicated that HBCUs have slowly responded to support and respond to the needs of LGBTQ students (Coleman, 2016; Ford, 2015; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

HBCUs foster familial environments for minority students (Harper & Gasman, 2008). HBCU administrators must seek to ensure that all minority identities, including sexual minorities, feel welcomed and included in the campus services, programs, and culture. The findings of this study revealed that educational programs and events concerning sexuality can be effective at affirming LGBTQ students and improving their feelings of mattering to the institution. This research should continue the conversation of diversity and inclusion on HBCU campuses and within the field of higher education.

HBCU administrators and student affairs staff should be willing to listen to the needs of their LGBTQ students and actively create opportunities to support and celebrate their sexual identities. As HBCUs adapt to societal changes and administrators seek more inclusive practices for LGBTQ students, it is important to consider cultural effects that impact institutional culture and the needs of LGBTQ students on their campus. Conducting this study has been an honor. I

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Tiffany Hinton](#)
CC: [Crystal Chambers](#)
Date: 3/8/2021
Re: [UMCIRB 21-000045](#)
IMPROVING THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ STUDENTS

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 3/8/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Consent Paragraph(0.02)	Consent Forms
Demographic Questionnaire(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Initiative Interview Protocol (0.02)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Interview Protocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Recruitment flyer(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
T Hinton Dissertation Proposal(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

ELIZABETH CITY STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION AGREEMENT

Reviewing Institution – Institution B (i.e., institution providing IRB review): Please Complete

Institution Name: East Carolina University
FWA #: FWA0000658
IRB Registration #: IRB00003781

Relying Institution (i.e., institution relying on the review of the above-designated IRB)

Institution Name: Elizabeth City State University
FWA #: FWA00018292
IRB Registration #: IRB00003640

Pursuant to 45 CFR 46.114, the above-listed institutions are entering into this agreement for the *Reviewing Institution* to conduct Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and oversight activities of the collaborative human subject research activities identified below on behalf of the *Relying Institution*. The review performed by the *Reviewing Institution's* IRB will meet the human subject protection requirements of the *Relying Institution's* OHRP-approved Federal Wide Assurance, and include a description of the research to be conducted by the *Relying Institution*.

This agreement covers the following activities:

All human subject research conducted in collaboration with Elizabeth City State University, or
X The following specific human subject research protocol(s):

Research Protocol Title: Improving the Social Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Students at an HBCU
PI: Tiffany Hinton
Other Investigators: Dr. Crystal Chambers - Advisor
Sponsoring Agency: _____
Other (Describe): _____

The *Reviewing Institution's* IRB agrees to the following with regard to the above-listed research protocol(s) or activities:

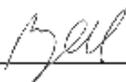
- I. Provide initial and continuing review in accordance with 45 CFR 46 and its FWA.
- II. Arrange for prompt reporting to the *Relying Institution's* IRB of any of the following, as defined and determined by the *Reviewing Institution's* IRB:
 - a. Any unanticipated injuries or problems involving risks to subjects or others.
 - b. Any serious or continuing non-compliance.
 - c. Any suspension or termination of IRB approval.
- III. Provide relevant minutes of IRB meetings and protocol documents to the *Relying Institution* upon request.
- IV. Copy the *Relying Institution* on all correspondence to regulatory agencies if reporting of an event is required.

The *Relying Institution* is responsible for the timely compliance of its employees, students, and agents with the *Reviewing Institution* / IRB's policies, procedures, and determinations.

This document must be signed and dated by Institutional Officials (IO) at both institutions, kept on file at both institutions, and provided to the Office for Human Research Protections upon request.

Signature of IO at *Reviewing Institution*:

Signature of IO at *Relying Institution*:

 Date: 03/23/2021

 Date: 2-21-2021

Name: Mary Farwell
Title: Assistant Vice Chancellor & Institutional Official
Email: farwellm@ecu.edu

Name: Kulwinder Kaur-Walker
Title: IRB Chair
Email: kpkaur@ecu.edu

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PART I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. My research project focuses on the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ students enrolled at the university. As such, the purpose of this interview is to understand your personal experiences as an LGBTQ student on campus. I am not here to judge you or your experience. I am interested in your social experiences with the faculty, staff and students on campus, as well as learning from your perspective about what policies, programs or services could be implemented on campus to improve the campus experience for LGBTQ students. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not feel comfortable answering any question, you have the right to pass on it. If you feel distressed or uneasy at any time during the interview, please let me know and we can stop at any time.

Our interview today will last approximately one hour during which I will ask you questions focused on the previously stated.

PART II. CONSENT

Please recall the consent form emailed to you. It mentioned that I will inquire your permission to audio record our conversation today. The purpose of this recording is to make sure that I get an accurate depiction of your story while still being attentive today. Are you ok with me recording (or not) our conversation today? ___Yes ___No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation instead.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]

- If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions.

