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**TOWARD AN INTEGRATED SELF:
MAKING MEANING OF THE MULTIPLE IDENTITIES OF GAY MEN IN
COLLEGE**

by

Daniel Weston Tillapaugh

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
University of San Diego

May 2012

Dissertation Committee

Cheryl Getz, Ed.D., Chair
Lea Hubbard, Ph.D., Member
Frank Harris III, Ed.D., Member

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Abstract

Since the mid-twentieth century, a shift in demographics of those attending higher education institutions has resulted in increased attention to underrepresented students and their development, specifically their social identities, including race (Cross, 1991), gender (Gilligan, 1982), and sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998). However, many theories have compartmentalized aspects of one's overall identity with little understanding of how one's social identity may influence the development of other identities. In the past decade, the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995), which explores the interplay between one's multiple identities and the larger systems of power and privilege within society, has been applied to understanding the holistic development of college students' multiple social identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). The purpose of this study was to understand how traditionally-aged gay men in college come to make meaning of the intersections of their gender and sexuality. The research questions for this study included: (a) how do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years, (b) in what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men in college, and (c) what are the critical influences during college on their meaning-making process? Seventeen gay men attending three universities in a metropolitan city in Southern California participated in this constructivist grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006). Data collection included two in-depth interviews for each participant as well as journaling and an activity using the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity as a methodological tool for identity salience. A focus group was held also to discuss the theoretical model and the major themes that emerged. The findings are represented in a theoretical model, depicted as a labyrinth that represents a nested system between the Individual and Societal Contexts. The Individual Context includes five main themes: (1) Sense of Sameness Disappears; (2) Compartmentalizing Identit(ies); (3) Seeking Community; (4) Questioning Allegiances; and (5) Living in the Nexus. The Societal Context includes two main themes: (1) Socialization of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Inherent Tensions and (2) Heteronormativity and Homophobia as Internal and External Influences.

Dedication

This work honors the memory of two influential women in my life: my grandmother, Irene Tillapaugh, and my great-great-aunt, Lillian Eckert. Each encouraged my curiosity about the world around me, instilled a deep love for reading and learning about the world, and played a significant role in my own meaning making process.

Acknowledgements

This work began officially over a year and a half ago with the start of a literature review on gay men and masculinity. Since that time, I have been so extremely blessed to have three incredibly talented and brilliant thinkers who have agreed to be on this journey with me serving on my dissertation committee. Dr. Cheryl Getz, Dr. Lea Hubbard, and Dr. Frank Harris III have each played a significant role in this work, and I am grateful to them for their time, energy and faith in me.

I have been so grateful to Lea stopping by my desk in the office to ask how everything has been going throughout the process. In each phase of my study, she has been provided such meaningful and thoughtful input, and I have appreciated her positive energy and deep passion for research. It has been a thrill to learn about the craft of qualitative inquiry from her.

It has been an honor for me to work with Frank on this research. It is an incredible opportunity to have such a well-regarded scholar on college men and masculinities in my own backyard. I nervously asked him if he might be interested in helping me with my research, and the graciousness he has demonstrated to me throughout this process has just been astounding. I cannot thank him enough for all he has done. From the early conversations about literature on men and masculinities to his willingness to offer feedback and challenge my assumptions, I have learned so much from him, and I am proud to call him a colleague and friend.

One of the main reasons why I chose to attend the University of San Diego was because of Cheryl. From the time I was applying and all the way through to the present time, she has been my biggest cheerleader. Words cannot express my gratitude for

everything that she has done for me over these past four years. She has played so many different roles in my life, but I believe that her roles of mentor and friend have been most important to me. This research is all the better because of our many conversations over Starbucks chai lattes. Throughout this process, Cheryl has encouraged me to do my best work and keep pushing forward thoughtfully, intentionally, and meaningfully. She epitomizes what it means to teach and advise. I will forever be indebted to her.

This research would not have been possible without the support of administrators at my various research sites. In particular, I want to extend special thanks to Dr. Penny Rue, Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at the University of California, San Diego and Dr. James Kitchen, Vice President of Student Affairs at San Diego State University for their early support of my research. Special thanks must also be given to the administrators working with LGBT students at USD, UCSD, and SDSU who have helped encourage students to participate in this study. In particular, I have appreciated the help, advice and insights from Dr. Evelyn Kirkley (USD), Dr. Shaun Travers (UCSD), and Ben Cartwright (SDSU).

I am extremely grateful to several agencies and organizations that have provided financial assistance for this research, including the San Diego chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the Greater San Diego Business Association (GSDBA) Charitable Foundation, and the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) LGBT Issues Knowledge Community.

A very special thank you to my dear friend, Chris Sclafani, who helped me several times in attempting to put together models and diagrams for this study. His

talents with graphic design never cease to amaze me. I thank him for helping me take my “best attempts” at drawing and making them into professional quality models.

Throughout my life as a student, I have been lucky enough to have exceptionally wonderful teachers who have inspired me. Their impact on me has led me to teaching as a vocation. Thank you to Jean Zachos, Robert Heasley, Judith Barker, Marylu McEwen, Karen Inkelas, Susan Komives, Terri Monroe, and Zachary Green. Additionally, as a student affairs professional, I had mentors who always had my best interest at heart. Thank you to Peggy R. Williams, Roger Eslinger, Greg Victory, Mathew Chetnik, and Kathy Neville for the roles you have played in my life and your continued friendship. I have also had the pleasure of working with amazing colleagues throughout my career who have supported me, and through the dissertation process, I have appreciated the friendship of my colleagues in Suite 273: Crystal Dujowich and Maureen Guarcello.

During the data analysis part of my research, I was lucky enough to have an incredible peer debriefing team – a group of individuals who reviewed transcripts and helped give their insights on the work. Their efforts and the dialogues we have shared have strengthened this work substantially. I cannot thank them enough, and I am indebted to Michael Lovette-Colyer, Justin Sipes, and Z Nicolazzo.

Speaking of Z, my interest in studying men and masculinities has been largely due to his influence. My thinking around this topic has been enriched through the many conversations that we have had over time. Z has been influential in my life as a reader, sounding board, and cheerleader. This research has been stronger because of his insights, intelligence, and challenging wisdom.

Likewise, my experience as a doctoral student has been enriched due to the guidance of my best friend, Dr. Paige Haber. Paige has continuously pushed me to challenge myself, inspired me to make the most of my doctoral work, and shown me the possibilities of research and scholarship. I cannot thank her enough for our many conversations at the coffee shop, her encouragement in times when I had “cursor paralysis,” and her insights and wisdom on tackling the dissertation process.

I have to thank my family for their support, love, and encouragement. My brother, Jeff, and sister-in-law, Lauren, have inspired me to take risks and make my own path in life. I am always in awe of them. During this process, they also had their first child, Maren Carlisle, who captured my heart in ways that I never knew was possible. My parents, Allan and Nancy, have always pushed me to do the best that I can, encouraged me to live a life that has purpose and integrity, and modeled what it means to serve others. Without them, this accomplishment would not have been possible. I humbly thank them.

In the midst of data collection, I fell in love with a wonderful man who has continued to support me through the crazy-making that can be the dissertation research process. I am forever grateful to my boyfriend, Martin Fernandez. He has been engaged in this work just as much as I have been – whether staying up late with me as I coded transcripts or making meals as I continued working on rewrites. He has been unwavering in his support of me. Always willing to listen to complaints and breakthroughs or ask thought-provoking questions, he has been my rock. I am incredibly appreciative of him.

Lastly, without the participants of this study, this dissertation would not have been written. While I am not able to publicly name them, I thank my participants for trusting

me with their stories. It is my great hope that I did them justice with this work. I appreciate their time, personal investment, and honesty. The great depth to which they have thought about and articulated their own sense of who they are is remarkable, and many times I was left in awe of their ability to tell their story in ways that I am not certain I would have been able to do at their age. They have certainly inspired me to continue making meaning of my own story.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In my first year at college, I enrolled in a course required for resident assistant applicants. During one particular class, my instructor, who eventually became one of my professional mentors, asked me, “Tell me about a time in your life where you’ve been empowered by your gender.” I replied, “I’ve never felt empowered by my gender. All my life, I’ve been teased, bullied, and picked on by other boys who have called me ‘gay’ or ‘fag.’ I’m not gay – but I’ve never really had easy relationships with other guys.” A month later, I looked at my reflection in the mirror of my residence hall room and finally after years of keeping the words inside, whispered, “I’m gay.” That moment of self-disclosure sparked an interest in understanding the development of one’s gender and sexual identity. My own experiences with other men, especially straight men, had a significant impact on my own ideas and concepts about what it meant to be a man. My feelings of being disempowered by my maleness back as a first-year student played a significant role in my own self-concept, including denying my male privilege at the time.

Coming out of the closet set me on a path to understand the multiple intersections of one’s identity. I started taking classes on race, class, and gender in sociology and psychology and began to examine my own biases and assumptions. From these classes and my involvement in student leadership positions in residence life, student activities, and orientation, I started to reframe the way that I saw others as well as myself, and explored the larger systemic elements of power and privilege and how they affected individuals, personally and collectively. Throughout my college experience, I started to understand who I was but also how I made meaning of who I was.

My personal experience is just that: one isolated experience of navigating one's identity. However, that experience, as well as my professional work with college students over the past decade, informs my interest in understanding larger patterns that may emerge in one's development in college. As a higher education professional, I am interested in understanding the process by which one comes to negotiate one's identity development, especially during college. One critique of the literature on college student identity development is the compartmentalized approach to understanding dimensions of social identity rather than how one's multiple social identities conjoin and influence each other (Poynter & Washington, 2005). For example, while there is a growing amount of research on gay men in college (Gonyea & Moore, 2007; Rhoads, 1997; Stevens, 2004; Wilkerson, Ross & Brooks, 2009), very few studies have investigated how gay men come to understand their multiple identities as both male and gay within that environment. In order to understand how students negotiate their multiple identities, gay men can provide great insight. Gay men experience privilege based upon the fact that they are male within the United States as well as discrimination and oppression due to their sexual orientation (Harper & Harris, 2010a; Dilley, 2010). They must negotiate their sexual orientation and gender as well as race and other dimensions of identity. How these men navigate their process of making meaning of their multiple identities, therefore, may reveal how these tensions of oppression and privilege play out in other groups as well.

Background of the Study

For far too long, our understandings of gay men have been derived solely from developmental models that discuss one's sexuality as if one's gender was absent from the discussion (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; Troiden, 1988) or that other

forms of social identities, such as race, socioeconomic class, and religion, are isolated from one another (Washington & Wall, 2010). Gay men's identity as men with multiple social identities has largely been ignored. However, the concept of intersectionality, a concept stemming from Critical Race Theory, provides a means for understanding the construction of one's multiple identities by higher education professionals.

Intersectionality refers to the interplay between multiple dimensions of one's identity and how those components of identity play into the larger power dynamics within the larger society (Crenshaw, 1995). Historically, feminist scholars have conducted research on intersectionality through a critical race and gender lens to understand the power structures that influence women and their lives (Butterfield, 2003; Crenshaw, 1995). But there has been little work on intersectionality or understanding of multiple identities within student development theory. One exception to this has been the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). This model provides a framework through which one can understand the confluence of one's multiple identities through a filter of meaning making on the individual, community, and systemic levels (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007).

Similar to the emergence of the use of intersectionality within higher education, the literature on the socialization of men and masculinity has evolved over time. Over the past two decades, the study of men and masculinities has emerged as an interdisciplinary field largely within the United States, England, and Australia, drawing upon work in sociology, psychology, education, political science, gender studies, and queer studies (Connell, 2002, 2005; Davis & Laker, 2004; Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2010a). While researchers have attempted

to define masculinity, there is not one singular definition (Connell, 1992; Davis & Laker, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2010a). In fact, the literature on masculinity studies has broad categories, including but not limited to: masculinity as embodiment (Fausto-Sterling, 1985); masculinity as performance (Butler, 1993; Harris, 2010; hooks, 2004; Kimmel & Messner, 2007; Reeser, 2010); masculinity as sociality (Connell, 2002; Lorber, 2001; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Reeser, 2010); hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson, 1993; Kimmel, 2006, 2008, 2010; Plummer, 1999); and gay masculinities (Connell, 1992; Heasley, 2005; Reddy, 1998). One commonality throughout the literature is the fact that the traditional views of masculinity are bounded in patriarchy and heteronormativity, which created the subordinated “other” (e.g., women, gay men) through male privilege (Connell, 1992; Kimmel, 2008; Reeser, 2010). In the Western world, patriarchy has historically allowed men to dominate women and other men, such as gay and bisexual men, based upon privilege (Kimmel, 2010b). Heteronormativity serves as a byproduct of patriarchy where there is an internalized assumption that sexuality for the purpose of procreation (therefore, heterosexuality) is natural and all other forms of sexuality are immoral or unnatural (Connell, 2005). These concepts of patriarchy and heteronormativity play a significant role in the lives of men and women, especially in K-16 educational systems.

In these contexts, young men and women are socialized from childhood around traditional gender roles and expectations as well as how patriarchy and heteronormativity can either privilege (in the case of many men) or oppress (in the case of women and other men who do not traditionally fit the notions of masculinity or heterosexuality) (Kimmel, 2006; Pascoe, 2008; Reeser, 2010). Pollack (1998) discusses the concept of how young

boys are taught “The Boy Code” from an early age about what is permissible to do as a boy and what is not and that one’s peers regulate and enforce those notions of traditional male gender norms. Likewise, this enforcement continues through early adulthood in college through a variety of means that perpetuate traditional hegemonic masculinity through unhealthy behaviors involving sex, personal wellness, alcohol and drug use, relationships with women, and media consumption (Edwards, 2007; Harris, 2006; Harper & Harris, 2010a; Kimmel, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011; Rhoads, 2010). These socialized messages also continue to perpetuate feelings of isolation, discrimination, and sometimes violence against men who do not participate in traditional masculine norms, including gay men (Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998).

As my own personal story demonstrates, understanding my sexuality could only be achieved within the context of my male identity. It was impossible for me to deny that my gender had a very real impact on my sexual orientation in terms of negotiating the tensions of male privilege as well as oppression due to being gay. Most of the contemporary lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity models suggest that one’s sexual orientation and identity should be understood within the context of one’s lifespan (D’Augelli, 2004; Fassinger, 2006; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Rhoads, 1997). Likewise, one’s socialization as a male continues to develop over time as well through the various agents of socialization, including one’s family, education, and the media (Harris, 2007; Kimmel, 2008). The ways in which gay men must negotiate identities over time suggests that they could provide rich insights into meaning making across multiple identities during a critical period of change and development. Thus, this study attempts to fulfill

that gap within the literature to provide new perspectives on how gay men in college make meaning of their multiple identities.

Problem Statement

Colleges and universities within the United States serve as a microcosm for the larger sociopolitical climate of the nation. The early research on human development describe how traditionally-aged college students negotiate major stages of their identity development (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1980; Kegan, 1982) but give no attention to the multiple identities that college students possess. With LGBT students becoming more visible on campuses, gay men in college provide an excellent opportunity to understand the negotiation and development of multiple identities, including issues of inclusion or exclusion and sense of self (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). New considerations of student development theory using a lens of multiple identities are emerging (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Abes, 2009). However, despite the fact that gay men provide an important opportunity to see the negotiation of multiple and conflicting identities, none at this point have specifically looked at gay men in college nor how those men have made meaning of their multiple identities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how traditionally-aged gay men in college come to make meaning of the intersections of their gender and sexuality. The literature on how college students make meaning of their social identities has increased amongst certain demographics, including but not limited to ethnic identity (Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, & Podobnik, 2008), Latino/a identity (Torres & Baxter Magolda,

2004); lesbian women (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007), and men (Harris, 2006). However, there has been little insight into the experiences of gay men in college and how they come to make meaning of their multiple identities. As a result, this study attempts to provide new insights to higher education professionals about how these men come to understand the complex dimensions of their identities within the context of colleges and universities in the United States. This research contributes to the aforementioned gaps in the literature on the meaning making process for gay men as well as how this process is affected by the critical influences gay men experience in college. Additionally, this study also contributes to the growing body of research within higher education utilizing intersectionality as a means to understand the holistic development of college students.

Research Questions

In order to understand how traditionally-aged gay men in college come to make meaning of their sense of gender and sexuality, three main research questions were created to explore this process. These research questions are: (a) how do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years, (b) in what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men, and (c) what are the critical influences during college that influence gay men's meaning-making process?

Significance

This study will result in increased understanding of the gay male experience in college, specifically how gay men come to make meaning of their multiple identities. As previously stated, there is an emerging movement amongst scholars of student development theory to analyze a student's growth and development from a more holistic

and integrative framework (Abes, 2009; Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007). This research takes a step in that direction by looking at gay men in relation to their other social identities. Likewise, this research will contribute to the growing dialogue about masculinity and sexuality studies within higher education as well as the impact that colleges and universities have on men. While research has been steadily emerging about college men (Harper & Harris, 2010a), very little of that research has provided new insights on the experiences of gay men in college (Harris, personal communication, 2010) or their meaning making process across multiple identities. Lastly, this research will provide information that may enable higher education professionals to gain further insights about gay men on their respective campuses. This has implications for higher education policies, procedures, and practice that can support students as they gain understanding of themselves in more integrated and purposeful ways. With the sociopolitical climate for the LGBT community shifting rapidly, it is essential that higher education professionals are equipped with the tools to help promote the growth and development of the growing numbers of LGBT-identified students.

Definitions and Related Concepts

Throughout this dissertation, there are several key concepts that will be used. Below, operationalized definitions have been provided.

Biological sex – “System of sexual classification based on biological and physical differences, such as primary and secondary sexual characteristics, forming the categories “male” and “female” as opposed to gender which is based on the social construction of the categories “men” and “women” (“Diversity Dictionary,” n.d.).

Critical influences – Edwards (2007) cites A. Stevens's (1997) work on critical influences indicating that they are “the significant people, places, and events impacting the participants' identity development” (p. 49).

Culture – “The dimension of [one's] identities rooted in certain customs, values, traditions, and heritages” (Jones, 1997, p. 381)

Gay – “1. Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. Not all men who engage in “homosexual behavior” identify as gay, and as such this label should be used with caution. 2. Term used to refer to the LGBTQI community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual” (UCR, p. 3).

Gender – “System of sexual classification based on the social construction of the categories “men” and “women,” as opposed to sex which is based on biological and physical differences which form the categories “male” and “female” (“Diversity Dictionary,” n.d.).

Hegemonic masculinity – “The pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

Heteronormativity – “The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality” (UCR, p. 4).

Intersectionality – Stemming from Critical Race Theory, intersectionality explores how knowledge is constructed and understood at the intersections of one’s multiple identities through three main levels: (1) structural; (2) political; and (3) representational (Crenshaw, 1995).

Masculinity – Acknowledging that a common definition may not be fully adequate, Connell (2005) defines masculinity as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (p. 71).

Meaning making – “The activity of composing a sense of the connections among things: a sense of pattern, order, form, and significance” (Daloz Parks, 2000, p. 19).

Race – “A sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms, 1993, p. 3).

Religion – “1. An organized belief system based on certain tenets of faith. 2. A belief in a supreme supernatural force or god(s)” (“Diversity Dictionary,” n.d.).

Sexual orientation – “The desire for intimate emotional and/or sexual relationships with people of the same gender/sex, another gender/sex, or multiple genders/sexes” (UCR, p. 8).

Socioeconomic class – “Category of division based on economic status; members of a class are theoretically assumed to possess similar cultural, political, and economic characteristics and principles” (“Diversity Dictionary”, n.d.).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Navigating the milieu of a college or university campus can be a challenging experience for all undergraduate students. It may be even more challenging for those students from underrepresented groups, who may experience discrimination, isolation, and even violent acts against them. One group that has faced such challenges on college campuses is gay men. The experience of gay men in colleges and universities within the United States today is substantially different from those attending institutions in the mid-twentieth century. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights movement, which gained prominence in 1969 with the Stonewall riots in New York City, has changed the experience of gay men on college campuses and changed the national conversation on LGBT rights (Duberman, 1993; Dilley, 2005; Marcus, 1992).

While colleges and universities are one environment where LGBT individuals have fought for and made strides in tolerance, acceptance and equality (Duberman, 1993; Dilley, 2005; Marcus, 1992), many students within this population continue to face discrimination, isolation and feelings of inadequacy due to their sexual identity. For example, in fall 2010, the national media reported on multiple LGBT-affiliated youth suicides. In each situation common reasons for the suicides were evident: experiences of harassment by peers; negative feelings of self-worth; and lack of acceptance of one's sexual orientation by peers, family members or communities (Keys, 2010; McKinley, 2010; Parker-Pope, 2010). Many of these young people were young gay or bisexual boys and men (Keys, 2010; McKinley, 2010). There are inherent difficulties of negotiating one's social identities either through external conditions, such as messages from one's religion or cultural values, or internal factors, including one's ability to reconcile the

tensions between multiple identities, which are developmental challenges for one's overall sense of self (Erikson, 1980). Researchers have found that gay men in particular seem to experience particular challenges in negotiating their multiple identities towards an integrated, holistic sense of self within college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to understand how traditionally-aged gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically to examine the struggles they face and the support they receive within the college environment to develop their sense of masculinity and sexual identity. There is a vast amount of literature that informs this study, which will be grouped within three main areas: (1) college student development theory, (2) meaning making, and (3) college environments. This exploration of college student development theories provides some understanding of how notions of gender and sexual orientation are developed by college students as well as how one's multiple social identities intersect with one another. The research on meaning making explores how college students come to understand themselves and their lived experiences, which plays a significant role in one's identity development. Lastly, research on college environments provides insight in how colleges and universities impact students and their development in meaningful ways. Yet up to this point, no study has addressed specifically how gay men come to make meaning of their multiple identities within the context of their college experience. In this next section, I will present a discussion on the current literature around these main topic areas of this particular study.

College Student Development Theories

Since the early twentieth century, research from sociology and psychology has influenced professionals in higher education in understanding the growth and development of students attending their institutions (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Early student development theories came into existence in the 1960s when college students were largely homogenous: primarily white, middle- to upper-class Christian men whose fathers had typically been well-educated (Chickering, 1981; Evans et al., 1998). Many of the early student development theories created during this time used these men as their research participants (Chickering, 1969; Perry, 1970). However, the sociopolitical landscape within the United States was changing rapidly within the 1960s, the time when “the country faced nearly a decade of social turmoil brought on by the Vietnam War and the civil rights and women’s movements” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 7). As a result of these and other sociopolitical movements within the United States, the demographics of students attending colleges and universities expanded beyond those students who were “between the ages of 18 and 25, white, middle-class, and academically skilled” (Chickering, 1981, p. xxvii).

Over the past five decades, a multitude of research studies have been conducted on students attending institutions of higher education, which have resulted in theories of development (Evans et al., 1998; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2009; McEwen, 2003a, 2003b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While there may be some slight disagreement with their categorization, most scholars agree that student development theories fall into three main categories: (1) cognitive-structural theories; (2) psychosocial developmental theories; and (3) social identity development theories (Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010; McEwen, 2003a, 2003b). These theories, by and large, have dealt

with how one thinks, how one behaves, and how one identifies. These concepts will be examined more in-depth throughout this chapter.

While student development theories are clearly distinct from one another, there are some areas of overlap as well (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). For example, student development theories allow for a general understanding of phenomena, behavior, or thinking and provide a framework to understand those concepts (Evans et al., 2010). A constructivist approach assumes that “knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 236). As applied to student development theory, a constructivist lens posits that people “live in social settings, each with historical and political elements....The identity that one creates for oneself comes out of one’s lived experience” (McEwen, 2003a, p. 170). Likewise, Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2010) suggest that social construction also allows us to understand “[h]ow individuals and groups make meaning of the world they occupy” which “is vital to understanding social identity” (p. 235).

Within the student development theory, social identity theories have been widely discussed as it relates to one’s development. Specifically for this study, social identity theories, especially those surrounding gay identity, male identity, and multiple social identities, play a critical role in what we know – as well as what we do not know – about college students. Within the next section, I provide an overview of the literature on the various aforementioned social identity theories and also attempt to outline the gaps in the literature that this study endeavors to address.

Social Identity

Social identity development theories are valuable to higher education professionals because they explore dimensions of one's race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability, social class, and other aspects of identity (Evans, Forney & Guido, 1998; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; McEwen, 2003a). These theories, while exploring aspects of one's identity, help to provide an understanding of how one comes to understand one's self, but also how one thinks about that particular aspect of identity as well (McEwen, 2003a). More specifically, these models have helped to establish understanding of "social groups that are not White, heterosexual, male, able-bodied, and of the privileged class" (McEwen, 2003a, p. 205). For example, multiple models exist for race (Cross, 1971, 1978, 1991; Deaux, 1993; Helms, 1993, 1995) and sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998). While there is a prevalence of research on underrepresented populations within social identity theory, there has been growing interest in examining the development of individuals within dominant social identities, or those identity groups that hold power and privilege within a larger sociopolitical framework (McEwen, 2003a), such as White identity (Helms, 1995; McIntosh, 1998) and men (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2006).

One of the key strengths of social identity theory – and often ignored concepts in other theories of identity formation – is its discussion of how oppression and privilege influence how people make meaning of their identity. Oppression is understood as an unequal distribution of power wherein an individual or a group of individuals is subordinated (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). Weber (1998) highlights that historically within the United States, people of color, individuals from the working class, women, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals have been

oppressed and marginalized. Conversely, those in dominant groups, typically Whites, middle- and upper-class individuals, heterosexuals, and men, possess privilege (Weber). Furthering Weber's point, McIntosh (2003) discusses the concept of conferred dominance whereby those who are affiliated with dominant groups continue to be entitled to certain privileges that those from marginalized groups are not. These concepts play a substantial role in understanding how one comes to understand him- or herself, how one thinks about his or her identities, individually and collectively, and how one is situated within larger systems of power and oppression (Weber, 1998). Yet, our understanding of how gay men navigate the inherent tensions involved in being in a dominant group due to their male privilege and a marginalized group due to their sexual orientation is still limited. As a result, there is a strong need to understand the literature on gay identity development, male identity development, and multiple identity development to further ground our knowledge about gay men in college.

Gay identity. As previously established, the college years of a traditionally-aged college student represent a critical time in one's development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1980). This range of ages is also a critical period for the establishment of one's sexual identity (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Rankin, Weber, Blumenthal, & Frazer, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2005). Over the past three decades, a substantial increase in the literature regarding gay and bisexual men has occurred (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1991, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; Rhoads, 1997; Savin-Williams, 2005); however, this has also been challenged by multiple "constraints, including ...social and religious disapproval both inside and outside the academy, and the difficulties of identifying and securing the cooperation of study participants who may not wish to be identified in terms of their

sexual orientation” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 218). Much of this research on gay men has been steeped in one’s coming out process.

Most of the models of sexual orientation identity development, like other identity models, are linear stage-based models developed using qualitative research methods. Cass (1979) developed the first homosexual identity development model examining gay males in a clinical psychological setting in Australia over several years. Her six-stage model posited that gay men and lesbians – bisexuals are not included in Cass’s original model – move through each stage progressively “to acquire an identity of “homosexual” fully integrated within the individual’s overall concept of self” (Cass, p. 220). Bilodeau and Renn (2005) discuss the fact that stage-based models highlight one’s denial of his or her sexual orientation, towards a gradual acceptance of a non-normative heterosexual identity and an eventual integration of identity pride and acceptance. However, Bilodeau and Renn (2005) and Rhoads (1997) argue that stage-based models, such as Cass’s and Troiden’s (1988), vary so widely due to the enormous psychosocial complexity of sexual orientation identity, that one model cannot adequately represent each gay, lesbian or bisexual person’s identity formation experience.

In more contemporary models of sexual orientation identity development, an ecological and environmental lens has been applied to help make meaning of the identity formation process. D’Augelli (1994) proposed a conceptual lifespan model that includes aspects of socialization agents, such as family and peers; sociopolitical constructs, such as law, traditions and policies; and personal attitudes and behaviors, such as meaning making and behavioral patterns. These factors work with one another providing further insight into six concepts of identity formation defined by D’Augelli (1994), which

include “exiting heterosexual identity, developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status, developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity, becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual offspring, developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status, and entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community” (p. 319). D’Augelli’s work provides a description of sexual orientation identity development within personal, community, and sociopolitical constructs which informs the work of others.

Fassinger and her colleagues (1998) argue that one’s sexual orientation is determined individually as well as through group membership, thereby establishing that one can be at different places developmentally in terms of one’s individual and one’s group identification. Fassinger’s model outlines four main statuses: (1) awareness; (2) exploration; (3) deepening/commitment; and (4) internalization/synthesis. In this way, Fassinger provides an identity development model that attempts “to create a model of LGB development that is more inclusive of demographic and cultural influences and less reliant on identity disclosure as a marker of developmental maturity” (p. 16). D’Augelli (1994) and Fassinger offer a new way of viewing sexual orientation identity development that helps provide a more multidimensional perspective of the sociopolitical ramifications of embracing an identity that is in opposition to the heteronormative constructs of our current society compared to Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988)’s stage-based models.

Expanding upon D’Augelli’s (1994) work which indicated that one’s sexual orientation identity shifted over one’s lifetime and emphasized the importance of context and environment, Dilley (2010) conducted research with over 50 gay men spanning multiple generations and established a typology of non-heterosexual collegiate men. One of the main critiques of foundational sexual identity development models has been that

they are largely limiting in terms of expression of one's sexual identity; in other words, individuals often feel that they do not want to be placed in a "box" or be "labeled" (Dilley, 2010). In his research, Dilley states, "multiple non-heterosexual male collegiate identities exist" (p. 106). In fact, he found six distinct typologies of non-heterosexual collegiate male identity. These include (1) homosexual; (2) gay; (3) queer; (4) closeted; (5) "normal," and (6) parallel (Dilley, 2010). In his research, he identified that a "homosexual" identity was maintained between the 1940s to late 1960s and was characterized by a personal acknowledgement of one's sexual orientation that was rarely spoken about or acted upon (Dilley, 2010). This homosexual identity is the only one of his six that is no longer found among college men since the term has deemed extremely clinical in nature and gay men often do not use that term to identify themselves (Dilley, 2010). Men that maintained a "gay" identity were found on campus between the late 1960s to present times. This group is characterized by individuals who publicly acknowledge their non-heterosexual identity and are often involved in efforts for social change (Dilley, 2010). Similarly, those with a "queer" identity are public about their identity but frequently take a more radical stance, often in opposition to dominant mores, values, and systems; this identity had its start in the early 1980s in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and continues to be found today (Dilley, 2010). Men with a "closeted" identity understand their attraction for other men yet avoid social contexts where that information would be made public; these men have been present on campus between the 1940s and today (Dilley, 2010). A "normal" identity was found among men between the 1940s and today who maintained a heterosexual identity yet engaged in homosexual behavior; these men separated their sexual behavior from their identity and

did not recognize the disparity (Dilley, 2010). Lastly, between the 1940s and the present, men with a “parallel” identity led double lives whereby they would identify as heterosexual in certain contexts and non-heterosexual in others. These men would attempt to compartmentalize their lives as much as possible in order to maintain this identity (Dilley, 2010). These multiple types of a non-heterosexual identity are helpful when understanding that one’s sexual identity, especially during the college years, may be fluid, especially along these different typologies (Dilley, 2010).

While it is important to understand sexual identity, it is also essential to understand that not all men or women who engage in same-sex sexual behaviors identify as gay, bisexual, or lesbian. In fact, sexual behaviors and sexual identity do not always correlate, especially among adolescents and college students who may be experimenting with sexuality (Dilley, 2010; Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1990). At the same time, research has indicated that more students are arriving to colleges and universities already identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer than ever before (Savin-Williams, 2005). These dynamic factors of LGBT development are important in framing these students’ experiences within the context of higher education. Additionally, however, there is also a need to understand that the construction of gender also plays a vital role in the lens in which one sees the world. In this next section, I provide an overview of the social construction of male identity and masculinities to help add another layer of understanding to the dimensions explored within this study.

Male identity. Scholars in sociology and gender studies often rely on the concept of social construction to understand dimensions of social identities (Weber, 1998). Gender, for example, is differentiated from sex, which is defined through biological

means (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). The dominant construction of gender is the binary of masculinity and femininity (Patton, 2011). Within the Western world, the concept of masculinity is informed by the social construction of gender (Lorber, 2001). In the United States, traditional gender norms emphasize the importance of being highly masculine for men and highly feminine for women (Connell, 2002; Kimmel, 2008).

Similar to the development of sexual identity development models, the literature on the socialization of men and masculinity has evolved over time. Over the past two decades, the study of men and masculinities has emerged as an interdisciplinary field largely within the United States, England, and Australia, drawing upon work in sociology, psychology, education, political science, gender studies, and queer studies (Connell, 2002, 2005; Davis & Laker, 2004; Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac, & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2010a). While researchers have attempted to define masculinity, there is not one singular definition (Connell, 1992; Davis & Laker, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2010a). In fact, the literature on masculinity studies has broad categories, including but not limited to: masculinity as embodiment (Fausto-Sterling, 1985); masculinity as performance (Butler, 1993; Harris, 2010; hooks, 2004; Kimmel & Messner, 2007; Reeser, 2010); masculinity as sociality (Connell, 2002; Lorber, 2001; Lorber & Farrell, 1991; Reeser, 2010); hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson, 1993; Kimmel, 2006, 2008, 2010; Plummer, 1999); and gay masculinities (Connell, 1992; Heasley, 2005; Reddy, 1998). One commonality throughout the literature is the fact that the traditional views of masculinity are bounded in patriarchy and heteronormativity, which created the subordinated “other” (e.g., women, gay men) through male privilege (Connell, 1992; Kimmel, 2008; Reeser, 2010). In the Western world, patriarchy has

historically allowed men to dominate women and other men based upon privilege (Kimmel, 2010b). Heteronormativity serves as a byproduct of patriarchy where there is an internalized assumption that sexuality for the purpose of procreation (therefore, heterosexuality) is natural and all other forms of sexuality are immoral or unnatural (Connell, 2005). These concepts of patriarchy and heteronormativity play a significant role in the lives of men and women, from young to old in the modern Western world.

In these contexts, young men and women are socialized from childhood around traditional gender roles and expectations as well as how patriarchy and heteronormativity can either privilege (in the case of many men) or oppress (in the case of women and other men who do not traditionally fit the notions of masculinity or heterosexuality) (Kimmel, 2006; Pascoe, 2008; Reeser, 2010). Pollack (1998) discusses the concept of how young boys are taught “The Boy Code” from an early age about what is permissible to do as a boy and what is not and that one’s peers regulate and enforce those notions of traditional male gender norms. Likewise, Kimmel (2008) highlights that this enforcement continues in early adulthood in college through “The Guy Code” that perpetuates traditional hegemonic masculinity through unhealthy behaviors involving sex, personal wellness, alcohol and drug use, relationships with women, and media consumption. These socialized messages also continue to perpetuate feelings of isolation, discrimination, and sometimes violence against men who do not participate in traditional masculine norms, including gay men (Kimmel, 2008; Pollack, 1998).

A critique of student development theory has been that it never really asked men to understand themselves as men in reference to their growth and development (Harper & Harris, 2010b). In response to this critique, two new models of men’s identity

development have emerged in recent years that focus on college students. Harris (Harris, 2006; Harris & Edwards, 2010) and Edwards (Edwards, 2007; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Jones, 2010) each investigated college men and factors that influenced men's identity development using grounded theory. Edwards' (2007) study involved ten men, all attending a large, public, four-year university in the mid-Atlantic. The men represented a wide array of backgrounds and interests which included social identities, including race, class, and sexual orientation, and campus involvement, such as involvement in athletics, fraternity life, residential life employees, and campus organization officers (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010). Participants in Edwards' (2007) study were interviewed three times "to explore what it meant for them to be a man, how their understandings of what being a man meant changed over time, and the influences that prompted these changes" (Harris & Edwards, 2010, p. 46). Harris's (2008, 2010) study was conducted in two distinct phases. With a total of 68 participants attending a private, four-year university on the West Coast of the United States, Harris originally conducted individual interviews with twelve men, which then informed the major themes and categories that were used to establish questions for focus groups with 56 participants (Harris, 2008). As in Edwards' study, Harris' (2008) participants represented a variety of racial, class, and sexual orientation identities as well as varying student engagement experiences on campus (e.g., student athletes, fraternity men).

The metaphor of a mask being worn is the central organizing theme within Edwards' study (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010). The men described being socialized from an early age about gender norms and expectations and indicated a great deal of pressure to conform to those expectations by both individuals in their lives

as well as institutions (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010). As a result, the men indicated that they felt as though they wore different masks of themselves based upon the contexts in which they operated (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010). This concept of the mask seemed to be used to describe the tensions they felt when they experienced male gender role conflict in relation to the expectations of others around them (Harris & Edwards, 2010). This use of the mask metaphor resonates with hooks' (2004) essays on men, masculinity and love. hooks (2004) wrote, "To always wear a mask as a way of asserting masculine presence is to always live the lie, to be perpetually deprived of an authentic sense of identity and well-being" (p. 138). This mask metaphor can be seen as a key ideology around the performativity of gender where men are actively attempting to perform masculinity to varying levels of success.

Edwards' (2007) study characterized men in college as underperforming and unprepared, with specific behaviors including competitive heterosexual sex, alcohol and drug use and potential abuse, being unprepared for academic classes and exams, and not following policies and procedures outlined by campus administration (Edwards, 2007; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris & Edwards, 2010). Certainly, Edwards' findings correlate with Kimmel's (2008) discussions of college men and the "Guy Code." Three overarching categories emerged from the study as consequences for the performance of masculinity: "misogynistic relationships and attitudes toward women, limited relationships with other men, and a loss of self" (Harris & Edwards, 2010, p. 47).

Understanding how men develop in college and identifying how men's development is influenced by environmental factors within college is an important distinction within the emerging identity development literature. Harris's (2006) study

addressed three main variables, which were how college men made meaning of masculinity and reified those meanings through their attitudes and behaviors; contextual influences within the campus environment that continued to reinforce and challenge one's meanings of masculinity; and gender norms and expectations that are a result of both meanings of masculinity within the context of the collegiate environment (Harris, 2006). This mirrors Kimmel's (2008) findings of his work on the behaviors performed by college men as well as much of the literature on the impact of fraternity life (Anderson, 2007; Rhoads, 2010) and athletics (Anderson, 2008) on college men. Harris' work was significant in that it was the first of its kind that attempted to understand one's meaning making of his masculinity within the context of college.

A third study on college men and their identity development, conducted by Davis (2010), looked at how gender role conflict influences a college man's development. In his study of ten White, heterosexual participants, Davis posited five main themes from the participants: "the importance of self-expression, code of communication caveats, fear of femininity, confusion about and distancing from masculinity, and a sense of challenge without support" (p. 56). According to the participants in Davis's study, being self-expressive about one's feelings and thoughts was seen as important yet not something they had practiced prior to college. The men also expressed concerns about what others may think about them, how they interacted and engaged with their peers, and their safety within the college environment (Davis, 2010). Many men in the study expressed concern with being perceived as 'feminine' or 'gay' while at the same time experiencing discomfort with the ideas of masculinity (Davis, 2010). Lastly, participants expressed the

feeling that the men felt women received more attention from college administrators, programs and/or services at their particular institution (Davis, 2010).

A major critique of Davis, Edwards, and Harris' work is that while they contribute new ideas about college men and masculinity, their findings stem from a predominantly heterosexual perspective. For example, Harris (2008) acknowledged that he had a small number of gay men within his study. At the same time, one of his main themes was "competitive sex with members of the opposite sex." While Harris's wording of his theme was not meant to be exclusionary, the reality is that gay men are not engaged in competitive sex with members of the opposite sex. Thus, the experiences and thoughts of gay men and how they make meaning of their own masculinity were not directly included within that theme in Harris's work. Likewise, Davis' (2010) sample of college men did not include any non-heterosexual men. One might assume that gender role conflict is a phenomenon experienced by gay men in college like their straight counterparts; however, Davis's study does not explore the gay male perspective.

Multiple identity development. Informed by the literature on intersectionality, scholars looking at identity development have attempted to address the critique that the research on sexual orientation identity development emphasized monocultural identity development (Poynter & Washington, 2005). However, similar to the larger intersectionality literature, it is rare for identity development literature to show how theories overlap and intersect with one another to provide a larger sense of identity than just one subsection of personal identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2008; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Weber, 1998). Thus, when conceptualizing identity, there has been a call for scholars and practitioners working within higher education to move from a

reliance on stage-based identity models to ones that describe how individuals grapple with developmental tasks and challenges simultaneously spanning their multiple identities (Poynter & Washington, 2005). This viewpoint has been influential within the emerging literature on multiple identity development.

Several multiple identity models have emerged in the past decade. Although these models of multiple identity development may be relatively new, scholars are advocating for their integration within the social identity literature. McEwen (2003b) asserts that social identity also inherently must look at the intersection of one's multiple identities, including "social class, ability and disability, and religion" (p. 13). Giroux (2005) concurs and offers that one's social identity cannot be limited to one particular identity at a time; instead, all identities inform and connect with one another for the individual's holistic sense of self. Deaux and Perkins (2001) agree with McEwen's (2003b) and Giroux's (2005) line of thinking, but expand upon it within their description of the "kaleidoscopic self." Using the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, Deaux and Perkins highlight three self-representations: "the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self" (p. 300). The authors explain that each of these self-representations are woven together with one another and interplay with one another, regardless of the situation or the environment (Deaux & Perkins, 2001). As a result, there are two major implications for the kaleidoscope model: "(a) social identities and personal attributes are often, if not always, linked to each other; and (b) their co-occurrence or joint salience is not merely a matter of situational instigation but, rather, reflects the underlying organization of self-representations" (Deaux & Perkins, 2001, p. 304). Deaux and Perkins' model, while appreciated for its connections between personal and social

identities, has been dismissed in most scholarly circles for its lack of empirical research because it was purely a conceptual theoretical model (Azmitia, Syed & Radmacher, 2008).

Higher education researchers have begun to expand on the literature related to intersectionality and multiple identities in relation to the study of college students. For example, Jones and McEwen (2000) offered the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) as a framework to understanding how one's social identities interact with one another and are established in relation to contextual influences. In essence, their work on multiple identity development provides a holistic development model for individuals where all of an individual's identities are constructed and explored in conjunction with one another (Jones & McEwen, 2000). One's core identity is seen as the nucleus of an atom-like figure with the rings around the core representing various individual personal identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The rings represent a dynamic and fluid movement of those individual social identities. The closer they are to the core, the more salient they are in that specific time and space (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Like the critique of Deaux and Perkins' "kaleidoscopic self" model, the critique of Jones & McEwen's model is that it is an untested conceptual model and that it failed to adequately take into account how one makes meaning of one's identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

In a recent update to the model, Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) have re-conceptualized the model to include a more direct link between contextual influences, such as family, media, and educational institutions that allowed for mapping of multiple identities. This work seemingly allows for a postmodern perspective of identity as a

social construction and sociopolitical phenomenon (Abes et al., 2007). By exploring a postmodern perspective within identity development, one can understand the individual's sense of identity in context with one's environment to allow for a more complex understanding of self (Abes et al., 2007). Additionally, a postmodernist perspective also allows for further critique of the larger sociopolitical structures in which individuals participate, knowingly or unknowingly, and also continues to disrupt traditional hegemonic and patriarchal practices, allowing for greater variations of personal identity, such as greater gender and sexuality fluidity, rather than rigid labels and boxes (Abes et al., 2007). These emerging views on identity development provide a helpful foundation for challenging the status quo, of relying on hegemony and patriarchy when viewing sexuality and masculinity.

For the purposes of this study, there is a desire to understand how gay men come to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their gender and their sexual identity. Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) MMDI model uses the constructs of sexual identity, gender, socioeconomic class, culture, religion, and race as components of multiple social identities. Therefore, those identities converge in various ways to inform one's multiple identity development. When investigating the existing research on multiple identity development among gay men, much of the literature has focused on the oppression that gay or bisexual men of color experience due to their race and sexual identity (Han, 2010; King, 2005; Reback & Larkins, 2010; Washington & Wall, 2010). Han (2010) claims, "[T]o be gay in America today is to be white. More specifically, it means to be white and well-to-do" (p. 356). In fact, many individuals within the LGBT community are not White (Han, 2010), but Han's claim is that racism within the gay

community has created certain conditions where individuals of color feel invisible and alienated. Certain cultural influences also create conditions where same-sex sexual behaviors are considered unacceptable according to cultural norms, leading to practices such as the phenomenon of being on “the down-low,” which is when Black men who portray themselves as straight men yet participate in same-sex sexual behavior secretly (King, 2005; Reback & Larkins, 2010). Additionally, many gay and bisexual men and women of color experience discrimination and racism within the LGBT community as it relates to dynamics of power and privilege that White men possess and exert through fetishization and hypersexualizing behaviors as well as potential overt or covert discrimination (Cintrón, 2000; Rhoads, 1997; Washington & Wall, 2010; Wilkerson, Ross & Brooks, 2009). As Han (2010) writes, “[W]hile men of color are fetishized for what they are, white men are fetishized for what they do. Thus, white men can choose when they want to be objectified, but men are [sic] color are simply objects” (p. 388). These often-troubling and distinct ways of understanding sexuality in relation to other social identities lend themselves to the argument to view one’s identity in totality rather than separated-out entities. Additionally, the fluidity and interplay between one’s multiple identities is related to the concept of identity salience, which is a key component of Abes, Jones, and McEwen’s (2007) and Jones and McEwen’s (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.