To protect your identity, you have the option of selecting a pseudonym for yourself. This name will represent your story/data and will be recorded in the study to keep your identity confidential. Do you want to continue with your selected pseudonym on the consent form/do you have one in mind now?

___Yes ___No

PART III. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
 - a. *Probe: Sexual orientation? Gender identity? Ethnicity? Religion? What impact has ethnicity and/or religion had on your sexual identity/gender identity, if any?*
2. In what ways have you found campus to be a welcoming or unwelcoming place for you as it relates to your sexual orientation/gender identity? If so, tell me more. If not, can you expand on this for me?
 - a. *Probe: Disclosure stories: What helped you come out? If not, why? Tell me about the campus programs/activities offered for the LGBTQ community on campus. Attended? Led? Are the cultural norms on campus inclusive of LGBTQ students?*

3. How would you describe your experiences with other LGBTQ students and other students on campus?
 - a. *Probe: Campus involvement? Social interactions, classroom, residence halls, cafeteria, orgs. Does being LGBTQ impacted your relationship or experience with peers? Positive experience? Negative experience?*
4. How would you describe your experiences with faculty, staff and administrators on campus?
 - a. *Probe: Does being LGBTQ impacted your relationship or experience with them? Positive experience? Negative experience?*
5. Do you feel that LGBTQ students matter or don't matter on campus? How so?
 - a. *Probe: programs, services, and/or people that contribute to mattering or isolation? Victimization? Positive/Negative examples*
6. From your perspective, what campus initiative could advance the experiences of LGBTQ students on campus? How so?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

PART IV: CONCLUSION

Thank you for your time and participation today. To ensure that I accurately chronicled your responses, I am going to email you a summary of this interview. Please review it and let me know of any changes that need to be made. I will make the corrections and email you the final report once I have concluded the data collection process and analyzed the data. I will then ask for your thoughts on the themes that I have developed from my analysis of the data. Do you have any questions?

Again, thank you for your time and I will be in contact. If you think of anything following our interview today, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

APPENDIX D: CAMPUS-BASED INITIATIVE PROGRAMS

Fall 2021

September 2021	October 2021	November 2021
9.2.15 LGBTQ Support Group Workshop 9.9.15 True Colors Involvement Fair 9.15.21 Safe Zone training 9.22.21 True Colors Paint & Chat 9.28.21 Book Chat with Author George M. Johnson: Conversations on LGBTQ & Ally Support	10.5.21 Safe Zone Training 10.7.21 LGBTQ Support Group Workshop 10.14.21 Spoken Word Evening (Poetry Night) 10.18.21 Pumpkin Painting 10.20.21 #LOUDOUTDAY LGBTQ Speed Dating 10.22.21 Vikings Got Talent: Student Body Pregame show featuring Saucy Santana 10.28.21 True Colors Chat & Chew (Luncheon) with Chancellor Dixon 10.28.21 True Colors Scary Movie Night	11.1.21 Safe Zone Training 11.4.21 LGBTQ Support Group Workshop 11.10.21 Twerk Out Workout Challenge 11.15.21 Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces: Campus Discussion on Race, Religion, and Sexuality 11.18.21 Thankful Thursday with True Colors

APPENDIX E: INITIATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

PART I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in the initiative designed to positively impact the social experiences of LGBTQ students at ECSU. The purpose of this interview is to gain feedback on your participation experience in the initiative. I am interested in learning if the initiative improved your campus experience or view of mattering and sense of belonging at ECSU. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not feel comfortable answering any question, you have the right to pass on it. If you feel distressed or uneasy at any time during the interview, please let me know and we can stop at any time. There is no penalty or consequence for your decision to stop participation at any time.

Our interview today will last approximately one hour during which I will ask you questions focused on the previously stated.

PART II. CONSENT

Please recall the consent form emailed to you. It mentioned that I will inquire your permission to audio record our conversation today. The purpose of this recording is to make sure that I get an accurate depiction of your story while still being attentive today. Are you ok with me recording (or not) our conversation today? ___Yes ___No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation instead.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]

- If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your quest

PART III. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your experience participating in the initiative.
 - a. *probing questions: what did you like about it? What could have better about it?*
2. In what ways did the initiative impact your sense of mattering at ECSU?
 - a. *Probing questions: as a result of participating, has your feelings of mattering to the campus community increased? Why/Why not?*
3. In what ways did the initiative effect the ECSU culture?
4. What effects did the initiative have on your social experiences at ECSU?
5. Should the initiative be continued? Why or why not?

PART IV: CONCLUSION

Thank you for your time and participation today. To ensure that I accurately chronicled your responses, I am going to email you a summary of this interview. Please review it and let me know of any changes that need to be made. I will make the corrections and email you the final report once I have concluded the data collection process and analyzed the data. I will then ask for your thoughts on the themes that I have developed from my analysis of the data. Do you have any questions?

Again, thank you for your time and I will be in contact. If you think of anything following our interview today, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