Identity salience. Stryker (1968) coined the term “identity salience,” or the “the probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of situations,” when discussing his research within the sociological construct of the family unit (p. 560). Stemming from symbolic-interactionist theory, identity salience connected

within role performance within the family structure through a situational context (Stryker). Stryker's concept of identity salience involves a hierarchy whereby the identity that is more important leads to a pattern of behaviors that serve as predictors of one's behavior. The critique of Stryker's work is that his notion of identity salience was not looking specifically at only social identity; rather, he was looking at both personal and social identities and did not fully explore the inherent tensions between social identities concurrently.

Within their work, Jones and McEwen (2000) and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) address this gap in Stryker's work. The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity comprises the interactions and convergence of one's multiple social identities thereby looking at the saliency of one's identities. Within their model, one's core involves one's personal identity, attributes and characteristics (Jones & McEwen). Jones and McEwen highlight their findings, which indicates, "Salience of identity dimensions was rooted in internal awareness and external scrutiny (e.g., race for Black women), and lack of salience seemed prevalent among those more privileged identity dimensions (e.g., sexual orientation for heterosexual women)" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410).

As discussed, the concept of identity salience connects with the development of one's multiple identities. Jones and McEwen (2000) highlight that one's identity salience is fluid and connected to the contextual influences at hand, similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concepts of microsystems, mesosystems, and macrosystems. For example, the personal identity components represented as the atom in Jones and McEwen's model relate to Bronfenbrenner's microsystem in which the individual's immediate environment influences one's development. In her work with lesbian college students, Abes (2009)

discusses infusing queer theory and critical perspectives in college student development theories to uncover and interrogate structural privileges that continue to reinforce the marginalization of certain identities, such as the concept of heteronormativity, which may also affect an individual's identity salience. Abes, Jones, and McEwen, in their reconceptualization of the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, remind us that identity salience towards one's core does not imply a positive view of that identity; in fact, they write,

An externally defined identity could be salient to one's sense of self but [assigned] for negative reasons, such as family or religious disapproval. Thus, incorporating meaning making into the model contributes to a more developmental and dynamic understanding of how persons negotiate complexities of personal and social identities. (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007, p. 14)

This sense of identity salience is important for higher education professionals to understand when working with college students who may be at different stages of their development and considering the multiple contextual influences in their students' lives.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) work uses the findings from Abes and Jones' (2004) longitudinal study on lesbian college students to explore the applicability of the revised Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity to be used for college students and their multiple identity development. To date, no work on the meaning making of one's multiple identities has been completed on gay men, which would seemingly be an important companion set of research when considering Abes and Jones' findings on lesbian college students. The understandings of one's multiple identity development, using a sample of lesbian college women, is an important contribution to the field of higher education yet that sample may not represent adequately the experiences of others outside of lesbian women identities. Abes, Jones, and McEwen discuss the fact that the

social construction of identity is influenced by “contextual influences and the changing meaning individuals make of these identities” (p. 15). Thus, the social construction of being a gay man may be different than the social construction of being a lesbian woman. As a result, a gap in the literature remains about understanding how gay men experience their own identity saliency within their multiple identities and understanding this process as a dynamic social construction.

While understanding how one negotiates the tensions inherent in oppressive factors within one’s multiple identities, little research has addressed how gay men have made meaning of their identities. As Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) state, the filter of making meaning of the intersections of one’s multiple identities is important to address the holistic development of college students. Understanding how the element of racial oppression plays out within gay men of color is an important first step in increasing our knowledge of how this plays a role in one’s multiple identity development, but the gap of understanding how gay men come to make meaning of their identities is still absent from the discourse. However, understanding the construct of meaning making is essential to this work; as a result, I provide an overview of the literature on meaning making next.

Meaning Making

Frankl (1979) summarized the human condition by saying, “The truth is that as the struggle for survival has subsided, the question has emerged – survival for what? Ever more people today have the *means* to live, but no *meaning* to live for” (p. 77). This importance placed on finding meaning is particularly important for college students and their development (Daloz Parks, 2000, 2011). Meaning making is defined as “the activity of composing a sense of the connections among things: a sense of pattern, order, form,

and significance” (Daloz Parks, 2000, p. 19). In college, meaning making is characterized by an individual’s ability to process and understand specific critical influences and incidents and become aware of their interconnectedness and mutuality with the world around them (NASPA/ACPA, 2004). The act of meaning making plays a significant role in a student’s cognitive development during college, but other areas of development as well.

Within the literature on student development theory, scholars have discussed the intersectionality between one’s cognitive development and one’s psychosocial development (Evans, Forney & Guido, 1998; McEwen, 2003a). The concepts of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) and meaning making (Daloz Parks, 2000, 2011; Kegan, 1982) are examples of this intersection, or as McEwen (2003a) calls them, developmental synthesis models. “*Developmental synthesis models* consider students’ development holistically – that is, their psychosocial and cognitive development in interaction with one another” (McEwen, 2003a, p. 162). Baxter Magolda (2009) discusses these developmental synthesis models as holistic student development theory. In her work, Baxter Magolda discusses the importance of meaning making on student development theory as previously discussed, but also adds the perspective of social identity theories as well. In essence, these meaning making models serve as a bridge between cognitive-structural and psychosocial development theories which allow greater insight of the holistic development of students rather than segmented and compartmentalized views of aspects of one’s identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2009; Daloz Parks, 2011). Therefore, meaning making as a concept serves a vital role in helping individuals have a more secure sense of self (Jones &

McEwen, 2000) and plays a significant role in the underpinnings of this particular research study because young adults often make meaning of their sense of identity during their college years.

Meaning making in college. In recent years, there has been a renewed assertion amongst higher education professionals that increasing students' cognitive complexity should be one desired learning outcome of an undergraduate education (NASPA/ACPA, 2004). A student's capacity to make meaning is one of many aspects of this type of cognitive complexity (Kegan, 1982; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Kegan (1982) discusses the concept of meaning making in his constructivist developmental study on the cognitive development of adult learners. In his work, Kegan frames a series of six developmental stages of consciousness that are developed over one's lifespan. These stages represent a shift between differentiation, or those stages founded in independence, and integration, or those stages which value inclusion; these six stages include: (0) incorporative; (1) impulsive; (2) imperial; (3) interpersonal; (4) institutional; and (5) interindividual (Kegan). Kegan's third position dealing of interpersonal is most applicable to the developmental readiness of undergraduate students when considering their cognitive, psychosocial and social identity development (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Acknowledging the significant impact the college environment has on students and their development, Kegan writes, "The experience of going away to college can provide a new evolutionary medium that recognizes and cultures the moves toward self-authorship and psychological autonomy which characterize the new balance" (pp. 185 – 186). The developmental process of meaning making is influenced by one's social environment; thus, the college environment provides

a magnitude of opportunities and critical influences to allow students the opportunity to make meaning towards self-authorship (Kegan, 1982; Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Discussing the intended outcomes for students attending college, Baxter Magolda (2001) outlines the expectation that they “integrate these ways of knowing, being and interacting with others into the capacity for self-authorship – the capacity to internally define their own beliefs, identity, and relationships” (p. xvi). The higher education scholars who wrote *Learning Reconsidered*, a joint document about student learning in higher education for the twenty-first century concur with Baxter Magolda. The authors (2004) wrote,

Meaning making comprises students’ efforts to comprehend the essence and significance of events, relationships, and learning; to gain a richer understanding of themselves in a larger context; to experience a sense of wholeness. Meaning making arises in a reflective connection between a person or individual and the wider world. (NASPA/ACPA, p. 17)

This focus on one’s internal process of making meaning has emerged as an important element of one’s experience in college. As a result, scholars (Abes, 2009; Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2007, 2009; Pizzolato, 2008; Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, & Podobnik, 2008) have investigated students’ meaning making within the context of higher education.

Expanding upon Kegan’s (1982) work, Baxter Magolda (2001) investigated the “journey” of self-authorship among young adults, aged 18 to their early thirties, through a longitudinal study involving 39 participants. Interested in understanding how their levels of consciousness were developed over their emerging adulthood, Baxter Magolda conducted interviews with her participants and found that their progression of meaning making moved from (1) following external formulas to (2) being at the crossroads to (3)

being the author of one's life to (4) internal foundations. This first stage of following external formulas was typically characterized by following scripts that had been outlined for them by others, such as parents or teachers, rather than one's internal desires (Baxter Magolda, 2001). However, the young adults soon experienced a dissonance with these scripts and found them to be largely unsatisfying (Baxter Magolda, 2001). As a result, they entered the crossroads, a period in which they realized that they needed to look inward to examine one's meaning and purpose as well as to understand their inner being (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Through this inner work, the young adults entered the third stage: being the author of one's life, which Baxter Magolda defines as "deciding what to believe, one's identity, and how to interact with others" (p. xix). The fourth stage of internal foundation comes from sustained self-authorship where the individual realizes that external influences can be useful yet managed (Baxter Magolda, 2001). For the participants in her study, their journey of self-authorship was dependent upon a movement from external to internal whereby they moved to a way of being, living and doing that exemplified interdependence, mutuality, and self-assurance (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Concurrent to the four stages, this process of self-authorship spanned three different dimensions of development: (1) the epistemological, or how we come to construct our knowledge; (2) the intrapersonal, or how we come to understand who we are as human beings; and (3) the interpersonal, or how we come to understand ourselves in connection with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

From her research, Baxter Magolda (2001) indicated that one's capacity for self-authorship progressed over the lifespan and that young adults made meaning in the stage in which they were in at that time. However, in her study of self-authorship of college

students, Pizzolato (2008) found that the young adults “appeared to have a range of epistemological orientations they could choose to use in meaning making” (p. 244). In fact, Pizzolato argues that students demonstrated greater fluidity in their selection of epistemologies due to the larger academic and personal contexts they were in at the time and their own role in making meaning. Often, this meant that they would not choose the more advanced levels of meaning making (Pizzolato, 2008). These findings are significant as it advances new knowledge of the greater complexities that college students have in making meaning. Pizzolato writes,

“How they make meaning in some settings – namely, academic settings – may not be representative of their most complex epistemological orientation. And what is more, students themselves are aware of the ways in which they purposefully choose to engage their more complex epistemological orientations or not, and this choice is based on consideration of their goals in particular contexts. (2008, pp. 245 – 246)

In some ways, Pizzolato’s findings of students using the range of self-authorship stages reinforces Kegan’s (1982) concept of evolutionary truces. Discussing his model as a helix and the dynamic nature of that image, Kegan states,

It makes clear that we move back and forth in our struggle with this lifelong tension; that our balances are slightly *imbalanced*. In fact, it is because each of these temporary balances is slightly imbalanced that each *is* temporary; each self is vulnerable to being tipped over. (1982, p. 108)

While the progression of self-authorship is important, it is also important to understand from Kegan and Pizzolato’s work that students engage in self-authorship and meaning making processes from various stages, not necessarily their most advanced one. This is also important as it relates to how one self-authors his multiple identities, especially in relation to this particular study.

Others studying college students and meaning making, Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004), Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, Podobnik, and Schaeffer (2008) and Abes and Jones (2004) explore how individuals from marginalized populations come to make meaning of their lived experiences. In their study of Latino/a students and how they come to make meaning of their ethnic identity, Torres and Baxter Magolda's findings echoed Baxter Magolda's (2001) work that stressed that the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive developmental domains converge with one another as a means to create opportunities for meaning making of one's identity. Pizzolato et al. used Torres and Baxter Magolda's work as a basis for an investigational mixed methods study investigating the correlation between ethnic identity, epistemological development, and academic achievement among a group of high achieving students of color. Their findings largely supported Torres and Baxter Magolda's findings; however, the researchers did find that the participants in their study, when reconstructing their ethnic identity, often did not have the developmental readiness to make meaning of their ethnic identity internally on their own (Pizzolato et al., 2008). The researchers noted that the students often were at the lower stages of self-authorship, such as external influences or crossroads; therefore, "to effectively cope with the ethnic identity challenges that they were experiencing, they needed more complex methods of meaning making than they had already developed," such as beginning to author one's lives or internal foundation (Pizzolato et al., 2008, p. 315). As a result, older peers served as vital resources for many of these students in order to help the younger students make meaning of their experiences; therefore, there was an increased reliance on external influences to assist with this meaning making process (Pizzolato et al., 2008).

The importance of cognitive dissonance as a means for an individual to make meaning in their lives has been supported by the research (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Pizzolato et al., 2008; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). In their research, Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) offer that cognitive dissonance occurred when the participants in their study moved away from the need for external influences in how they made meaning as they continued towards self-authorship. Often, this was experienced by students when the stereotypes of their ethnic identity that they subscribed to were challenged by others, especially those from within their same ethnic identity; as a result, these students had to hold the tension of how they had formerly seen their ethnic identity as well as this new way of viewing the world (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Ultimately, students had to make meaning of these identity tensions and resolve them as best they could (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Similar to the research on students of color making meaning of their ethnic identities, Abes and Jones (2004) explored the meaning making of lesbian college students. Adapting the work of Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (2001), Abes and Jones explored how 10 traditionally-aged (18 to 24 year old) undergraduate lesbians came to understand their multiple identities using the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) through narrative inquiry. Their findings indicated “that meaning-making structures act as filters between contextual influences and self-perceptions of the content of lesbian identity” (Abes & Jones, 2004, p. 624). Additionally, Abes and Jones found an important component of one’s meaning making, which was that,

As meaning-making grew more complex, the participants grew more capable of filtering contextual influences. This relationship between contextual influences,

meaning-making capacity, and college students' perceptions of their identity illuminates how multiple dimensions of identity are thought to interact and extends existing theories of sexual orientation identity development in a more integrated direction. (2004, p. 624)

Abes and Jones's work demonstrates that there was a connection between one's meaning making process of one's social identities within the context of the college environment; this connects to the larger purpose of this particular study in understanding how gay men come to make meaning of their sense of sexuality and gender during their college experience. The findings of Abes and Jones were critical also in influencing the reconceptualization of Jones and McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) and thus made a valuable contribution in understanding how one particular group (lesbians) of individuals within the LGBT community come to make meaning of their multiple identities. This was the first study of its kind to explore meaning making through the lens of sexual identity.

While Abes and Jones' (2004) findings were important to understanding the intersections of sexual identity and meaning making, their work was limited in scope to lesbian women. Thus, it would be incorrect to infer from their research that the meaning making process for gay men in college is the same for lesbian college students. While there are some overlaps in the identity development models for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998), the socialization of boys and young men may influence a difference in how boys and girls (or men and women) develop their sense of making meaning of their multiple identities. As a result, a significant gap in the literature remains on how gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities.

College Environment

Within the literature of student development theory, contextual influences have been shown to be important (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Erikson, 1980; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). The college environment is a particular salient context for student development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009) and serves as a particularly powerful place where young men give and receive messages about manhood and masculinity (Erikson, 1980; Harper & Harris, 2010a; Kimmel, 2008) and their sexual identity (Berila, 2011; D'Augelli, 1994; Dilley, 2010; Rhodes, 1997) during one of the most critical developmental periods of their lives. As a result, understanding the literature on the college environment is critical, especially in light of the purpose of this specific study, which is to understand how gay men in college make meaning of their multiple identities. In this section, I discuss two relevant developmental models that specifically deal with one's environment, Astin's (1970) I-E-O model and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological developmental model in helping us understand the influence of the college environment on students' growth and development. Additionally, I discuss the developmental factors of one's life, particularly those critical influences in the college environment that serve as key moments in one's development.

Astin's I-E-O model. The work of Alexander Astin (1970) and Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) provide unique insights into the role of the college environment and their influence on the development of students. Astin's I-E-O model is well known for introducing a discourse on the impact of the college environment on a student's growth and development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This model has three main components: (1) student inputs; (2) the college environment; and (3) student outputs (Astin, 1970). Student inputs are "the talents, skills, aspirations, and other

potentials for growth and learning that the new student brings with him to college” (Astin, 1970, pp. 2 – 3). These may include a student’s academic readiness or elements of personal identity, such as one’s gender or race (Astin, 1970). Astin defines college environment as “those aspects of the higher educational institution that are capable of affecting the student;” these may include “administrative policies and practices, curriculum, physical plant and facilities, teaching practices, peer associations, and other characteristics of the college environment” (p. 3). Finally, student outputs, according to Astin, “refers to the measures of the student’s achievements, knowledge, skills, values, attributes, aspirations, interests, and daily activities” (p. 2).

In his model, Astin (1970) indicates that the college environment is influenced by the students who attend the institution due to their inputs. Likewise, student outputs are the measurements of the college environment affecting the students and their development (Astin, 1970). Additionally, Astin posits that student outputs are also influenced by student inputs. This cyclical model helps provide insight into the role of the college environment on student learning and development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009). The aforementioned holistic student development theories indicate that the college environment is important to understanding the contexts in situating one’s development (Abes, 2009; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Next I discuss the importance of context and how Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological developmental theory adds further complexity to Astin’s concepts of input-environment-outputs and helps us to derive a clearer understanding of the different dimensions of individual, group, and systemic influences on one’s development.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological development model. Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological development model relates to Astin's (1970) model yet adds further dimensions with greater specificity to the individual, group, and systemic influences on a young person. Building upon Lewin's (1937) work on environmental impact on behavior, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model "is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 3). According to Bronfenbrenner,

the ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

Thus, the individual's development occurs within the context of his or her microsystem, the immediate environment he or she is in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In some ways, the microsystem is often in flux due to the fluidity of the environments in which we are a part (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, a child's microsystem could be his or her family home, his or her school, and so on. As a result, there is a certain level of fluidity within the microsystem. The mesosystem is understood to be the interactions occurring between different contexts of one's life; for example, the context of one's family and one's peers serves as a mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, the macrosystem involves the systemic context of which one is a part, such as one's cultural group or one's country of origin (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Each of the three levels – the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the macrosystem – work together to reinforce certain socialized messages that contribute to one's development and sense of self (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of this would be the cultural notion of heteronormativity, a concept previously discussed in this chapter. At

the macrosystem, heteronormativity reinforces on a systemic level that heterosexuality is the norm within U.S. society and plays a critical role in oppression for an individual who identifies as non-heterosexual. Often, the mesosystem, such as one's family, peers, or church communities, reinforces these heteronormative notions on an individual, exemplified by family structures, an emphasis on opposite-sex attraction in the media, and many other examples. At the microsystem level, these notions of heteronormativity are felt on a deeply personal level and reinforced in one's immediate environment, such as one's home with the enforcement of rigid gender and sexuality norms by family, or one's college with faculty, staff, and peers often holding the assumption that everyone is heterosexual or through programs that are heteronormative, such as campus dances or dating games. As with the previous example, a significant contribution of Bronfenbrenner's work is that the individual is at the central focus of the theory yet the various contexts affecting his or her development are also contributing factors in his or her life.

Developmental factors in one's life. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work highlights the developmental factors or contexts that are important in one's life. Often these environmental systems can include one's family, peers, media, church, and schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These various factors serve as agents of socialization throughout one's life reinforcing messages from generation to generation. In his work, Kimmel (2008) highlights the powerful influence that many of these factors have on the development of college men, whether positive or negative. For example, as young people move into emerging adulthood, adults lose their influence on young people and instead one's peers and the media become the central figures as agents of socialization (Kimmel,

2010b). One's peers ultimately reinforce messages that are bound in hegemony and patriarchy and serve as a sort of "gender police" where they reward individuals for meeting gender norms and punish those who do not (Kimmel, 2008). As a result, industry capitalizes on this failure on the part of peers, and young people are targeted – and in fact, bombarded – with messages about gender and sexuality (Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2010; Kimmel, 2008). For example, the average American teenager – aged thirteen to eighteen – spends approximately two hours a day playing some type of video game whether on a computer, handheld device, or gaming system; that represents a fraction of their general use of electronic media (Kimmel, 2008). This use of media, as one example, reinforces certain notions and messages, typically those that are loaded with hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, to young adults whereby the messages play a role in these individuals' lives. Bronfenbrenner states, "An ecological orientation is interactive and very much in this world: in it, development involves making the world one's own and becoming a person in the process" (p. 289). This connects back to Kegan's (1982) work on meaning making and consciousness and his concept of an individual as an "embeddual." Kegan argues an individual is embedded within one's holding environment. Thus, one cannot separate his or her context of self from that embedded culture; therefore, a person is both an individual and an embeddual (Kegan, 1982). Kegan's work, while not named as such, is discussing a nested system similar to Bronfenbrenner's theory. Each of these systems connects to one another in dynamic ways and ultimately contributes towards an individual's development and growth.

Critical influences in college. Related to the notion of developmental factors, critical influences are understood to be those experiences (e.g., events or places) or

individuals who are significant to others, similar to the way in which Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the relationships that influence a person's development within the microsystem. In her work with lesbian college students, A. Stevens (1997) uses the term critical influences to understand how the college environment affected these students' development, with particular regard to their lesbian identity development. These critical influences serve as significant events, people, or relationships that have an impact on one's development (A. Stevens), and these factors contribute greatly to one's development within their immediate environment, which is Bronfenbrenner's concept of the microsystem.

Other related studies have used different terminology for critical influences. In fact, other scholars (Daloiz Parks, 2011; Kimmel, 2008; R. Stevens, 2004) have used the term "critical incidents" to capture those experiences of participants that were key moments or mile markers in one's life and development. In his study of gay men on campus, R. Stevens (2004) discusses critical incidents as significant experiences for gay men and their gay identity development within the context of colleges and universities. Additionally, Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) use the language of "movement points" or those moments in one's meaning making process where a student has an experience which allows them greater understanding of complexities.

Critical influences have been used widely within the literature on identity development (Edwards, 2007; Helms, 1993, 1995; A. Stevens, 1997; R. Stevens, 2004). This concept has been particularly helpful in allowing higher education professionals to have greater insights into those experiences during college that may be powerful in one's identity development, including college men (Edwards, 2007), gay men (R. Stevens,

2004), lesbians (A. Stevens, 1997), ethnic identity (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004), and racial identity (Helms, 1993, 1995). While Baxter Magolda (2001) and Daloz Parks (2000, 2011) have identified critical influences that impact college students and the development of their self-authorship and faith, respectively, there has been very little research that has been completed to understanding how critical influences serve a bridge to the meaning making of one's multiple identity development, which is another gap in the literature that this study aims to address. However, it is important to understand further the literature that exists on college environment as a context for the development of gay men.

The college environment for gay men. As previously mentioned, R. Stevens (2004) examined how critical incidents and influences affected gay men's sexual identity development in college. Relationships with family, other students and staff, locations of "safe spaces" on campus and in the surrounding community, affirming symbols and signs within the campus community, and stereotypes and discrimination were all environmental influences that arose from the conversations with gay men in R. Stevens' study. Among these gay men, the elements of trust and safety were positively associated to the security one felt in his sexual orientation identity as it related to his surroundings (R. Stevens, 2004). However, personal experiences of discrimination or hearing stories of discrimination happening within the community from their peers had a significant weight on the men's feelings about their place and inclusion on campus (R. Stevens, 2004). In essence, the gay men in R. Stevens' study highlight the fact that institutions of higher education are largely set within hegemonic and patriarchic systems. Other scholars (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Renn, 2010)

support R. Stevens' findings and outline that gay men as well as their lesbian, bisexual, and transgender peers experience feelings of isolation, exclusion, and fear of discrimination at times at colleges and universities because they do not meet the traditional gender norms and expectations.

Institutions of higher education play a significant role in the development of all students; however, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students have unique challenges within that environment that play a role in their overall development. In their research, Gonyea and Moore (2007) found that colleges and universities have both positive and negative influences on LGBT students. Using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE), the researchers analyzed responses from 839 LGBT-identified students and found that 49% of those respondents characterized themselves as "more out" with 51% of their peers claiming to be "less out" (Gonyea & Moore, 2007). The findings of this study demonstrated that the LGBT students who were "more out" reported higher levels of student engagement with activities associated with "enriching educational experiences," such as research and internship experiences, study abroad, and participating in multicultural competency coursework and opportunities (Gonyea & Moore, 2007). Additionally, LGBT students appeared to report more frequent contact and interactions with faculty members than their straight peers (Gonyea & Moore, 2007). However, LGBT students who were "less out" categorized their campus climate as unsupportive, especially compared to their "more out" LGBT and "straight" peers (Gonyea & Moore, 2007). This research takes up Renn's (2010) challenge that researchers, especially those related to understanding behaviors, attitudes, and influences

within the higher education context, include sexual orientation identity as a demographic variable to allow for new insights into LGBT students' experiences.

The college environment continues to be an important holding environment where individuals continue to explore their sense of self through identity (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2010a). To this, Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) state that colleges and universities must meet the imperative to allow for one's examination and exploration of identity in order for these students to "construct an internal sense of identity and their own belief systems. It is through these new perspectives that students can reconstruct their worldview to be more complex, integrated, and inclusive" (p. 343). Thus, opportunities and spaces for individuals to engage in meaningful consideration of what identity means for them as applied to their own sense of self, especially for gay men (R. Stevens, 2004).

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I present an extensive discussion of the literature that informs this study on how gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their gender and sexuality. Scholarship on college student development theory, specifically gay identity (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; Rhodes, 1997) and male identity (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards, 2007; Harper & Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2006, 2008, 2010; Laker & Davis, 2011), largely inform higher education professionals' insights on these two populations. However, it is understood that there is overlap between one's gay identity and one's male identity; thus, the literature on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995) and multiple identity development (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) provide valuable insights on how

college students bridge their multiple social identities together. Additionally, Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) work on intersectional perspectives of student development theory includes the valuable component of one's meaning making process (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008; Kegan, 1982; Pizzolato, 2008). Making meaning of one's identities is critical to one's holistic sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2009a). It is also important to understand that one's environment has an influence on this meaning making process (Kegan, 1982); thus, understanding the critical influences (Edwards, 2007; Kimmel, 2008; Parks, 2011; A. Stevens, 1997; R. Stevens, 2004) within the higher education environment and how that helps or hinders a college student's development is important. In fact, key environmental factors, such as fraternity life, athletics and sports, and media play a significant role in a college man's well-being (Harper & Harris, 2010a, 2010b; Harper, Harris & Mmeje, 2010; Harris, 2008; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Kimmel, 2008). Narrowing the scope to gay and bisexual men on campus, environmental influences still play a role in these men's development, but with some specific factors towards their sexuality, including finding allies in a support network, access to safe spaces on campus, and other important needs (R. Stevens, 2004; Wilkerson, Ross & Brooks, 2009).

However, much of the attention within the research that currently exists has been highly fractured into social identities rather than an intersectional approach that provides further context to understanding how power and privilege interweave with one another to provide a holistic sense of self on individual, group, and systemic levels (Abes, 2009; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2009a; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, the literature on ecological development models (Astin, 1970; Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

provides an important perspective that context matters. Through the literature on the college environment, it is understood that a college student's development is shaped and informed by one's environment in critical ways. If our goal as higher education professionals is to help students develop personally and academically, it is critical that we understand how our students navigate that developmental process. In a time where young men who are identifying themselves as gay or bisexual are committing suicide because they are being harassed or feel burdened by their true sexual identity, it is essential that higher education professionals come to understand all of those intersections that create our unique selves. By understanding the environmental influences and factors that help a young man make meaning of his sexuality and masculinity, we may be that much closer to having a more complete picture of his true self. To understand that picture, I outline a research methodology in the next chapter that aims to explore how gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of sexuality and masculinities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how gay men in college come to understand and make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sexual orientation and masculinities, and qualitative methodology, specifically constructivist grounded theory, was used. In this chapter, I provide an overview of constructivist grounded theory, discuss site and sample selection and data analysis, and provide information regarding trustworthiness and researcher reflexivity.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to construct meaning from data collected by synthesizing through coding, building categories from those codes, and continuously testing those categories as aspects of theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed the use of grounded theory in the mid-twentieth century as a viable means for systematic qualitative analysis in order to address the critique from quantitative scholars that qualitative research methods lacked rigor and validity. “Glaser and Strauss aimed to move qualitative inquiry beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks, thereby providing abstract, conceptual understandings of the studied phenomena” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6). While Glaser and Strauss outlined several specific components of grounded theory, such as the use of codes, analytical memos, and reflexive practices by the researcher, contemporary thinking on grounded theory suggests that it can be understood as “a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” (Charmaz, p. 9). Charmaz (2006) suggests that there are two families of grounded theory that exist: constructivist grounded theory and objectivist grounded

theory. Objectivist grounded theory comes out of the traditional grounded theory literature proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This grounded theory approach stems from the positivist tradition that “attends to data as real in and of themselves and does not attend to the processes of their production” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). As a result, the data are discovered by the researcher and then the theory emerges from the data; the process of how the researcher found the data or made meaning of it to create the theory is not a concern of objectivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additionally, there is very little regard for the contextual elements of the data as evidenced by the advocacy within traditional grounded theory to collect data prior to conducting the literature review (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Conversely, constructivist grounded theory places an emphasis on the phenomenon being studied through the gathering and analysis of data through the relationships and experiences between the researcher and the participants (Charmaz, 2006). Likewise, constructivist grounded theory “means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them – *and* locating oneself in these realities” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). Thus, the researcher must be conscious about his or her positionality and be reflexive throughout the research process to process their interpretations of the data and their analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theorists take into consideration the systemic aspects of social contexts in which data are collected (Charmaz, 2006). For example, for this proposed study, one’s identity as a gay man is layered within certain systems, including his family, his university, his city, and his country. Each of these systems plays a role in how he negotiates his identity; likewise, he is also rewarded and/or punished within those systems based upon his

identity of being a gay man. The constructivist approach to grounded theory allows for further examination of the social contexts in which people live that then informs the larger theory.

Charmaz (2005) argues that constructivist grounded theory can be a useful tool in understanding research relating to social justice. Since the participants of this study were gay men, a marginalized community, the data collected from the men through in-depth interviews as well as interactive activities regarding their social identities give voice to their experiences while taking into consideration the social milieu in which they are a part. Also, my own interactions with the participants and the relationships built through our joining together influenced our mutual learning and allowed me to help them understand their experiences as well. Likewise, a parallel process emerged for me throughout the study in the role of researcher from my positionality as a gay man, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Since this study's foundation is based on one's social identities, a constructivist grounded theory approach was most appropriate as a means to explore this work. In this chapter, I discuss how this methodology has been incorporated throughout this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study is to understand how gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their gender or sense of masculinity and their sexuality. In an effort to address this, three main research questions underpin this study, which are (a) how do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years, (b) in what ways do gender,

sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men, and (c) what are the critical influences during college on gay men's meaning-making process?

Sampling Strategies and Criteria

Constructivist grounded theory, like any qualitative method, requires the researcher to use purposeful sampling techniques as a means of identifying participants who have in-depth experience with the phenomena under study (Patton, 2002). Within this study, I used open, maximum variation and discriminate sampling. In the next section, I will provide an overview of how these sampling strategies were used.

Open sampling. Traditionally, theoretical sampling is used within grounded theory to select participants who will best explore the chosen phenomenon or condition of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open sampling was used as an initial technique to obtain participants. Open sampling allows for access to “those persons, places, situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I used open sampling by providing individuals at each of the three research sites the opportunity to complete the online participation demographic survey, which included questions regarding their personal contact information; identity demographics, such as gender, sexual orientation, and race; and their involvement on-campus. I will discuss this survey more in-depth later in this chapter. Based upon the number of possible participants, maximum variation sampling was then used to narrow down the participants from the initial opening sampling strategy.

Maximum variation sampling. Since grounded theory is meant to discover something new about a phenomenon, maximum variation sampling allows for the

flexibility needed to find individuals who represent the widest range possible amongst those who participate in the online survey (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). There is very little research that has been done on gay men and meaning making of their multiple identities; as a result, maximum variation sampling assists in uncovering information about a population or phenomenon that is not understood well (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). One's campus involvement, including but not limited to fraternity member, student-athlete, performing artist, or peer educator, and social identity groups, especially race and religion became the most significant factors in this study of maximum variation sampling. Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasize the importance of finding multiple perspectives amongst participants within grounded theory. In an attempt to follow traditional guidelines for grounded theory research, the study's participants were not pre-determined from the start of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Initially, three men from each institution were chosen in an effort to include specific factors involved within the study, including race, extra-curricular involvement, and religious background. These men were the first three men to respond fully to the participant demographic survey, and they were each from a different campus and had different experiences in terms of campus involvement at their respective institutions.

Discriminate sampling. After those initial participants had been selected, discriminate sampling was employed as the study progressed to select additional participants at each of the three research sites whose backgrounds, either their social identities or their campus involvement, were different than previous participants in an effort to test assumptions of the initial theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) highlight that discriminate sampling is a helpful strategy to assist with the

constant comparative method used within grounded theory research. The use of discriminate sampling helped add necessary richness and depth to test the initial theory.

Identifying Participants

During the summer of 2011, I met with the advisors to the LGBT student organizations at each of the research sites to discuss my research and ask for their assistance in distributing the link to the online participant demographic survey to their students. I had previously established relationships with two of these individuals: one was a work colleague when I had worked at California University, Oceanside (pseudonym) and the other, who worked at Oceanside State University (pseudonym), was working on his Master's degree at St. Andrew's University (pseudonym), the university where I was doing my doctoral work. The third individual was the faculty advisor to the LGBT student organization at St. Andrew's University, and my dissertation chair introduced me to her. Each of those individuals forwarded out an e-mail invitation (see Appendix A) that included the link to the survey to their students via organization e-mail list-serves and newsletters.

Through my professional networks, I also knew colleagues who worked in student affairs administration at each of the three research sites, and I provided them the e-mail invitation (see Appendix A) and asked them to forward the information to any students with whom they worked who might fit the research study criteria. Additionally, I utilized Facebook as a means of sending out the online survey link as well by posting information about the research study and the link on each of the university's LGBT student organization's page. I also created my own Facebook page about my research (see Appendix J) and purchased an online advertising campaign for two weeks in September

2011 targeting gay-identified individuals between 18 and 23 living within the metropolitan San Juan Miguel area.

Sample Size

Throughout the late summer and fall semester, individuals completed the online survey to determine whether they met the research study criteria. 34 students accessed and completed the survey link, which included identifying information, such as the student's name, cell phone number, and e-mail address. 31 out of 34 surveys were completed in full; however, one student completed the survey twice. Out of the 30 remaining respondents, 7 did not meet the specified research criteria that will be outlined later in this chapter. Based upon the discriminate sampling used within the study, I contacted 21 of the men via e-mail (see Appendix C) to invite them to participate in the interview phase of the study. The two individuals not invited to participate had similar racial and student involvement demographics compared to several of the participants who had previously been interviewed; as a result, I chose to interview other men who provided different demographic backgrounds that had not yet been represented in the study. 20 men responded to the invitation to interview. However, three men, each from a different research site, ended their participation in the study following the first interview; thus, their data were not used. Two of the men e-mailed to inform me that they would no longer be able to participate after several attempts of contacting them to schedule their second interview. One never returned e-mails or phone calls from me in an attempt to schedule his second interview. A table of the study's 17 participants is included below, including some key demographic information, including their campus affiliation, year in school, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic status.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Class Year</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Socioeconomic Status</u>
Brandon	22	OSU	Senior	White	Christian*/Atheist	Middle class
Bryan	23	CUO	Alum	White (1/4 Mexican)	N/A	Upper middle class
Charles	21	SAU	Junior	Cambodian	Buddhist	Working class
Craig	21	CUO	Senior	Filipino	Christian	Working class
Jonathan	22	CUO	Senior	White	Catholic*	Upper class
Kevin	20	CUO	Junior	Biracial (Irish & Japanese)	Agnostic	Middle class
Landon	23	CUO	Senior	Taiwanese	Christian	Working class
Luke	21	SAU	Senior	White	Catholic	Upper class
Marc	21	SAU	Senior	White	Christian*	Middle class
Mason	21	OSU	Senior	Filipino	Agnostic	Working class
Matt	20	OSU	Junior	Filipino	Christian	Working class
Nate	21	SAU	Junior	White	Atheist/Self-Contemplative	Middle class
Peter	21	SAU	Senior	White	Catholic*	Upper class
Robert	22	OSU	Alum	Latino/Hispanic	Christian*/Buddhist	Working class
Sean	22	SAU	Senior	White	N/A	Upper middle class
Victor	22	OSU	Alum	Biracial (Greek & Mexican)	Greek Orthodox*	Middle class
Will	21	SAU	Senior	Biracial (White & Mexican)	N/A	Upper middle class

* Represents a shift from observing one's family's religious affiliation to one's own spiritual practices (or lack thereof).

Research Settings

The setting of this research study was limited to the metropolitan area of San Juan Miguel, California and three of the major universities located there. (San Juan Miguel is a pseudonym used for a metropolitan city in Southern California.) San Juan Miguel has a thriving and vibrant LGBT population, including the Danby neighborhood affectionately known as the “gayborhood,” and it has many available community resources, including but not limited to the San Juan Miguel LGBT Community Center and its annual Pride festival. This made San Juan Miguel a useful and convenient site to explore the

experiences of gay men as it related to their lived experiences in college. An overview of the three institutions, using pseudonyms for each, involved in this study is provided.

Oceanside State University. Founded in 1897, Oceanside State University (OSU) is a public institution and has a Carnegie status of RU/H Research University – High Research Activity. With over 85 Bachelor’s degree programs, OSU is home to 25,714 undergraduate students at their main campus in the College neighborhood of San Juan Miguel with another 657 located at a satellite campus 150 miles east of San Juan Miguel. The incoming first-time freshman average high school grade point average (GPA) is 3.62 as of Fall 2011 with an average SAT score of 1080.

Overall, there are more women students (57.3%) than men (42.7%). The institution ranks 25th in the nation for racial diversity. White students are the largest racial group on campus at 37.8%, followed by Mexican Americans at 23.3%, then Filipino (7.1%), Other Hispanic (5.3%), Multiple Ethnicities (4.1%), African American (4.0%), and Asian (4.0%).

OSU is home to over 200 student organizations as well as 45 fraternities and sororities on campus, both social and cultural. The list of fraternities at OSU also includes Delta Lambda Phi, a progressive fraternity for gay, bisexual and straight men, which is open to any college student within the metropolitan San Juan Miguel area. OSU student-athletes compete within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I sports.

OSU maintains a Cross Cultural Center for underrepresented students on campus, and just this year, added an LGBT Resource Center to its services, staffed by a graduate student and student volunteers. The campus also has an active Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

and Transgender Student Union and Safe Zones program. The institution also made national news in Fall 2011 when it approved an LGBT Studies major for undergraduate students and became the second institution in the United States and the first public university to do so.

California University, Oceanside. With 23,046 total undergraduates, the California University, Oceanside (CUO), a public university, has a RU/VR Research University – Very High Research Activity Carnegie classification. CUO was established in 1960 and while a younger university, *U.S. News & World Report's* 2012 Best College Guidebook named the University the 8th best public university in the nation. Undergraduate students at CUO are assigned to one of six undergraduate colleges, which have their own graduation and core curriculum requirements. In Fall 2011, 93% of the entering first-year class lived on campus as all first-time, first-year students are guaranteed campus housing. The average high school GPA for incoming students in Fall 2011 was 3.96 and the average SAT score was 1233.

The gender statistics of undergraduates at CUO are relatively close with women being 50.5% of the total population and men making up 49.5%. In terms of race and ethnicity demographics, Asians are largest undergraduate population on campus at 44.0%, not including Filipinos at 4.4%. This is followed by White students at 24.2%, Mexican-Americans at 12.1%, 9.5% Other/Undeclared, 3.4% Latino/Other Spanish and African-Americans at 1.9%. Most undergraduates of CUO come from within California (90.5%) while 3.0% come from out-of-state and 6.6% are foreign students.

CUO has over 350 student organizations as well as 20 sororities and 16 fraternities on campus. The University provides LGBT students with a nationally-

recognized LGBT Resource Center that is staffed by three full-time professional staff members and a large group of student volunteers. There is a wide array of programs and student organizations for LGBT students – including a student-facilitated and led men's group as well as organizations that look at various intersections of social identities and sexualities, such as Queer People of Color (QPOC).

St. Andrew's University. Originally created as two separate schools in 1949, then known the College for Women and the College for Men and School of Law, the St. Andrew's University (SAU) was created in 1972 by the merger of these two colleges. A private, Roman Catholic-affiliated institution, SAU has a total student population of 8,317, with 5,493 of these being undergraduates. SAU's Carnegie classification is a DRU – Doctoral Research University. Entering freshmen in Fall 2011 had a high school GPA of 3.89 and the average SAT score was 1220. 96% of all first-year students in the Fall 2011 class live on-campus.

As of Fall 2011, women outnumbered men, 55% to 45%. A predominantly White institution (57% of undergraduates are White), 17% of the student population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, 5% as two or more races, 5% as Asian, and 2% as Black or African American. 52% of first-year students were from California. Out of the entire first-year class, 49% identified themselves to be Catholic.

SAU has 17 NCAA Division I teams, 5 national fraternities and 6 national sororities. The campus is also home to students participating in Army and Navy ROTC programs. The University has PRIDE, the undergraduate LGBT and straight ally student organization, and also PRIDE Law, an LGBT student organization for students in the Law School. Additionally, students, faculty, and staff may also participate in Rainbow

Educators, a group of trained volunteers who serve as community educators on LGBT issues and concerns, and Safe Space training programs.

Participant Selection

Since this research study examines college students of particular identity groups, a set of research study criteria was established. The criteria include:

- Born and raised biologically male
- Self-identify as “gay”
- Have junior or senior status or be a recent graduate (no more than 1 year out) from the participating universities
- Be over 18 years of age
- Be “out” to friends and family (in essence, live life as an openly gay man)

Amongst the participants, the open sampling strategies allowed for a diverse group of possible participants. The pool of individuals from each institution included individuals from multiple racial and ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as campus involvement affiliations and engagement. It was my initial assumption that each of these factors is important to consider as an additional construct that may either help or hinder one’s ability to make meaning of his gender and sexuality within college. Men, especially gay men, receive a wide array of socialized messages from those aforementioned specific communities. For instance, gay men often find athletics, especially team sports (Anderson, 2002; Messner, 2002), and traditional fraternal organizations (Kimmel, 2008; Rhoads, 2010) to be hostile environments; therefore, individuals participating in these campus experiences may have a very different sense of self than their peers involved in more affirming groups. Likewise, campus climate for

LGBT students has a potential impact on gay men and their development (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010); as a result, the distinct services and resources for LGBT students previously mentioned in this chapter may have an effect on the men in this study.

Since I was investigating the gay male experience, bisexual men or transgender or transsexual men were not invited to participate. It should be noted that at least one trans-identified male did contact me during the recruitment process indicating a strong desire to participate; the conversation between he and I was important in continuing to think about the importance of understanding the transgender male experience and their multiple social identities as well. But for the purposes of this study, I explained to him that his participation was not appropriate as this study was narrowed to include only the experience of birthsex males for a host of reasons, but most importantly, that the socialization a biological male experiences is significantly different compared to that of a transgender gay man.

I chose to include participants who were near the end of their college experience or who have recently graduated from college to provide richer insights based upon the length of time they attended their respective institution. Lastly, being “out” and openly gay was an important characteristic required for participation in this study, as it allowed participants to provide a richer perspective about the evolution of their sexual identity as compared with individuals who may still be in the process of understanding their sexual identity. Since the purpose of this study is to understand meaning making across multiple identities, it was helpful for participants to be able to speak about all aspects of their identities to the best of their abilities.

Prior to the submission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application at the St. Andrew's University (SAU) in May 2011, I received documentation from the Vice President of Student Affairs from Oceanside State University (OSU) and the California University, Oceanside (CUO) indicating support for my study and conducting research with their students on their campuses. These letters were included in the IRB application for SAU. SAU's IRB office approved this study in June 2011, and invitations for participation were submitted thereafter.

Data Collection

Throughout the study, I used a variety of means to collect data from the participants. Key to this work was honoring the participants' stories; as a result, I interviewed each man twice and also asked the men to respond to 11 journal prompts that I provided them (see Appendix G). During our first interview, I also engaged the men in an activity using the Model of Multiple Dimension of Identity as a methodology (see Appendix E). The men were also invited to a focus group in the spring where the initial model and the themes from the findings were presented. Lastly, I kept a research log and field notes throughout the study, which were used as data as well. Within this section, I expand on my data collection efforts in more detail.

After participants had completed the online demographic survey, I contacted those participants who met the research study criteria via e-mail to invite them to participate in the interview phase of the study. Included in that e-mail was an offer to meet with each of the participants for an introductory meeting to discuss the research, answer any of their questions and begin building rapport. Since this research focuses on topics that are often seen as taboo or are not discussed frequently, this initial meeting

provided an opportunity for participants to feel more comfortable with me as the researcher and for increased openness during subsequent interviews (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Only one student took me up on this offer, and we met for a forty-five minute time period at a coffee shop off-campus to answer his questions. It should be noted that this student was, in fact, a former student with whom I had worked with through a leadership development program I coordinated while working at the California University, Oceanside. From our conversation, it was clear that he viewed the meeting as an opportunity to get his questions answered about what he would be asked to do throughout the study, but also to ensure that what he shared would be kept confidential, especially in light of our past history and the shared relationships with other professionals as well as students we had together.

Likewise, in my initial meeting with each of the participants I discussed my own identity as an openly gay man who has worked as a student affairs administrator for the past ten years during our first meeting. Then, throughout the interview process, I would share small parts of my own life as appropriate as a means of reciprocity and mutuality. This would occur through sharing some anecdotes about my own experiences of coming out, my involvement within the LGBT community within San Juan Miguel or just casual mentions of different aspects of my life being openly gay, including the friendships I had or having an intimate relationship with another man. Being open about my sexual orientation with participants allowed a sense of mutuality of our lived experiences as gay men and provided the opportunity to build rapport and trust leading to the ability to discuss deeply personal topics for the men (Anderson, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Pascoe, 2008; Patton, 2011).

Each participant was interviewed twice. With the exception of one of the participants, all interviews were conducted in person. The interviews with one of the participants, Robert, were conducted via Skype as he was studying abroad in Beijing, China during data collection. The first interviews ranged between forty-six minutes to an hour and forty minutes in length; the second interviews were significantly shorter with the shortest being twenty-eight minutes and the longest being an hour and forty minutes. Most of the second interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Most of the participants were interviewed within a span of two months during the Fall 2011 semester. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D) was utilized for all interviews.

General topics covered within the interview guide were life history background questions regarding four main areas: one's sexual identity, one's sense of masculinity and/or gender, the intersections of one's multiple identities, and the critical influences on one's development in college. These questions were useful since identity development is an evolving and dynamic process and there are many potential factors and experiences that influence development (Evans, Forney, Guito, Patton, & Renn, 2009). Understanding how one's identity has shifted over time, especially during one's college years, was helpful in providing context for participants' experiences. Additional questions about participants' experiences (if any) of critical incidents, (e.g., specific programs, classes, or student involvement opportunities, such as leadership positions) or events (e.g., attending a party, coming out to peers or family) during college that affected either of those identities or their possible intersections were also asked in an effort to further understand how college has had an impact on the participants' development. A semi-structured approach lent itself well to this study by allowing me to have a set of

questions to use as a guide while also maintaining flexibility to probe participants on topics that arose during the interviews (Patton, 2002).

In addition to the semi-structured interview process, during our initial meeting, participants were also led through an interactive activity to describe their social and personal identities using the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Participants were given a worksheet of the MMDI (see Appendix E) and asked to indicate the saliency of their multiple social identities on the rings around the core nucleus of one's self. The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) was created as a framework to be used to understand how college students made meaning of their multiple social identities. As a result of this activity, a pictorial representation emerged of how each participant viewed themselves in relation to their various social identities, as well as the saliency of those identities. This snapshot of their multiple identities gave greater specificity to how the participants in this study viewed themselves, which in turn assisted in understanding the complexities of multiple identities.

The use of journaling as an additional qualitative method was used. Also known as elicited text, journaling as an additional form of data collection allows for further insights from participants about certain experiences, insights, and thoughts about certain phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Glesne, 2006). These prompts were also created in an attempt for triangulating the data from the participants as well (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002), which will be discussed later in this chapter. All participants were asked to respond to eleven different journal prompts (see Appendix G) between their first and second interviews. These prompts asked the men questions that were similar to the larger

interview categories of masculinity, sexual orientation, intersections of identities as well as campus environments and cultures. 16 out of the 17 men in the study completed these journal prompt responses, which were then coded within the data analysis. These journals were used as additional information gathered from participants regarding their meaning making process.

Asking participants to journal during this period of data collection provided the opportunity for participants to reveal insights to questions that may be embarrassing or difficult to answer during an in-person interview (Charmaz, 2006). As previously mentioned, this study's emphasis on understanding how gay men in college come to make meaning of their sexuality and masculinities included particularly sensitive and difficult-to-discuss moments of their lives, including but certainly not limited to experiences of sex and intimacy with others, feelings of inadequacy, or risky behaviors. Journaling allowed the participants of this particular study a venue to provide additional information to me as the researcher in a way that may have been more comfortable for them than revealing certain information in a face-to-face interview, especially when discussing vulnerable or difficult topics or issues (Charmaz, 2006; Glesne, 2006). However, it must be noted that most of the journal responses just reiterated data the participants had disclosed during the interview process. Very little new data stemmed from the journal portion of the study; instead, the journals served as a means of triangulation of the interview data.

The final aspect of data collection was a focus group with the participants in February 2012. All of the study participants were invited to participate in the focus group. Out of the 17 total participants, eight of the men gathered and were presented the

initial theory and major themes that emerged from data analysis. By presenting the study's findings, including the emergent theory, to the participants (see Appendix H), I was able to gather additional input and feedback regarding my interpretations of the data (Glesne, 2006). Conducting a focus group was a useful strategy to obtain data from a large group of participants in a short period of time (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002).

Among the men participating in the focus group, there was an exploration of "the nature and effects of ongoing social discourse in ways that are not possible through individual interviews or observations" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 902). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis's point is particularly important when acknowledging that the participants' individual experiences and stories are unique to themselves yet the theory that emerges out of the collective may bring up further discourse and dialogue around how gay men in college have made meaning of their multiple identities. The men attending the focus group demonstrated this developmental change in discourse when grappling with some of the significant themes within study. Each of the men were able to share significant aspects of their lived experiences as it relates to their social identities, but in meaningful ways in community with one another. In essence, this focus group may have served as a specific developmental intervention to help these men continue to elevate their individual sense of meaning making.

Lastly, throughout the study, I kept a research journal and field notes. After each interview, I would make notes to myself about questions that I still had as well as general comments about connections that I was making to other men's experiences. At times, I also would use that space to freewrite about different aspects that the men's stories brought up for me, including emotions I was feeling and memories that their stories

triggered. As previously discussed, my own positionality as a gay man was important within this research, and often times, I found the men's stories compelling and used the journal as a space to debrief those moments of meaning making for myself. Additionally, as I moved into data analysis, I was often jotting analytical memos (Charmaz, 2006) to make connections between codes and providing insight on what certain codes meant. Lastly, as I moved to theoretical coding, I began to draw as a means of building the emergent theory. Using colored markers and large newsprint paper, I connected writing and drawing together as a means of exploring different dimensions of analysis. For instance, I would connect different categories together written out with shapes or drawings. In essence, I was engaging in constant comparison, a concept important to grounded theory where the data is examined from all angles until the data reaches saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All of the research journal and the subsequent conceptual maps/drawings were coded, and analyzed for use in this study.

Data Analysis

Each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim. Those transcripts as well as the journals were analyzed and coded. Initial open and "in vivo coding," which honors the voice of the participant by using codes directly from their actual language, were used as first level coding strategies (Saldaña, 2010). Both of these coding strategies are appropriate for grounded theory methods as they provide insight about one's process or a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2010). Axial and theoretical coding were used as a second and third level coding strategy. Axial coding assisted in narrowing down the codes from all data obtained from interviews, the participants' journals, and my research log, which included analytical memos, to create larger categories (Saldaña,

2010). At the same time, theoretical coding expanded upon the axial coding to create the skeletal framework of the overall theory by examining the relationships between established categories with one another to ultimately move the data towards theory (Saldaña, 2010).

Trustworthiness

As with all qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the research is dependent upon the researcher (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). For my part, I have used several different means to ensure trustworthiness of the study's findings. Through the use of participant journals, the exploration of the initial theory within the focus group, the discourse within the peer debriefing team, I attempted to limit my own biases as the researcher and triangulate data. Next, I discuss how I ensure trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Focus group. As previously discussed, the use of a focus group within the research design served as means for triangulation of the data. The focus group also allowed for member checking of the participants' experiences (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Rather than having each participant review their interview transcripts, their participation in the focus group allowed for them to verify (or disagree with) the themes that emerged from the aggregate. Through the feedback gathered during the focus group, the initial model of the theory was altered in some minor ways to represent the participants' experiences more closely.

Peer debriefing. In conjunction with my work, I used a peer debriefing team to assist me in looking at the data. My peer debriefing team consisted of three individuals: one, a White, straight, Catholic man, who is a colleague within my doctoral program who

also serves as an administrator in University Ministry at the St. Andrew's University; another, a White, straight, Catholic man, who works in student activities and fraternity and sorority life at an institution in Northern California and who I had formerly supervised at an institution on the East Coast; and another, a White, transgender-identified individual, who is a doctoral student at an institution in the Midwest who has a strong interest in gender and sexuality who formerly served as the chair of an international higher education organization's men and masculinities affinity group. Each of these individuals is well versed in the literature on masculinity and sexuality. The peer debriefing team reviewed the interview transcripts and journal responses and was asked to look for major themes that stood out from the data. During conversations with the team, we compared the categories and themes that had emerged for me through my data analysis with the themes that they identified.

In many ways, the peer debriefing team served as external auditors for my work. This method of auditing allowed for further testing of the theoretical model by those external to the research, contributed to the trustworthiness of the research, and assisted in the concept of reflexivity, which is the process by which a researcher examines one's biases and subjectivity, understands one's positionality in terms of sociopolitical consciousness, and why one makes meaning of the data the way that one does (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Charmaz (2006) highlights the importance of reflexivity when engaged in constructivist grounded theory methodology as constructivists may bring their own presupposed assumptions into the analysis of the work. Therefore, the use of these colleagues was useful in helping me question my own assumptions as possible. Since my own positionality as a White, well-educated, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied,

overweight gay man as well as my sense of making meaning of my own sexuality and masculinity inform how I came to this work, using a peer debriefing team was an attempt to understand my positionality and minimize my projections from that positionality onto the data analyzed in this research.

In late February 2012, two members of the peer debriefing team were asked to review the emergent theory, including the transcripts and journals they had previously reviewed as well as my research log. One of the peer debriefing members was unable to assist with this step due to personal and professional time commitments. Using those documents, they were asked to evaluate them using Charmaz's (2006) criteria for grounded theory studies (see Appendix F). The peer debriefing team reviewed the findings as well as the conceptual model, applied Charmaz's criteria, and indicated as though the various components of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness had been met based upon their review of the material. This was one final attempt at ensuring the trustworthiness of my work.

Researcher Reflexivity and Subjectivity

As a qualitative researcher, I am the one who is responsible for the selection of participants, the data collected and analyzed, and the theory construction. Charmaz (2006) highlights the fact that engagement in constructivist grounded theory is relational in nature. Therefore, my lived experiences inform how I bring myself to this work and the relationships that I built with the participants of this study also inform this study and its findings. Through reflective journal entries and conceptual maps, I have explored how my own inner work was playing out within my data collection and analysis. Within this section, I provide my own story of how I have made meaning of my multiple

identities as a gay man in an effort to understand my own positionality as a researcher. Sharing my own story is important to frame my own experiences as a gay man throughout my life as well as to indicate how those experiences contribute to how I viewed the data from this study.

At a very young age, it was clear that other boys did not know what to make of me. In nursery school and kindergarten, I enjoyed playing house with the girls. Just a few years later, my favorite movie was *Annie*. Knowing that I was an adopted child, I felt a connection to Little Orphan Annie, but I also loved the cassette tape my aunt made for me of all of the music. I had memorized the songs and would stand behind the long curtains in our living room and act out the soundtrack with choreographed routines. I was not like other boys, especially my brother.

My younger brother and I were like night and day. I was smart and did well in school. He did well in school, but never enjoyed it. I grew up oriented to the arts, singing in the choir and school musicals and participating in show choir. He was the school's star athlete, playing soccer, basketball, and baseball. The one common denominator that united us was that we were competitive with one another. We both were driven to be the best at whatever we liked doing. But if high school taught me one thing it was that my brother fit the stereotype for what it meant to be a guy in high school; I did not.

Throughout middle and high school, my closest friendships were with girls. While I had guy friends, they were somewhat on the periphery, and we were never close. With the exception of my few male friends, I was picked on by other boys and was called a "fag" or "sissy" often. I never told my parents about it very much, but I found high

school to be particularly challenging. In my ninth grade English class, we were required to keep a journal, and I remember writing an entry that spoke of the anguish I was experiencing from the other boys in that composition notebook. My teacher, Mrs. Turner, reviewed my journal and gave me some feedback on that particular entry. She wrote, "Don't let the turkeys get you down." It stuck with me.

However, while I knew that I was different, I was in deep denial about being gay. Growing up in a small town in upstate New York, I knew that being gay was bad. At the time, I had gathered enough evidence from school, church, and conversations that adults had, that being gay was not something that I wanted to be. And in that moment, I would never have considered myself to be gay. At the time, I was just trying to keep my head down, get good grades, and go to college.

I looked forward to college as an opportunity to escape my hometown and move to a bigger city, not quite understanding what that meant for me and how it might transform my life. When looking at colleges and preparing to audition for music schools, I remember comments being made by other people about various schools. Specifically, I recall a close family friend telling my mother that I should not attend SUNY Fredonia because "that's where all the fags go." However, I had wanted to go to Ithaca College since I visited in the eighth grade. I had fallen in love with the campus and knew that they had a great music program there. I remember sitting in the lobby of the School of Music with my dad immediately after my audition waiting for my mom, and some flamboyant male students were chatting loudly with each other nearby. My dad and I were watching them, and he turned to me and said, "You really want to go here?" I said,

“Uh huh,” nervously. And soon enough, I was packed and heading back to campus for move-in day.

During my first year of college, I experienced a very difficult transition to life as an undergraduate. I was extremely homesick especially during the fall semester and took advantage of any offer to come home. My shyness held me back from meeting many people, and because my parents stressed getting good grades, I went to classes, did my homework, and would be in bed every night by 10:30. I missed my friends from home. While my roommate went out on the weekends to party, I was beginning to explore my sexual orientation by using his computer to go online and chat to gay people in chat rooms or searching for information on message boards. Unfortunately, my roommate tracked my online usage and left a homophobic message to me on his desktop one day. I went back into the closet for another few months until I finally worked up the nerve one day to look in the mirror, stared at my reflection and said, “I’m gay.”

As I mentioned in Chapter One, I was hired as a resident assistant my sophomore year of college, which served as a critical influence on my own meaning making in college. Coming back that August for training and connecting with a group of peers that were supportive of diversity issues as well as working with a supervisor who was a gay man himself, I was still gaining my legs in terms of being open about my identity. It took me until September to share that information with someone else, who happened to be a fellow resident assistant on my staff. There were plenty of tears, but a sense of relief. The next day, I shared the news with my supervisor, who hugged me and said how proud he was of me for taking the steps necessary to get to that point. He provided books to read, a shoulder to cry on, and a large box of tissues. Over a period of a couple of

months, I came out to my friends on campus and started to explore what it meant to be gay, by reading books about being gay and coming out, but also mirroring what other gay men were doing or saying. I made some gay friends and also became involved within the LGBT student organization on campus.

While I was out on campus, I was very much living a divided life when I went back home to visit my family. I was not out to my parents or brother until the spring semester of my junior year of college. For all of the stories that I had heard from other people, the worse case scenario was playing loudly in my head, and I was worried that I would be disowned, have to leave school, and a whole host of other irrational thoughts. It was not an easy conversation to have with my parents. In fact, it may have been the most difficult conversation I have ever had, but they expressed their love and concern for me. While I had two years to adjust to my sexual orientation, they also had their own adjustments to make which often were painful, frustrating, and difficult for everyone involved. But time did help.

Throughout college, I immersed myself into learning about gay culture and spent a great deal of time attempting to understand who I was in terms of being gay. However, I did not spend much time thinking about what it meant to be a gay *man*. My male privilege was something that I never explored or considered at that point, but I knew that I just connected more with women. The issues I experienced with men growing up only exacerbated my disdain for straight men my age in college, especially in my sophomore year of college. As a resident assistant my sophomore and junior years of college, I was forced to move past this ideology in order to develop community with my residents, 30 first-year student men who lived on my floor. Additionally, I started building important

friendships with straight men who were also on my resident assistant staff as well as other orientation leaders. I began to see that not every straight man was the same nor were they all to be feared.

In my junior year, I took a class called Men's Lives. I continued to have difficulty understanding how masculinity fit within my own life, and as someone who was out and proud of being gay, I took offense to how little information there was about gay men and masculinity, not to mention that most of the times that gay men were mentioned, it was pertaining to the homophobia and heterosexism they experience as a result of interactions with straight men as the majority. I felt conflicted, but also alienated. This was my first experience of understanding my male privilege, and I attempted to reject the idea due to my sexual identity. However, I did start developing an understanding of the intersections of race, class, and sexual orientation as well as continuing to explore what it meant to be a male feminist. These were important and valuable learning opportunities for me throughout my sociology classes.

After college, I was a professional hall director at a medium-sized, largely commuter state college in the suburbs of Boston. The student demographics there were significantly more diverse than my undergraduate experience, and I experienced quite a culture shock. Suddenly, all of the intellectual lessons I learned about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation were playing out in reality for the students with whom I was working. I recognized my White privilege and my racist assumptions, often being called out and challenged by colleagues and my students for my thoughts and actions. Ultimately, they confronted me on my White privilege and made me realize the impact of

race on people's lives, especially that my lens of the world was not the same as others'. Real learning was happening.

During this same time, I dated for the first time and had my first significant relationship with another man. I learned quite a bit about myself through my relationship with him, mostly by trial and error. While I had a couple of older gay men who were important mentors to me, I would rarely ask them questions about relationships, but I was keenly observant of their interactions with their partners. Essentially, I wanted to have a rulebook about how to conduct myself when dating, but knew that there was none. Who paid for dinner? Should I call to schedule a second date or should I wait for him to call me? How soon was too soon for sex? While the roles were socialized early for straight people, I had a difficult time aligning the messages I was getting from the gay community about what it meant to be a gay man and the Hollywood romantic comedy movies.

When arriving to graduate school, I joined a cohort of scholars who were largely concerned with diversity and social justice work. I continued to explore my sexual identity; however, it was during this time that I was also engaged in critical self-exploration of my White privilege. It was during the course of those two years where I worked to move my guilt into action and engage in anti-racist work. It was also during this time that I started and ended a partnership with another man. This relationship was different from my first, more grounded in mutuality and deeper levels of care and concern. It also sent me into a tailspin when the relationship ended. While I did not realize it at the time, my reaction was quintessentially masculine in nature where I tried to suppress my emotions. After a short time, I forced myself to "man up," compartmentalizing my emotions and throwing myself into my work. I concentrated on

anything else other than my feelings, although they would bubble up in angry bursts periodically.

After graduate school, I took a position working in student activities at a small liberal arts college outside of Baltimore. While there, I was working within leadership development and informally mentored quite a few men on campus, especially gay male students. In addition to my work responsibilities, I also served as the advisor for the LGBT student organization on campus and often found myself being integrally engaged in the work that they were doing. I was the only openly gay man working in the Division of Student Affairs and often felt tokenized. In essence, I needed to feel a sense of belonging with the students in the LGBT organization because they largely were my support network there; I believe that they also benefitted from their interactions with me as well.

When planning my future steps professionally, I realized my bad habits of throwing myself into my professional work and not taking the time to cultivate my own personal life was negatively affecting me. In my last year in Baltimore, I realized that I had only been on three dates in my entire time there. I began to address the issues that I had compartmentalized for myself, and I attempted to undo the pain as much as possible. Deciding that I needed to take advantage of new opportunities and challenge myself, I applied for a job and entrance into a doctoral program in San Juan Miguel. I got both, and moved 3,000 miles across country to start a new life.

It was over the past few years that I began to explore the ideas of masculinity(ies) and the intersections intrinsic in being a gay man. A colleague in a qualitative research class was doing some work around men and their experiences in community-service

learning opportunities. While doing peer review work, reading his paper started the gears moving in my head. At the same time, I had begun re-establishing a friendship with my ex-partner, who was actively engaging in work around men and masculinities within college. We began to have deep conversations around these issues, and I spent a summer reading many different books and articles on men and masculinities, especially those having to do with the college experience.

While that analytical, heady work was happening, I also had issued a challenge to myself when I turned 30 to take advantage of new and different opportunities that presented themselves to me. In August of that year, I ran my first 5K, a feat that largely would have been unimaginable before as the running joke I had told friends was that I was allergic to sun and air and would only run if someone was coming after me with a gun. Then, a friend encouraged me to come to a rugby clinic that his team was offering. I learned some of the basics of rugby and became a member of the team. Joining this group of gay, bisexual, straight, and questioning men who came together for the love of their sport was the first time I experienced the bonds of brotherhood. It was also the first time that I ever considered my own masculinity. The performance of my masculinity on the rugby pitch was new, exciting and often frightening. The physicality of the sport was intense, often leaving bruises, pulled muscles, sprains, and many aches. The battle scars were marks of honor.

However, at the same time, there were aspects of the brotherhood that bothered me. The joke for rugby is “our drinking team has a rugby problem.” After games and even socially together, my teammates would engage in binge drinking behavior. During our “drink ups,” the socials after games, the players would engage in singing songs

together; these songs were loaded with racist, sexist, and heterosexist messages. This seemingly was in direct contradiction to our team's mission, which was to provide a supportive environment to learn and play rugby for men from underrepresented communities. As a rookie, I chose not to sing and occasionally had to defend my refusal to participate to others.

I came to this research through the merging of my experiences on the rugby team as well as my immersion into the literature on men and masculinities. I wondered how and if college men thought about their masculinities as it relates to their sexual identity. As a higher education professional, I wondered about how one's campus involvement played a role in how they saw themselves as gay men. Additionally, I had the experience of working professionally at two of the institutions within my study, and I questioned if those campus cultures had an impact on how these men experienced their identities.

Through the data collection aspect of this study, I was experiencing a parallel process of making meaning of my own sense of masculinities as a gay man. It was during this time that I started dating my boyfriend, Martin, a fellow rugby player. While interviewing the participants, I was asking the men about intimate details of their lives, and often times, they expressed vulnerability. They shared with me the fears that they had in terms of sexual behavior, the shame they sometimes had around decisions they had made in the past, or the questions they had never had answers for. At the same time, I was conscious of how similar some of our fears, shame, or questions were. They were processing how sexual roles were intertwined with masculinity or femininity, and so was I. They were attempting to understand why they continued being involved in spaces that were not always affirming to who they were as gay men, and I was facing some of those

same questions in terms of some toxic people in my life or certain heteronormative aspects of the rugby culture. They were struggling with their parents' concern for their well-being and safety, and I was often having similar frustrating conversations with my parents and their well-meaning advice that often came across as condescension or ignorant of my identity as a gay man. I found many commonalities between our stories as our relationships with one another continued.

However, I also found myself questioning my positionality at times in terms of how my identities converged and created a lens through which I saw the world. My identity as a White, gay man informed how I thought, behaved, and engaged with others, which had a significant role as the research seeking and analyzing data. In particular, I began to do some inner work around how I viewed my socioeconomic class and race as a gay man, especially as those two concepts became a prominent aspect of the data. My relationship with Martin became my touchstone in many ways for being reflective about my White and economic wealth privilege.

As a White, middle-class man, I know that I navigate my gay male identity in particular ways that are different from Martin's. Martin comes from a Mexican, Catholic family, and while his immediate family knows about his sexual orientation, it is not something that is widely discussed, a common cultural element of Latino gay men. Only certain members of his extended family knew that he was gay, and he did not really care to share his sexual identity with them. To him, his identity salience of his gay identity shifted depending upon the context. The context of his extended family was not one where there was a high salience for his gay identity.

Through our relationship together, Martin has helped me understand that my truth does not mean that it is his truth. We have our separate realities, sometimes of the same situation – the first time we met, for instance. However, as we have started our relationship together, I have learned valuable lessons from him about what it means to be a gay man and make meaning of those intersecting identities. Now, I look at my work differently, and I have questioned my original assumptions of the data.

Related to this search for truth and multiple realities, the use of the peer debriefing team was critical and vital in assisting me with this work. Throughout the data analysis process, I was very lucky to have these three men engage with the data in valuable and meaningful ways. When I asked them to participate, I do not know that any of us really knew what we were getting ourselves into, but the outcomes have been personally and professionally enriching. Additionally, this work that I have presented has been made all the stronger because of the peer debriefing team's voices, insights, and interpretations.

Each of the three peer debriefers was well versed in the literature on college men and masculinities and sexual identity development. Additionally, each had worked closely with college men in their professional practice as student affairs administrators. Most importantly, though, they also brought their own positionality to this work, which was critical. All of us were White individuals, but we saw the world in different ways due to our other social identities and our lived experiences. Among us, we had an array of gender diversity (three men and one trans-identified individual), religions (two Catholic and two non-practicing), sexual orientation (one gay, one fluid, and two straight), and professional backgrounds (one worked in University Ministry; one worked

in Fraternity and Sorority Life and was a fraternity member himself; one had experience working in Fraternity and Sorority Life as well as men's advocacy against rape and sexual assault; and my own background in residence life, multicultural affairs, and student activities and leadership).

When I reached out to the men initially for their help, I asked them if they would be willing to review the interview transcripts as well as the journal data, which had all identifying information removed to protect the confidentiality of the study's participants. I asked my colleagues to track large themes that emerged for them while they were reading as I was concurrently completing the coding of the data and beginning to categorize the data. During our first call, our discussion was rich, and my colleagues seemed energized by what they had read. I had been feeling similarly throughout data collection, so it was a thrill to finally have others get a sense of the stories that the men had shared through their interviews. The call, which lasted approximately almost two hours, was a dialogue of sorts with each of us sharing our insights of the data, but was also an opportunity for me to ask some questions. For instance, some of the men expressed that their sexual orientation was no big deal to them; however, I did not get the sense that this was the case. Our team was able to discuss this more in-depth, and we were able to connect that statement to a sense of posturing or competitiveness that they were using to outwardly project a much stronger sense of confidence than they had, in fact. By serving as a sounding board and providing perspectives outside of my own, I was able to use some concepts that seemed to fit, but also rejected some thoughts as well.

One final note of significance relating to the peer debriefing team was our final meeting, which happened to be our only meeting in person. The two remaining members

of the team and I (as previously discussed, one of the members had to excuse himself from further work after the initial data review due to his professional and educational obligations) met together during a higher education professionals conference. During that time, I was providing my final review of the model, and one of the men said, “So I feel like I really need to voice a concern, Dan. I really thought that you were going to talk more about masculinities throughout your findings, and right now, I’m not seeing that as much.” The feedback was direct yet important. In my discussion of the findings to them, I neglected to make direct connections to the influence of hegemonic masculinity on the men’s lives as well as how they, at times, upheld and reinforced that hegemony. From my positionality as a gay man, I found myself gravitating more to the gay identity in my discussions rather than bridging both the gay and male identities. My colleague’s reminder from his positionality as a straight White man was critical. It served as a reminder to continue looking from all angles to interrogate the data and make the strongest case when building theory. I believe that from my colleagues’ work with me has led us to a significant and meaningful theory that stems from and honors the voices of the men who participated in this study.

Throughout this process, I have attempted to limit my blind spots, suspend judgment as much as possible and work collaboratively with others to minimize my bias. By owning my own experiences, I aim to be reflexive and also acknowledge that my experiences are my own. It is understood that everyone’s lived experiences do not match up to mine, and as the researcher of this study, I have taken great pains to ensure that I have not projected my own lived experiences onto the men of this study. In honor and

respect to the participants, I have done my own inner work and used my voice to help them collectively to share their stories.

Summary

Within this chapter, I outlined the research design and implementation of this study investigating how gay men in college make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of gender and sexuality. Using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006), this qualitative research study incorporated the data from interviews, journals, and a focus group from the perspective of 17 college-aged gay men attending three universities in San Juan Miguel, a pseudonym from a large metropolitan city in Southern California. Additionally, my own reflexivity and positionality as the researcher is also used as data due to our connectedness through the data collection.

Within the chapter, I emphasized the methods used to recruit and select participants, including the sampling techniques utilized; how I analyzed the data, including coding strategies; and how I worked towards the trustworthiness of the study's findings through focus group data and peer debriefing. My discussion of both the literature review and the methodology in Chapters Two and Three, respectively, situate the study's findings, which will be presented next in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In the previous chapters, I set the framework for this research study which has been designed to understand how gay men in college make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of gender and sexuality. Three research questions guided this research, and they included: (1) How do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years; (2) In what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men; and (3) What are the critical influences during college that influence gay men's meaning-making process? Using qualitative inquiry methods, I used constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2005, 2006) to analyze the data from the 17 participants attending three different universities in San Juan Miguel, a metropolitan city in Southern California.

In this chapter, I present the findings from this research study. First, I provide biographical descriptions of the participants. These descriptions are meant to give further contextual information about these men, especially their social identities and their curricular and co-curricular experiences. Next, I briefly provide an overview of the labyrinth model, a model that emerged from the data to reflect the participants' experiences of making meaning of their multiple identities. This model will be discussed more in depth in Chapter Five. Then, I present the study's findings that are split into two main parts: the Societal Context and the Individual Context. The Societal Context includes two major themes: (1) Socialization of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Inherent Tensions and (2) Heteronormativity and Homophobia as an Internal and External Influence. Meanwhile, the Individual Context includes five major themes: (1) Sense of Sameness Disappears; (2) Compartmentalizing Identit(ies); (3) Seeking Community; (4)

Questioning Allegiances; and (5) Living in the Nexus. Each of these major themes also contains several sub-themes that will be explored as well in this chapter.

Participant Descriptions

Throughout this study, 17 men from three different universities within San Juan Miguel were interviewed. Biographical descriptions for each of them are included within this section. Additionally, each of the men had the opportunity to review, comment upon and edit these descriptions as a means of member checking. These descriptions incorporated any and all edits they asked to be made.

Brandon. A senior integrated marketing communications major, Brandon, 22, grew up in Silver Strand, just south of San Juan Miguel. He attended Oliver Community College and received his Associate's Degree there before transferring to OSU in January 2010. During college, Brandon worked various jobs off-campus, including his newest entrepreneurial adventure of founding his own information technology business. Raised in a conservative Christian household by his single mother, Brandon was active within the church until coming out and now identifies as an atheist. Brandon identifies as White and indicates that during his childhood, his socioeconomic class was working poor, but that as a young adult, that changed to middle class. He is a member of Alpha Kappa Lambda fraternity and has been on the Dean's List at OSU.

Bryan. A recent graduate in June 2011, Bryan, 23, spent all four years at CUO active within the men's swimming and diving team. In addition to being captain his junior year, he was named an NCAA All-American in 2009, an NCAA Academic All-American in 2010, and made All-Conference Honors from 2007 – 2011. A double major in biochemistry and cell biology, Bryan identifies himself as White but did disclose that

his mother is biracial (White and Mexican). Originally from Los Feliz, a city two hours north of San Juan Miguel, he remained in San Juan Miguel after graduation and works on campus at CUO as a research technician.

Charles. A junior business administration major at SAU, Charles, 21, is originally from the Pacific Northwest where he grew up with his parents, brother and sister. His parents emigrated from Cambodia, and he was raised speaking Cambodian until he went to elementary school. Charles is the first member of his immediate family to attend college. He indicates that his mother's Buddhist faith has influenced his own life philosophy significantly although he himself is not a practicing Buddhist. Currently working 20+ hours a week in a retail job and also completing an unpaid internship Charles supports his own way through college and also assists his family financially when necessary. He is vice president of the campus's STAND club, an organization against the genocide in Darfur. With his work and academic schedule, Charles indicates that he does not spend much time on campus.

Craig. A native of San Juan Miguel County, Craig, 21, grew up just south of San Juan Miguel where he lived with his single mother and his extended family. A first-generation Filipino, Craig was the first of his family to go to college. He is a fourth-year student at CUO studying communications. Craig has been active within the life of both his undergraduate college and the University serving as the president of his college's student council. He was also chief of staff for the External Relations office for the University's Associated Students. Additionally, he has participated as a member of the Queer People of College (QPOC) student organization on campus and this year lives in

the LGBT-interest housing program in an upperclassmen residential apartment community.

Jonathan. Born into a wealthy, conservative, Catholic, White family in Northern California, Jonathan, 22, is a fifth-year political science and public law major. In his senior year of high school, Jonathan had been recruited and was awarded a scholarship to a prestigious private Catholic institution in the Midwestern part of the United States to play baseball. However, he was in an accident that required emergency surgery, which violated the terms of his scholarship. Instead, he attended CUO and was involved in intramural sports, his undergraduate college's student council and also served as coordinator and facilitator of the LGBTQIA men's group last year.

Kevin. A junior communications major, Kevin, 20, was born and raised in a conservative, predominantly Asian town in Northern California. Half-fourth generation Japanese and half-first generation Irish, his parents divorced at a young age. As a student at CUO, he has served as an Orientation Leader for his undergraduate college for two years, been a senator for his undergraduate college's student council and also is a campus radio DJ. In the summer of 2011, he spent two months studying in Paris, France on a study abroad program.

Landon. Born and raised in Taiwan, Landon moved to the United States in his childhood. A senior business management major, he is 23 and transferred to CUO after studying at Cambridge City College for two years with a year break to help care for his ailing father. His father was a pastor and with his wife's assistance, they built a Christian church in Taiwan and then moved their ministry to Riverdale, California. Landon has one older sister. He and his current boyfriend have been dating for almost two years.

This year, he was chosen to be the resident assistant for the LGBT-interest housing program in the transfer student housing community on his campus.

Luke. Luke, 21, began his undergraduate studies at a state university in Northern California his freshman year, but quickly transferred to a community college in the San Juan Miguel area for his sophomore year with the intention to transfer into SAU starting his junior year. Now, a senior marketing major, Luke has been active in the SAU Marketing Club, served as finance director for PRIDE and has been involved as a Rainbow Educator on campus. Born into a White, upper-middle class Catholic family, Luke was raised in a city in Northern California. He studied in Rome during the summer of 2011 on a four-week program and spent additional time traveling through Europe.

Marc. Born in northern Virginia, Marc and his family moved to Singapore when he was a young child, and his family continues to reside there. A senior visual arts and architecture major, Marc, 21, has been active on campus at SAU within PRIDE, the LGBT student organization all four years of college, taking leadership roles as historian and secretary. Additionally, he was active in Phi Kappa Theta fraternity and served as their director of diversity last year; during the Fall semester, he was inactive within the fraternity. A White man, Marc is a SAU Presidential Scholarship and SAU International Studies Scholarship recipient.

Mason. A senior international security and conflict resolution major, Mason, 21, is a Filipino man who was born on U.S. Naval Basic Subic Bay, Philippines. He was raised in Japan and San Juan Miguel, CA. He has been active in the Naval ROTC program all four years of college, and within that program, he has been selected as Platoon Sergeant and Mentor Program Coordinator. He has served as a resident assistant

on campus at OSU and also has been active as the executive vice president of the Mortar Board Senior Honor Society. Currently, he is an intern for the Safe Zones @ OSU program.

Matt. A Filipino man born in Salem, CA and raised in Carlisle, CA, a predominantly White and conservative community, Matt, 20, is a junior business administration major at OSU. He has been an active member of the Asian Pacific Student Alliance and the Pride Action Committee. This Fall, he served as the Associated Students representative for the LGBT Student Union and pledged Delta Lambda Phi, a progressive fraternity for gay, bisexual, and straight men, of which he is now an active member. Raised in a religious household, he struggled with his faith until he became a member of Missiongathering Church, a progressive religious community targeted towards San Juan Miguel's LGBT community.

Nate. Born and raised in a metropolitan area of the Midwest, Nate, 21, grew up in a liberal, White, middle-to-upper-middle class household. A junior communications major at SAU, he spent his freshman year as a student at a large public university in the Midwest where he was involved in the campus marching band and briefly was a pledge in a fraternity. Since transferring, Nate has been involved in PRIDE and serves as the marketing director this year. He is also involved in the Greater San Juan Miguel Community Orchestra, the SAU Brass Quintet, and the campus's Advertising Club. He is also a founding member of the campus's chapter of FIJI, one of SAU's newest fraternities. In the summer of 2011, he spent several weeks studying abroad in Paris, France.

Peter. A senior communication studies major, Peter, 21, is a White man who comes from a wealthy, Catholic family residing in the Pacific Northwest. During his time on campus at SAU, he has been active within Lambda Chi Alpha all four years, been a member of PRIDE, the campus's LGBT student organization, served as a Rainbow Educator and Safe Space Ally. This year, Peter was elected as the Associated Students President and became the first openly gay student to ever hold that position. He also studied abroad in Florence, Italy for a semester during his time at SAU.

Robert. Born and raised in Texas, Robert, 22, identifies as Mexican-American and was raised primarily by his mother in a predominantly Latino community. His father was involved peripherally in his life until his parents separated when he was 16; his father passed away when he was 19. He attended a large state university in Texas for two years before transferring to Oceanside State. A December 2011 graduate, he double majored in international security and conflict resolution and French language and literature. A member of Delta Lambda Phi, a progressive fraternity for gay, bisexual, and straight men, and the Oceanside State University International Rescue Committee, Robert studied abroad twice, including a semester-long experience in Beijing, China during the time of data collection for this study.

Sean. Originally a student at the U.S. Military Academy on the East Coast, Sean, 22, transferred to SAU to begin his junior year. Born into a White, wealthy, conservative family in the Sacramento area, he has participated in two short-term study abroad programs to Hong Kong and London at SAU. He is not actively involved on campus outside of his international business major. Most of his time is taken up being an

entrepreneur working on several projects with his business partner, who resides in New York City. Sean is a December 2011 graduate of SAU.

Victor. Identifying as half-Greek and half-Mexican, Victor, 22, grew up in northern San Juan Miguel County. He attended Capistrano College, a local community college, for two years before transferring to OSU. A recent graduate, Victor was a history major and LGBT studies minor, and he is currently enrolled as a graduate student in history at OSU. As an undergraduate, he was active on the Pride Action Committee, served as membership chair of the Lambda Archives in San Juan Miguel and was a volunteer at San Juan Miguel's LGBT Community Center. Currently, he is president of Delta Lambda Phi, a progressive fraternity for gay, bisexual, and straight men.

Will. A senior economics major, Will, 21, identifies as biracial, half-White and half-Mexican. Raised in Northern California, he is an economics major with a double minor in Spanish and Real Estate. During his time at SAU, he has been on the Dean's List in Spring 2010 and 2011. Additionally, he has completed an internship at a large, prestigious accounting firm, been involved in the campus's chapter of Invisible Children and PRIDE, the campus's LGBT organization, and served as an economics tutor.

Presentation of Theoretical Model

Through my data analysis, an emergent theoretical model was created to represent the process by which gay men in college came to make meaning of their multiple identities. The model, shown in Figure One, and its components are presented in this chapter; however, further discussion of the model in relation to the study's findings will be presented in Chapter Five.

Figure 1. The Labyrinth Model

Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study, which are organized into two distinct contexts: the Societal Context and the Individual Context. The Societal Context deals more with how systemic levels of oppression and discrimination impact the individuals and their meaning making process. The Individual Context, however, pertains to the developmental process by which the gay men participating in this study have come to make meaning of their multiple identities internally. Both of these contexts inform and shape one another, especially how one comes to make meaning of his sense of

self. These two contexts are similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological developmental model, especially his concept of a nested system. Within the findings of this study, the Societal Context relates to Bronfenbrenner's concept of the macrosystem in which the larger system plays a role in one's development. Additionally, the Individual Context relates to Bronfenbrenner's concepts of the microsystem, in which the individual's environment influences his or her development, and the mesosystem, which is the relationship between the individual and other important developmental influences, such as one's family or religious community. While the Individual Context is nested within the Societal Context within the findings that will be presented in this chapter, it is important to note that the two inform one another, so it is a challenge to separate the two explicitly as they often work concurrently with one another with fluidity to inform and influence one's development, especially for the gay men in this specific study and how they make meaning of their multiple identities in college.

Societal Context

Within the Societal Context, two sub-themes emerged; these sub-themes were: (1) *Socialization of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Inherent Tensions* and (2) *Heteronormativity and Homophobia as Internal and External Influences*. The participants discussed either explicitly or demonstrated through implicit actions or behaviors that the socialization of hegemonic masculinity played a large role in their development yet there was a often a high degree of tension within that and heteronormativity and homophobia served as both an internal and external influence in how these gay men came to see themselves. These sub-themes will be explored further within this section.

Socialization of hegemonic masculinity and the inherent tensions. The first sub-theme within the Societal Context was called the Socialization of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Inherent Tensions. For the study's participants, the socialization of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy began at an extremely young age for them and they highlighted their awareness of this. They discussed the tensions and gender coding that they have received from others about what it means to be a boy or a man. Reflecting upon his childhood, Matt discussed his interest in playing with Barbie dolls yet the messages he received with others for doing that. Specifically, his parents would say, "Oh, you shouldn't be playing with Barbies." Matt's parents were serving as gender enforcers of traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity, which taught Matt what was perhaps unacceptable for young boys.

The men also engaged in reinforcing gender stereotypes and roles that followed traditional hegemonic masculinity as young boys. For instance, Craig acknowledged that his family stressed involvement in athletics as a norm for young boys. He felt that sports play into the "gender expectations that you're supposed to have as a male in this society. So you know, growing up, I was put into Little League....It's just kind of how you're supposed to act when you're a guy." However, over time Craig found himself moving away from this notion when he says, "I don't like watching sports. I used to. But that was back when I was little, and I thought I had to like it. But now I realize it's stupid, and I don't want to watch it." Ultimately, hegemonic masculinity boxed individuals into certain mental models about what was allowed and what was not. Therefore, gay men who were often subjugated to the margins were left feeling bruised and wounded in some ways by experiencing homophobia within a heteronormative environment.

Heteronormativity and homophobia as internal and external influences.

The second sub-theme within the Societal Context was called Heteronormativity and Homophobia as Internal and External Influences. Related to hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity and homophobia served as ways to reinforce hegemony. A salient finding within this study was the role of internalized homophobia and its impact on reifying heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. Mason discussed this when he acknowledged that he has dealt with some internalized homophobia because “society has told us that being a man is being heterosexual.” Likewise, even messages steeped in heteronormative and homophobic thinking got reinforced and exhibited at young ages. Speaking of his experience of being in the closet in high school, Peter would be extremely conscious of his behaviors in an effort to not be perceived as gay. He said,

“In high school or even in elementary school, you hear people that are like, ‘Oh, if you cross your arms a certain way, that means you’re gay.’ ‘If your left index finger is longer than your other one, that means you’re gay.’ I would hear these things and be like, ‘Oh shit.’ So I would be consciously trying to – little things like that, that you know, you don’t want to hint to the reality of the situation.”

This awareness of heteronormativity and homophobia at a systemic level was discussed by some of the men, and this systemic reinforcement of heteronormativity had significant implications for the men, especially around their gay identity.

However, more often than that, the men lacked an awareness of their own attempts to reify heteronormativity. Many of the men discussed aspects of their lives as gay men that seem to be assimilationist in nature. For example, many of the men spoke of their desire to find a partner eventually and settle down. In one case, Brandon’s notion of living the American dream was founded in marrying a husband, having some children, and supporting his family. While this was a perfectly acceptable choice, he had never

examined what those choices meant in terms of being a gay man. Ultimately, he voiced that desire as “the typical American dream, but the faggot American dream.” His choice of language even reinforced a “same but different” mentality, internalized over his life. These systemic level issues continued to exert influence on one’s experiences and visa versa.

Nestedness of the Societal and Individual Contexts

As previously mentioned, this chapter includes the findings from this study, which are presented within two contexts: the Individual Context and the Societal Context. This section explores the Individual Context, which is the developmental process by which the men in this study come to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of masculinities and their sexual orientation as gay men. The Individual Context is nested within the Societal Context, which was just previously described. Thus, the Individual Context describes the experiences of the men in this study at a micro-level while the Societal Context represents the systemic issues affecting the men’s lives at the macro-level. However, this nestedness is complex as the two different contexts constantly inform one another and cannot be separated easily. This nestedness calls back to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) work and the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem. As with Bronfenbrenner’s work, the Individual and Societal Contexts of this study provide unique and important dimensions of influence on one’s development, especially how one makes meaning of his multiple identities, especially his sense of gender and sexuality. Thus, the findings within the Individual Context are nested within the Societal Context to indicate their influence. Additionally, the findings largely fall within the Individual Context, which emphasizes the men’s

meaning making of their multiple identities due to the research questions for this study and their focus on the individual rather than the systemic or societal.

Individual Context

Within this section, I present the five main themes that emerged from the data analysis that fall within this Individual Context. They included: (1) *Sense of Sameness Disappears*; (2) *Compartmentalizing Identit(ies)*; (3) *Seeking Community*; (4) *Questioning Allegiances*; and (5) *Living in the Nexus*. Each of these themes served as an umbrella for movement points (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004), which often emerged as sub-themes within the data that were critical incidents for the men and their meaning making of their multiple identities. These movement points either helped students advance, regress or temporarily pause in the meaning they make of their multiple identities and were represented with specific symbols throughout the labyrinth model (see Figure 1). Often, these movement points were typically found within their corresponding quadrant, but sometimes found in other quadrants representing the fluidity and complexity of the men's meaning making experiences. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I present each of the five major themes as well as their corresponding movement points to explain the process by which gay men make meaning of their multiple identities.

Sense of sameness disappears. While most of the quadrants were not meant to indicate a linear developmental model, the entrance into the labyrinth in the bottom left quadrant does represent the start of one's meaning making process; this quadrant is called Sense of Sameness Disappears. In this quadrant, there were four movement points that took place within this quadrant of Sense of Sameness Disappears. These movement

points included: a) *Acknowledgement of one's gay identity*; (b) *Coming out to others*; (c) *Maintaining traditional hegemonic masculinity*; and (d) *Troubling one's sense of privilege*. Each of these movement points was characterized by feeling "different" from other boys or men, a common word used by many of the men in this study. These feelings of being different ranged from a nascent awareness of being gay to moments where the men experienced discrimination or alienation from others due to their identities. This connected to their meaning making of their identities in that this awareness of that not being like other boys or men set them on a journey of discovering who they really were rather than others' assumptions of who they might be. In this next section, I outline each of these movement points through the participants' stories.

Acknowledgement of one's gay identity. The first movement point that occurred within the Sense of Sameness Disappears quadrant was called *Acknowledgement of One's Gay Identity*. Many of the men in the study discussed feeling "different from other boys" early on in their life. Matt recounted a story of being outside playing with his neighbors who were young girls around his age and watching the girls' father washing the car. He said, "I was just really attracted to him 'cause he was like shirtless, right? And I think that was the first memory I ever had [pertaining to being gay]." As a result, Matt knew that from discussions with his brothers who spoke about liking girls and women that his feelings of attraction for other boys and men were different than most boys his age. Similarly, Victor discussed intimate situations with friends as early as five years old. He said, "It was just kind of like holding their hand or just being around them whereas I just never had that kind of concept with women." These experiences reinforced a sense that

attraction to other boys and men was not the norm since their male peers largely focused their attentions towards girls and women.

As a result, these feelings of being different due to one's nascent gay identity often resulted in negative consequences. Some of the men had a more difficult time acknowledging their gay identity, which was a deeply painful process of formulating one's sense of self. Jonathan, Peter, Nate, and Will all discussed the difficulty they had in actually accepting their gay identity. That time in their lives was characterized with severe depression and suicidal ideation, which furthered their feelings of being "different" from their peers, especially their heterosexual peers. In his interview, Peter discussed his deep depression of accepting being gay and his struggles with it. He said, "It was just overwhelmingly negative because I was so against it. I went through a really dark period where I could not admit it to myself. I didn't want to. I was desperate to find some way out of it. It was bad." This led to a suicide attempt while in high school. Peter continued,

The person I attempted to be on the outside at school was very happy, but then I'd go home. And when I was alone or when I was with my family, they saw the real troubled person, and that almost ended up really bad. But then when [the suicide attempt] happened, I realized that this is ridiculous...I'm not gonna waste my life and freak out about it. So I didn't have an epiphany and suddenly scream to everyone that I was gay, but it's – like once I graduate and get to the next stage of my life, you know, high school was a stage. Once college starts, I can move on and stop being so miserable.

For many of the men, like Peter, college was seen as an opportunity to come out and be open about their sexual identity rather than being closeted. The men's early awareness of their gay identity served as a first step in differentiation and the disappearance of feeling like other (straight) boys and men.

Coming out to others. The process of admitting their sexual identity to others was another movement point of meaning making related to the larger theme of Sense of Sameness Disappears. *Coming Out to Others* was the only aspect of linearity within this model from the previous movement point of *Acknowledgement of One's Gay Identity*; all of the other movement points were much more fluid and not linear in progression necessarily. While most of the men knew that they were gay early on in their life, many of them did not come out publicly to another person for years. Landon, for example, indicated that he knew as far back as being in the fifth grade that he was attracted to other men. However, it was not until seven years later when he was a junior in high school that he actually came out to a friend who was assumed to be gay by others, but who had not yet come out. Recounting his first coming out story, Landon said, "It was more of him pressuring me to let him know because he didn't want to be the only one that "all eyes on him" kind of thing. But it was because we were best friends, so yeah. He kind of pushed me into coming out to him."

Some of the men discussed coming out to acquaintances made via social media on the Internet or through video games. As a 15-year-old sophomore in high school, Luke connected with a gay boy from Tennessee via MySpace. Luke discussed the importance of being able to talk to someone outside of his friend group and family about his sexual identity so that he was better able to feel confident in being gay when coming out to those closest to him. Likewise, Matt made a connection virtually with a girl while playing an interactive video game on his computer who was the first person he came out to. Speaking about the experience, he said,

I never met her in person, but we were pretty close through the things that we talked about through the video game. And she was the one to first question me

and ask me if I was bi or gay. And of course, I was in denial at first, but then she slowly started sharing with me because she was bi and she just started sharing with me her experiences. And that's when I think I slowly came to terms with it, and then so I eventually...I'm pretty sure I came out to her before I came out to my best friend.

Coming out online was something that seemed very commonplace among the men.

Many of them spoke about coming out in person to those closest to them, but then changing their sexual orientation status on Facebook so that acquaintances knew that they were gay.

The coming out process to one's family seemed to be the most anxiety producing for many of the men in the study. The word "scary" was used multiple times by the men in the study. Bryan, in particular, felt scared to tell his parents about being gay, but decided to tell his father first while his mother was out of town with his older brother. He recounted his experience, saying,

I remember sitting on my bed and telling him, like, 'Oh, Dad, I need to tell you something.' 'Oh, okay.' I told him, 'I'm gay.' He kind of freaked out, but just in a 'Holy crap! That came the fuck out of nowhere. I was not suspecting that at all.' He had a rough time with it, and he called my mom and told her.

Sean's coming out to his parents connected with his decision not to return to the U.S. Military Academy for his junior year. While in Cairo, Egypt on vacation, Sean wrote an e-mail to his parents telling them that he was transferring schools and that part of the reason for the transfer was that he was gay. He recalled, "And of course, [my mother] demanded I call her. And so on a pre-paid phone from Cairo, I called my mom where I got disconnected halfway through....Mom was confused because I had a girlfriend right before that." He continued to discuss that his mom had difficulty understanding his disclosure, but that part of that was that she didn't get to talk to him face-to-face and see

him. Upon his return home, he said, “But then as soon as I came back, it was like, ‘Okay, you still look the same and talk the same. Everything’s okay.’”

Coming out to one’s parents and immediate family was significant for the men in the study who had done so. However, there were at least a couple of men who had not yet done so for a variety of reasons, but mainly due to the feeling that their identity as gay men would not be supported by their family. An important piece was that the men in this study who were not out to their parents were more likely to be men of color than White men. Craig, Charles, and Robert were not out to either one or both parents and were Filipino, Cambodian, and Mexican, respectively. Craig, in particular, discussed that he believed that his conservative Filipino family would disown him once he came out. He believed that most of his family knew that he was gay and that the issue was largely ignored. Likewise, Charles discussed that he wanted to wait to come out to his family until he had found a long-term partner. His Buddhist upbringing led him to believe until he found that partner his sexual identity did not play a significant role in his relationship with his immediate family.

Maintaining traditional hegemonic masculinity. Another movement point within the Sense of Sameness Disappears quadrant was the men’s upholding of traditional hegemonic masculinity, which was characteristic of the early stages of meaning one made of his multiple identities. Many of the participants either discussed explicitly or demonstrated implicitly the role that internalized homophobia has played in their lives, which had an impact one’s disclosure of his identities. Additionally, deeply rooted transphobia and gender coding were upheld by many of the men as well.

Transphobia is defined as “the irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the

inability to deal with gender ambiguity” (UC Riverside, n.d.). In discussing the intersections of masculinity and sexual identity, many of the men were quite blatant in upholding traditional hegemonic values and ideals towards other gay men, but not necessarily themselves. When asked about the type of men that he was attracted to, Brandon indicated that very masculine men were attractive while feminine or flamboyant men were avoided. He said, “And even within the gay community, flamboyant people are kind of looked down upon by the mainstream....If you give them a chance, they’re really cool people, but I think there’s still that kind of prejudice even within our own community.”

There was a strong concern for reinforcing one’s masculinity as much as possible by many of the men. In particular, there was a strong fear of being seen as feminine or flamboyant. Will mentioned the plans for holding the campus’s first drag show at SAU yet discusses the apprehensions he and his friends had in participating. He stated,

[Marc, Luke, and I] have talked about, ‘Oh, we would totally be in it if it was just our group.’ But I don’t want to dress up in drag in front of the whole campus. Like, it’s just what you’re comfortable with, and obviously no one in our group is going to judge us and make pre-judgments on how we’re dressed because obviously we trust each other, but none of us want to do that in front of the whole school with people that we’re in class with.

Taking this notion farther, there is an underlying current of transphobia among many of the men. When discussing his viewpoints on masculinity, Brandon was very explicit that his views were in opposition of those who might be transgender or gender non-conforming. He stated, “My idea of a man gets me in trouble all the time with the transgenders [sic]. They want to cut off my penis and feed it to their cat, I think.” At another point in the interview when asked how his thoughts on what it meant to be a man has shifted over time, Brandon said,

I think I've become more accepting of less masculine men and transgenders [sic]. Because when I, when I was a kid, still even once I came out, I didn't understand why if you're lucky enough to be born a male, and you want to go and get it [one's penis] chopped off? But I didn't understand the psychology behind it, I guess, feeling that they're a woman trapped in a man's body.

Brandon's statement juxtaposes his self-perception that his acceptance of less masculine men and transgender individuals and language that serves to exclude those individuals to whom he refers. In fact, Brandon's statement focused on transgender women (those individuals who were born with biological male sex organs yet identify and express their gender as female) rather than transgender men (those individuals who were born with biological female sex organs yet identify and express their gender as male). Through his statements, Brandon (potentially unknowingly) served as a gender enforcer himself, attempting to reinforce the notions of gender back to biological sex. However, Brandon was not alone in this. In the focus group, Luke stated his opinion on lumping transgender issues into the lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights movement. He said,

Sometimes I feel like we're all grouped together, but there's so much about transgendered [sic] people that I don't understand. And I'm willing to understand, but to me, ...it's kind of apples and oranges a little bit. It's a similar struggle, but I think being transgender would actually be a bigger struggle honestly.

In essence, both Brandon and Luke's statements reinforced their cisgender privilege, or the reification of gender as a binary system of man and woman thus ignoring the greater gender diversity that exists (i.e., gender non-conforming or transgender individuals; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009). Additionally, Luke's statement also seemingly reinforced a supposed hierarchy of various elements of oppression by seemingly looking at the lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights movements as separate and more insular than the larger collective LGBT community.

Troubling one's privilege. For the White men in the study, many of them discussed that coming out as gay brought about a new awareness that they no longer had heterosexual privilege. Thus, by coming out as gay, they troubled their sense of privilege, another movement point within the Sense of Sameness Disappears quadrant. Up until this point, these men were a part of the majority and dominant status groups within U.S. society. While they still had White and male privilege due to their race and gender, they experienced a sense of disequilibrium coming out as gay where there was a switch from a dominant status (heterosexual) to a subdominant group (gay). Reflecting upon his coming out experiences and describing what it means to be a gay man, Luke said,

I think it means that you do have a lot more obstacles, you know. Suddenly, I went from...I'm White. I'm from an affluent family. Come from a very, it was the norm. High school, I was the norm. College, the norm. But then when you really factor in the fact that I'm gay, I'm, by statistics, I'm a minority. And I see that.

This was a powerful moment for some of the men. Jonathan, in particular, discussed this loss of heterosexual privilege eloquently. He stated,

I had had a pretty perfect life up to that point, and it was kind of – not only shellshock for everyone around me, but really for myself because it really did change, not who I was, but it forced me to change my perception of myself. It was tough.

When discussing this phenomenon during the focus group, some of the participants had a transformative moment where it seemed like they finally had language for a feeling they had had for a substantial amount of time. Brandon spoke to this by saying,

That, that, that sums it up. I didn't think of it in those terms, but that's exactly one of the issues for me...Being an "Other" and seeing what it's like to be discriminated against. Wow. That's profound.

This troubling of one's privilege is important in the construction of one's sense of self, and Jonathan's experience exemplified the difficulties inherent in this movement from possessing a dominant identity to having an emergent subordinated identity.

Compartmentalizing identit(ies). The second major theme within the Individual Context is known as Compartmentalizing Identit(ies), located in the upper-left quadrant. In this quadrant, the men continued to make meaning of their multiple identities yet often times they compartmentalized certain aspects of their identities. Therefore, their overall sense of self was segmented into unique parts. Within this quadrant, there were four movement points within this section, and they included: (a) *Mirroring others and the consequences of that*; (b) *Not finding one's self in media images*; (c) *Tensions between one's sexuality and other social identities*; and (d) *Engaging in posturing behavior*. The participants' experiences of making meaning within this quadrant was widely informed by the internalization of messages about masculinity and sexuality and the consequences, intended or not, of that process of internalization by the men. This played a substantial role for the men's self-concept of who they were as gay men, and the compartmentalization of aspects of themselves certainly influenced how they made meaning of their identities. I will provide further evidence and discussion of this process of compartmentalization and meaning making throughout this section.

Mirroring others and the consequences of that. A movement point within the quadrant of Compartmentalizing Identit(ies) was *Mirroring Others and the Consequences of That*. Throughout the study, many of the men reflected upon their own sense of self in relation to others. Often times, the men felt challenged by the relationships established with other men, especially those who were straight, because they did not feel completely

accepted or similar, especially in light of their gay male identity. While this was certainly related to the Sense of Sameness Disappears quadrant, there was a distinction, namely in the constant comparison of one's self to others. For many of the men, this mirroring of others occurred with the growing realization of the role heteronormativity plays within their life, including relationships with their families, friends, and peers. This comparison between one's self and others informed in important ways how they began to see themselves and how they began to construct who they were, especially their sense of masculinity as young gay men.

For many of the men, the relationships they had with their fathers were the most significant and longest-sustaining "mirroring" relationship they had. From an early age, the men learned messages from their fathers about what it meant to be a boy (and eventually a man). Most of the men indicated that their fathers were the primary breadwinners in their family and that they often had closer connections with their mothers due to their fathers' absence due to work demands leading to father-son relationships that were strained or distant. Often times, the men's fathers were characterized as being emotionally distant, disengaged, and "awkward," which tended to be representative of not being able to connect with his family members easily.

Discussing his relationship with his father, Charles said,

With my dad, he just never...he never talks much. He just hangs around or just goes and does little odd jobs and things like that. See others family members, but yeah, he never...he just wasn't actively present. That's the best way to put it....But yeah, there was not much of a real father-son relationship, a typical one that you would see on TV.

Similarly, Peter discussed the fact that he grew up mirroring his father, a stereotypical guy's guy who is a businessman working in the personal health and fitness industry. He stated,

I think he enforced the masculine stereotype on men, but he wasn't an overbearing dad who made me play sports all the time. Everything I kind of wanted to do was by choice. And I never put him in a weird position by being the son who wanted to wear dresses or any of those kind of things so it's not like he was knowingly pounding 'Be masculine' into my head.

Peter's perception that his father enforced the masculine stereotype on him was important yet it was also essential to point out that Peter internalized those messages from his father about what was appropriate (or not appropriate) to do as a man. His comment that he never wanted to wear a dress was an example of the conscious choices Peter learned from his father as an act of mirroring his behaviors, thoughts, and actions. While their relationship may have been strained, the men in this study still mirrored their fathers in terms of a strong desire for financial security, yearning for approval from one's father, or an emphasized need to find a good job after college. In many ways, while acknowledging their fathers' perceived shortcomings, the men were mirroring their behaviors and continuing to perpetuate their fathers' influence in their own lives.

The coming out process served as a pivotal role in how many of the men mirrored their fathers and other men. Since most of the men they knew were heterosexual, the gay men, when coming out, found that they were not able to mirror their male role models fully any longer, leading to shifts in their relationships. Prior to coming out, Jonathan and his father had a very positive relationship; in fact, Jonathan said that his father was one of the most important people in his life. He said,

He was always, always there for me, always....[However,] I knew in the back of my mind, there was this one thing that I was hiding that could truly change

everything. So until that point, I made sure I was the perfect son. I never got in trouble. I got perfect grades. I was the star athlete. Everything you could have wanted as a high school son, that was me. And so it really hurt that all of a sudden that just because of this one thing [being gay] that hasn't changed who I am as a person, it completely changed the dynamic of our relationship.

As a result of his coming out, Jonathan and his father did not speak to one another for six months, which furthered Jonathan's depression and was extremely painful for him.

While not as severe, Luke expressed that while he knew that his father loved him, regardless of his sexual orientation, his father never really discussed it with him. He felt as though there was a significant void in their relationship because his sexual identity was the only thing that they were not able to be open about together and discuss publicly.

These examples furthered a process of comparison between men and a compartmentalization of what was permissible to discuss and what was not, especially with other men. Discussing something as difficult as sexual orientations outside of heterosexuality largely went against the grain and the socialized messages of masculinity. In the case of fathers and sons, however, it led to the shattering of an important and useful mirror.

Similar to the importance of the relationship between son and father, one's peers, especially straight male friends, seemed to play an important role for many of the men, but also created some troubles for the men in the study. Growing up as an athlete, Peter discussed having many male friends back home in Seattle. While in the closet during high school, Peter often felt as though he had to put up a façade outwardly to mask who he really was, and that played a critical role in him passing as straight to others. He said,

I don't really feel like I had my own identity because the identity I had was so crafted in a way to make these walls stay up. These walls of a façade so that no one really knew who I was, but I could come across as who I wanted to be in high school. So that's how I came across: a nice, funny guy who was always in a

relationship with a girl or hooking up with a girl. That was what I just made sure to do even though that wasn't who I was.

In essence, he mirrored what his classmates were doing to protect himself and continued to hide his sexual identity. In college, Will had a similar experience as that of Peter. Throughout his first year of college, Will was in the process of coming to terms with his sexuality. He stated, "I had drunkenly made out with some girls at parties, and I was like, 'That's not for me. That's not what I want to be doing.'"

Often times, the men discussed their relationships with other men to mirror the cisgender heterosexual norm: Who's the guy? Who's the girl? Victor highlighted this when responding to whether he believed that sexuality and masculinity are intertwined. He declared, "I want to say that they are intertwined because of how I am in my relationships at a sub level, like very much so. 'Well, who's the guy? Who's the girl?' Quote/unquote." Sean furthered this point by saying, "I think there's a lot of straight people who don't understand how a gay relationship works and that varies to sex or who's the woman and who's the man." At the same time, some of the men discussed the consequences of cisgender and heterosexual privilege in how they also looked at themselves and their identity and behaviors as gay men. Mason stated,

Oh, the question that I don't like that people ask me about my sexual orientation is 'Are you the guy or the girl in the relationship?' And I say, 'You know, I think gay relationships probably adhere less to the male-female paradigm of relationships.' And, you know, I'm not speaking from experience, just from what I've seen.

The constant mirroring between one's self and others had some serious implications for how the men came to see themselves as well as how they internalized the messages they received from others in how to be a man.

Not finding one's self in media images. As the literature discussed in Chapter Two shows, media is a powerful form of socialization for young people, especially men. However, the participants in this study discussed feeling as though they did not see depictions of gay people in the media that represented them adequately. Thereby, the men felt as though they experienced a compartmentalization of identity where the few images that did exist in the media played into common stereotypes rather than reality. Thus, this sense of *Not Finding One's Self in Media Images* was another movement point within the quadrant of Compartmentalizing Identit(ies). Additionally, the images that often were projected onto the gay community reinforced ideas that occasionally were dangerous or unhealthy for the men.

Among a handful of men, pornographic images of gay men were often viewed or watched as a means to understanding what it meant to be gay at a young age – typically prior to coming out. Jonathan spoke about watching gay pornography when in high school. He said,

Well, I would tell myself, 'Well, it's just because you're horny. It's just because of that.' Because every time I was finished,...I was racked with guilt. 'I can't believe I just did that.' I had to tell myself these lies just to make it okay when most of the time, I'd say 95% of the time, that's what I was looking at.

Unlike Jonathan, Brandon's attitude on watching gay porn was less emotionally loaded.

Instead, he found it to be useful in understanding his gay identity. Brandon stated,

I don't think porn's necessarily healthy, but in my case, since I had no exposure to the community at all, and even myself didn't want to admit it, that was an educational experience for me just to, I guess, to give sexual terms to the feelings I had. Like, "Oh wow. Really? That's what they do. Oh. Looks kinda cool.'

In essence, the men who discussed gay pornography spoke about watching it as a way to understand sexual activity between two men, but not seeing the models as aspirations for

themselves. Jonathan reflected upon this by saying, “Does [gay pornography] substitute for actually experiencing [sex]? No. But at least when I started, when I was 18, and actually started getting into the scene, I wasn’t going in there ignorant or blind to what I was supposed to do.” Additionally, Luke said, “I wasn’t looking at [gay pornography models] thinking that I need to look like them or anything by those means.” A reality for these men was that gay pornography served as an educational tool largely because families did not address non-heterosexual behavior nor did sexual education programs at school; thus, this was seen as a compartmentalization of identity due to heteronormativity. The men in this study accessed whatever images they could to be able to learn more about their own sexual identity albeit sometimes from a place of shame or secret, another place of compartmentalization. At the same time, the men did more readily discuss the challenges of finding themselves adequately represented as gay men in the movies and television.

In discussing the representation of gay men in popular media, especially television and film, the men often found the existing characters troubling. Craig voiced his concerns when saying, “When I think about the media, I think because you don’t see a lot of gay people in the media and especially of color either, so I just felt like I was the outcast kinda. I’ve never seen anyone like me.” This absence of role models was particularly salient for gay men of color, such as Craig, which often led to confusion about how he should be a gay man. Craig explained that on Filipino television shows, gay men often are the flamboyant entertainers or comedians, which left him wondering, “So I was like, ‘Do I have to act that way because I’m a Filipino gay man?’ But I guess that’s the pressure from TV because [my family members] watch it all the time.”

Some of the men discussed their experiences of watching television with their families at home, especially shows that had gay characters. Bryan mentioned watching *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, a makeover reality show where five gay men helped make over a straight guy each episode. In telling his story, Bryan stated,

And my dad, there would be a gay moment and my dad would be like, 'That's very gay.' I'd be like, 'Yeah, that was a really gay moment.' ...And I'd laugh, but then at the same time, in the back of my head, it'd be like, 'Oh, I guess that's who I shouldn't be.' ...But yeah, that would be one instance where I'd say that my dad's perspective on the gay community kind of turned me – or made me be kind of anti-that. But the complete opposite...so you know, not being involved in fashion and grooming and all that kind of stuff, but be more into sports.

Bryan internalized the messages that he received from his father watching that show together and compartmentalized any emergent thoughts on being gay and went back into the closet. Additionally, Jonathan recounted that his family's favorite show to watch together was *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. However, whenever there was a gay character involved in one of the storylines, his father would turn off the television and not allow the family to watch the episode. These conflicting messages between media and one's identity as a gay man brought about many conflicts and tensions that were difficult for some of the men to navigate.

The messages from the media around what it means to be a gay man went far beyond fictional characters in television or films. Peter discussed the visibility of the LGBT community within the media and its growing influence. He said,

At least the media is more than cable television now. People can go online, and they can see "It Gets Better," that campaign. You know, they can see in the news that murders of homosexuals or suicides are getting a lot of attention now. And at the same time, a lot of ridiculous anti-LGBT stuff, like the Westboro Church, and then you know, not that it's ridiculous, but Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the whole issue surround that, you know federal issues surrounding our community are getting a lot of attention. And the media is being, with standard journalism, you're getting

both sides of the story, so if you want to be a more competent...consumer of the media, then, you know, you can definitely be that.

At the same time, Peter still believed that there was room for improvement. He stated, "I would still say it's still more...negative, I think. Definitely far better than it used to be though. So that makes me happy because it means that it's going in the right steps."

While there had been advancement in the representation of gay men in the media, there was still a lack of representation in finding others that seemed similar to them which continued to negatively affect one's sense of self and how they made meaning of their sense of sexuality and masculinity.

Tensions between one's sexuality and other social identities. The awareness of *Tensions Between One's Sexuality and Other Social Identities* served as another movement point for the men in this study within the Compartmentalizing Identit(ies) quadrant. Throughout the study, it became clear that many of the men experienced significant and sometimes very traumatic tensions between their sexual orientation and other social identities leading to the compartmentalization of one or more identities. In particular, race, religion, and socioeconomic class emerged as three social identities that typically had an adverse effect on one's holistic development as a gay man.

The tensions between religion and sexual orientation were most significant for those men whose families were involved in more conservative religious communities. In high school, Brandon was president of his school's Christian Club, and while he was aware of his emerging gay identity, the tensions he felt between his religious beliefs and his sexuality were very painful. He said, "I kind of felt like the biggest hypocrite in the world – that I was a faggot – like, sexual deviant – that I was going to Hell, and I didn't want to be." Similarly, Craig grew up being involved in religion and continued in

Intervarsity Fellowship his first year of college. However, that was during the Proposition 8 movement¹, and it was during this time that he started to feel conflicted between his religious beliefs and his sexuality. He reflected upon this, “I was conflicted with that, and when there’s conflicted thoughts, that’s when I know something’s up. So being male and being Christian, that’s when I started feeling different.” These conflicts ultimately created a sort of dissonance for the men, which they each processed and/or continue to process currently. Other men in the study, particularly those who did not come from religious backgrounds, spoke of their friends who were also in the process of coming out as gay and that those who had the hardest time doing so were from religious families. Bryan spoke of a friend who was in law school and who had just come out to his family, who were having a very difficult time accepting him because their religious beliefs were very specific that being gay was a sin. This tension between religion and sexual identity was very difficult for some of the men; however, adding in socioeconomic class as an additional intersection to those two social identities was particularly challenging.

The role of one’s socioeconomic status added another layer of complexity to one’s ability to make meaning of his multiple identities. Social class, in particular, had specific implications when joined with the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender in different ways. Like Brandon, both Peter and Jonathan grew up in religious households; both were White, raised by their families whose income classified them as being in the upper-class socioeconomically and identified as Catholic. As previously discussed, Peter

¹ Proposition 8 was a voter referendum in the State of California in 2008 that served to reverse the California Supreme Court’s decision allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals the right to marry their same-sex partners.

and Jonathan were also the two men in this study who had attempted suicide at least once. Being upper-class seemingly reinforced notions of how one acted, behaved, and interacted in significant ways, especially when considering the importance of other's perceptions of one's self and family. In many ways, the men who were from upper-class backgrounds spoke about the need to meet expectations, and being gay was not one of those expectations. Thus, this intersection of social class, religion, gender, and sexuality resulted in increased mental health issues for those men from wealthier families.

Jonathan reflected upon his suicide attempts and depression by saying,

I think a lot of it has to do with how I was raised. Both religious, status, all those. I was afraid that because of this that [coming out] would somehow change me. Like I said, I'd been in sports my whole life. That somehow it would demasculinize me, that I would no longer be the same person. That I would no longer be able to do the same things that I'd loved my whole life. And so it carried very negative connotations for me.

Likewise, Peter stated, "I think I remain distant from [religion] because...it's at the root of all these issues surrounding around my identity and so many people hate gay people and think I'm immoral because that's what religion tells them."

The intersections of men of color from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds played out in different ways than their wealthy peers. Many of these men had limited exposure to the gay community, whether as a part of their campus community or the local off-campus community, due to their lack of financial capital. For example, Craig acknowledged that being from a working class background affected coming out. He said, "I guess it's definitely more heteronormative, so I guess that's why in the communities I grew up in, that's a definite factor [of not coming out], too." Accessing available resources was something that was discussed by many of the men of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As Craig stated being gay and poor "means it's a lot of

oppressive factors playing in your life, and don't have resources other people have, you also have a conflicting identity because there's also a certain community that goes around with low income."

As a first-generation college student and first-generation American, Charles discussed the lack of resources that he has financially and that while as a college student, he has continued, at times, to provide some monetary assistance to his parents. For him, his priorities were significantly different than the other men in this study. He went to school full-time, had an internship, and worked at a part-time retail job. He was not involved in much on campus, and he was the only man from SAU who was not involved in some way with the campus's undergraduate LGBT organization. Charles said that his gay identity was "not something that I concern myself with, and it's not something that has been my experience because of my parents, because of where they came from. For me, it's not something that I think about." Instead, he indicated that he focused on being happy, which he said was a significant tenet of his Buddhist faith. Thus, he did not focus on his sexual identity; rather, he compartmentalized it within himself and often kept it private from others.

For the men in this study, elements of one's race, social class, gender, religion, and sexuality converged in ways that created increased awareness of the tensions inherent between one another. This awareness of tensions between one's multiple identities was a key element of one's meaning making. Throughout this part of their journeys of self-discovery, the men began to experience these tensions in relation to their interactions with others, but also how they began to construct their own sense of self. These tensions

often exhibited themselves through compartmentalization where they would present themselves in different ways in different situations or contexts.

Engaging in posturing behavior. The final movement point within the Compartmentalizing Identit(ies) quadrant was *Engaging in Posturing Behavior*.

Throughout this quadrant of the labyrinth, the men, by and large, demonstrated a strong sense of posturing to either impress or mislead others. Mostly this behavior stemmed from the men attempting to impress or mislead others around their masculinities. A very traditional masculine trait, this behavior arose by projecting an image that they had life all figured out or that they were extremely self-confident, which underscored a sense of competition with other men.

When discussing his relationship with his father, Luke demonstrates this false projection of confidence. He said,

With my dad, I've noticed that it's been me almost trying to overdo it a little bit in trying to prove how confident I am in myself and talking about being gay as much as possible that's reasonable with him and forcing him to do it sort of, just so that he sees and addresses the fact that yes, I'm gay and I'm super okay with it.

Yet another point, Luke equated being a man with being comfortable with who he is, but recognized that is not always the case for him, personally. He stated,

I still find myself in the situations where I need to put on a front, and I almost don't want to say that I, that it's a false me. It's just a more aware me of 'This is kind of my situation.'

This concept of a "false me" was alive for some of the men; however, it played out in very different ways.

For some of the men, the "false me" was used to protect themselves, especially in cases in which they did not feel completely comfortable. Often times, this occurred

largely in spaces that were predominantly heterosexual, such as going to bars with straight friends. This “false me” would often play out by the men “butching it up.” Marc discussed aspects of how he butches up, saying, “When I’m with more straight men, I get more quiet as opposed to more straight – I suppose that’s my straight way.” He continued,

Just when I talk to someone in a more relaxed environment, such as this one, it’s when I’m first getting to know them, so it’s a bit more monotone in a way. But when I’m like closer with some friends, I get much more excited, and it [his voice] may kind of rise a bit.

Likewise, Luke admitted to being much more reserved in mixed crowds. He stated,

Yeah, there’s a lot of circumstances – a lot of times, new situations or groups of people, I kind of find myself maybe just putting a little edge up on my masculinity just so I feel it out. I’ve always been that way when meeting new people, especially guys. I start out one way. I want you to get to know me first, and then I’ll come out.

In many ways, this posturing was used as a sort of self-protection from others. By projecting a stronger sense of masculinity than they often felt they had, the men were able to test out whether they were safe to be open with their sexuality or not.

This posturing also was seen in interactions between gay men as well, largely in relation to the competition between one another for someone else’s attraction. When discussing his involvement in the club scene in Los Feliz, Landon discussed feeling competitive with other gay Asian men for attention from other men. He recalled his friendship with another Taiwanese man he would go clubbing with during this time and said,

With both of us being Asian and going out, we kind of, we’re already in the category of Asians, it kind of puts us in the spotlight of having to compete with other Asians for attention. So I feel like being friends with him and going out so much morphed me into being the bitchy Asian when I go out.

Echoing Landon's experience of taking on a persona when attracted to other men, Luke highlighted that masculinity plays a large role in that. He commented,

It's like, it's human nature for everyone, I guess. You want to be attractive to the opposite sex, gays, whatever. So it's part of the role that you play, I guess, in the sex scene. But I definitely think the act of having sex makes me think about the term 'masculinity' more. 'How do I want to be perceived in this situation? Am I being perceived that way? And does it matter?' I definitely think about it.

This competitive spirit and drive cut across many of the men's experiences, whether in their personal lives, their leadership roles, or their outward projections in every day life.

Additionally, the college environment from each of the participating sites seemingly had its own effects on one's posturing. In his interview, Victor discussed his experiences in different campus cultures and how those cultures sometimes reinforce certain gender codes or roles. He said,

It definitely, at times, is uncomfortable because sometimes I'll carry a bag or something. It's very different from the typical guy at [Oceanside] State who is a tank and board shorts with his skateboard....But there is definitely more of that masculine male who's more athletic, more stoic, more quiet, frat boy kind of thing, so yeah. State definitely has that culture versus if I were to go to CUO which I'm there somewhat often, the guys there are much more not that image. Much more seemingly studious. I don't want to say stereotypical nerd, but it kind of fits their profile.

As a result, the campus culture plays a role in reinforcing certain gender messages about what is acceptable, and the men often internalized these messages, such as Victor feeling out of the norm because he sometimes carried a bag on campus. While Victor did not change his behaviors, that environment may have led others who were gay to act differently.

Seeking community. The third major theme from the findings entitled, Seeking Community, was the upper-right quadrant of the labyrinth model in which the men expressed a deep yearning for belonging and connection with others. Within this theme,

six movement points emerged that influenced how the men in this study made meaning of their multiple identities. These included: (a) *Campus environments as safe spaces*; (b) *Importance of campus involvement*; (c) *Use of technology*; (d) *Making other gay friends*; (e) *Sexual behavior and same-sex relationships*; and f) *Immersion into off-campus LGBT community*. Through the interviews, the men detailed that being in community with others was essential to their development and meaning making. Many of the key influences experienced in this quadrant involved platonic and romantic relationships with other men, finding safe and beneficial spaces on campus, and accessing resources available to the men that provide them contact with others who may be like them. All six of these movement points were significant in helping the men make meaning of their multiple identities, especially their sense of gender or masculinity and sexuality, by giving them the space to find others like them and also begin to develop new ways of thinking about themselves through experiences in which they joined with others within the gay community.

Campus environments as safe spaces. One of the movement points within the Seeking Community quadrant was known as *Campus Environments as Safe Spaces*. The overwhelmingly majority of the men in this study found their university campus to be a safe space in which they could be open about their sexual orientation. In fact, 13 out of the 17 participants came out once they enrolled in college. As previously discussed about the men in the *Sense of Sameness Disappears* quadrant, most of them were aware that they might not have been heterosexual between elementary to high school; however, many of the men commented that their high schools would not have been a safe space for them to be out as gay men. In contrast, the college environment allowed the men to feel

comfortable in terms of their sexuality as well as challenge their assumptions of others at times. As a student at Oceanside State, Victor discussed his peers as being on a “spectrum” where “there are those jackasses who are complete pricks, but at the same time, the opposite is very true.” He continued on, saying,

One of our [fraternity] brothers – he’s 27 – and his roommate is in the Navy, and like, he walked with us at [the] Pride [parade], and he’s so supportive. He lets our [fraternity] brothers flirt with him, and he loves it. He’s completely straight. But I think that kind of experience, of meeting people who you think would cause harm and be damaging, not so physically, but just emotionally, and they’re not. They’re the opposite, so I guess I’ve learned that from State – that variety.

Similarly, Nate’s experience of his peers at St. Andrew’s University was positive, but attributed part of that to the University’s mission. He said,

Yeah, I’d say pretty much everywhere I go at SAU, I’m pretty comfortable being myself because I know that even if people do have negative thoughts about who I am, they won’t show them a – that’s how people here are, and b – because our school really emphasizes that we should be tolerant of everyone.

Craig’s experience at CUO matched closely with Victor and Nate’s. He stated that compared to his experiences in middle school and high school, CUO’s

definitely been a more open space because we do have one of the largest LGBT Resource Centers. With that, I feel like that thought of that surrounds the school. It becomes a safe space for people with LGBT identity. We have inclusive housing. That’s kind of the constant conversation going around this entire school.

From the men’s perspectives, the campus climate on each of the three research sites reinforced a sense of inclusion for LGBT students.

The presence of LGBT affiliated individuals or organizations and events were identified as helpful to the men and their meaning making during the college experience. Robert, who attended OSU, mentioned how different his experience was there than his previous undergraduate institution in Texas. He claimed, Oceanside State

just seemed like such a gay-friendly place. My professors were openly gay – at least the ones who were – and they had things like the Big Gay Barbeque. I mean, the gay community had a pretty strong presence at OSU, and I wanted to be part of it, I guess. That really helped.

Peter commented on the influence of his campus's PRIDE advisor, Dr. Erin King, an out lesbian faculty member. He said,

Dr. King, she's incredible. Being around her, and seeing how she speaks and how passionate she is, she's been a mentor to me whether she knows it or not. It's not the kind of thing where I go to mentors for advice and all those kinds of things. I probably should, but it's just not what I do. But I guess she's as close as I have to one because she's what I would strive to be like and have her passion.

Through their contact with out faculty and staff members as well as through the campus's espoused and actual values on diversity and inclusion, the men found their campus environments to be mostly positive. While they had some critiques of their institutions and their overall support of LGBT students, these men found meaningful support networks through fellow students, campus programming, and student organizations geared towards the LGBT community.

Importance of campus involvement. Within the Seeking Community quadrant, another significant movement point found was the *Importance of Campus Involvement*. Almost all of the men in the study, with the exception of Charles and Sean, were involved in some type of student organization or campus involvement opportunity. Quite a few of the men found importance in connecting with other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and straight ally students on campus.

Whether through the LGBT undergraduate organization, working in LGBT-related internships, or serving as peer educators on campus training and advocating about LGBT rights and issues, many of the men were able to use these experiences in meaningful ways to learn more about being a gay man. Mason, in particular, highlighted

the significance of taking on a leadership role as an intern at the Safe Zones @ OSU program. In his first interview, Mason spoke at length about the challenges he faced as being a gay man who was involved in the Naval ROTC program and the Navy's Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy. While he had been open about his sexual orientation as a campus resident assistant, he felt as though he could not participate fully in LGBT programs on campus, especially those sponsored by the LGBT Student Union organization. However, with the repeal of DADT, he started to get more involved in LGBT related organizations and also began his internship with Safe Zones. For National Coming Out Day, he was asked to be a panelist and tell his coming out story on campus, and this was a pivotal moment for him and how he has come to make meaning of his identities. He said,

It was a good experience because I think it was the next step. I think that as I've learned, identity is development. It's not just one thing that's you. You're constantly finding new things about yourself, so I think that it was good for me to express myself.

Mason's story was similar to many of the men who were involved in LGBT organizations which provided opportunities for the men to build support networks, learn more about issues relating to LGBT rights, and discuss critical aspects of gender and sexual identity.

While Mason and other men benefited from becoming involved in LGBT organizations, some of the men felt an unfulfilled yearning for belonging in those spaces. Craig discussed multiple ways that he has tried to connect with other gay men on his campus. He had attempted to become involved in the Queer People of Color group; however, he found the individuals in that space to be too radical as well as more advanced in their understanding of their sexual identity. Likewise, he challenged himself further and chose to live in the LGBT housing program this past academic year, but had

not connected meaningfully with many of the men living in that space either. Reflecting upon this, he stated,

Like, I've really reflected on why I'm in LGBT housing, why I chose to be in it. Like, my personal reason was to kind of connect with the community because I feel so disengaged with that kind of space so that's why I chose this housing in hopes that I would find a way to connect. It hasn't worked. I mean, so far, it's only been a month or so, but I'm still hoping that there's still something that's going to gravitate me to something like that space.

Craig's experience of yearning for connection but finding disconnection seemed deeply rooted into his own identity of being very "heteronormative." He commented, "I mean, still it's the uncomfortableness [sic] of talking about sexual identity because I mean, I've thought about it, but it's something that I don't really talk about with my friends."

Additionally, Craig was closeted in terms of his family, so he was faced with not being able to talk openly with those who should be closest to him about his gay identity, something that affected him in very significant ways. As a result, he turned to LGBT-related programs and organizations to help him feel a sense of comfort yet due to his own internalized homophobia, he was unable to find meaningful connection. Unfortunately, his yearning for connection was not met.

Three of the men from this study were also involved in Delta Lambda Phi, a progressive fraternity for gay, bisexual and straight men. Delta Lambda Phi's home campus was at Oceanside State yet any student attending a college or university in San Juan Miguel was eligible to pledge. For the men who were a part of DLP, they consistently discussed the fraternity's importance of helping them understand what it means to be a gay man. Robert, an alumni member, said, "I thought it'd be neat to have that network of support from people who understood what it was like growing up in a society where they didn't necessarily accept being gay." Victor, the fraternity's

president, concurred with Robert, but expanded on what the fraternity has meant to him.

He stated,

For me, it kind of...gave me that family that a lot of people in the gay community talk about. You have your family, but then you have your family, like that group of men or group of people, any sexuality, gender identity, who understand the difference between you and what is known as the other, like, the hetero society, the greater society, the straight world. So for me, crossing into the brotherhood gave me that place of belonging and that strength. And it also gave me a sense of the diversity of the community. So it's very important. Very impactful.

The experience of being involved in LGBT-related organizations was quite meaningful for many of the men; however, just being involved on campus generally was significant for many of the men.

Significant leadership roles or inclusion in campus involvement groups or athletics were highlighted as important factors in the men's lives. Kevin emphasized his involvement on campus as an orientation leader as a pivotal moment in his life. Through this leadership role, he discussed having the opportunity of what it meant for him to be a role model for others, especially as one of the only openly gay orientation leaders on staff. He recounted his participation in a diversity activity where he publicly came out in front of 250 new incoming students to his college, saying,

Then I was like, 'Well, I'm an orientation leader. I'm the only orientation leader in this room who could stand up. If I don't stand up – first of all, some of my freshmen are going to be, "Engh?" And there are freshmen in this room who won't stand up because no one else is standing up. So I was like, 'Okay, I'm standing up.' So I stand up, and there was one other boy in the room who stood up.

Kevin commented on feeling empowered by that experience of coming out and potentially making a difference to those incoming students. Additionally, he spoke of the important validation he received from his fellow orientation leaders and staff members

and their support of him. To Kevin, there was a strong sense of belonging with his fellow orientation leaders despite the differences that they may have had identity-wise.

Participation in a traditional social fraternity and athletics was discussed by several of the men. Peter, Marc, and Nate each had the experience of joining a fraternity while Bryan was a member of the swimming and diving team at his institution. Each of the men expressed the fact that being a part of their respective fraternity or team was important to them. In his words, Marc said, “It was great being with groups of them and hanging out” and that he joined “mainly just to make new friends and find some people I could get along with.” In his experience as an athlete during college, Bryan discussed the importance of having the instant bond with his teammates from the start of his time at college. He found that being on the swim team provided an instant group of friends, which was significant for him. At the same time, the students who were actively involved in traditional fraternities or athletics seemingly demonstrated that those organizations influenced how they viewed their own sense of self, especially in terms of the sometimes siloed experiences those organizations provided for their members. Bryan, for instance, discussed at length that the amount of time devoted to his academics and sport prevented him from exploring other resources and opportunities on campus that may have assisted him as he was working through his identity development as a gay man. Additionally, each of the men also discussed the fact that they often felt tokenized as the only openly gay men within their fraternity or team, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Use of technology. Another important movement point for the men in this study found in the Seeking Community quadrant was the *Use of Technology*. It probably

comes as no surprise that the lives of college students today are heavily influenced by the use of technology, and the men in this study were no exception. However, it should be noted that the use of social networking and social media played a significant role in understanding and exploring their identity as well as how they communicated their identity as a gay men.

A large number of the participants spoke about using MySpace or Facebook as a means to find connection with other gay men, especially early on in the exploration phase of coming out as gay men. As previously mentioned, Luke connected with another young man in Tennessee who was also coming out prior to telling his parents about his identity. Furthermore, Luke actually came out to his mother via text message. While at dinner one night with a friend, he decided that he needed to tell her immediately and used his cell phone to do so. In an effort to communicate his gay identity to multiple people, Marc changed his Facebook profile to "Interested in Men" as a means of coming out. He recounted that doing so created quite a stir, especially amongst his siblings to whom he had not yet come out. The use of social media as an expression of one's identity was significant in allowing them to instantly communicate who they were to a mass group of friends and acquaintances.

A small group of the men also accessed technology as a means to connect with other gay men sexually. These men commented that this use of technology was both positive and negative. During his first and second years of college, Matt used gay social networking sites to experiment sexually. He stated, "I met up with people that I met online and experimented. And it was terrible because at the time, it made me feel like I had no respect for myself. But at the same time, I didn't know any better. So that was

definitely a big learning experience for me.” However, Jonathan discussed the benefits of using gay social networking sites personally as he had met two of his boyfriends through a particular site. He said, “The truth of the matter is that the way that social media has evolved in our time, it really is one of the best ways to meet other gay men in the area.” The predominance of technology within the lives of these men suggested that it played a substantial role in their development, but particularly their ability to make meaning of what it meant to be a gay man, for better or worse.

Making other gay male friends. The movement point of *Making Other Gay Male Friends* emerged within the Seeking Community quadrant. The participants discussed the establishment of friendships with other gay men at length. In many cases, these friendships provided a mutuality of peer support, education, and counseling. Beginning his college experience at the U.S. Military Academy, Sean was not able to be public about his sexual identity and felt isolated until connecting with the underground network of gay midshipmen. Finding this group was important to him in just finding others like him and feeling as though he had found his place within the academy. Sean stated, “It wasn’t a question of gay or straight or should I do this or that, but it was just being comfortable for once.” Brandon, while discussing his friendship with his gay friend, Blake, who is in a long-term relationship with a same-sex partner, reflected, “Since I was very sheltered from the gay community as a kid growing up,...I can kind of observe, ‘Oh, okay.’ It’s kinda cool. It’s a learning experience and a friendship.” As a result, many of the men found their friendships to be important to their own learning of what it meant to be a gay man.

However, some of the men's friendships with other gay men seemed complicated. Often, the men's friendships supported hegemonic masculinity. Instead of sexually objectifying women, as would be the case in heterosexual friendships, the gay men sexually objectified men. Marc stated, "When straight guys are together, they talk about hot girls and all this stuff. Same, we can talk about hot guys and talk about either the gender-bender things or even sexually related to gay sex and just be." This demonstrated the complexity of friendships among gay men. These friendships also iterated certain troubling notions around hegemony and perpetuated certain negative stereotypes about the gay community as well. While this negative consequence of gay male friendships had been acknowledged, it was also clear that, by and large, these friendships were essential for building one's social support networks and assisting others in learning about what it meant to be a gay man.

Peter also found the connections made with other gay men important, but also stressed the importance of helping support others. He stated,

I really like the group of gay friends that I have and now it spans at all levels. I have friends the year below me, friends that I have that are graduated, that I've met, that kind of thing so it's expanded. And I think it's become richer because we're all realizing that we're experiencing a very unique lifestyle that only we can fully understand.

Nate happens to be one of those friends that Peter mentions who was younger than him. From this perspective, Nate acknowledged that being included in this group of men has had a positive influence on him. He stated, "My confidence has grown so much since meeting them. I don't see it happening, and I haven't put much time in thinking about it....but yeah, I think it mostly has to do with my confidence." Likewise, Landon commented on a message heard by many of the men in that having these friendships also

allows them to be one's authentic self. He said, "I feel like for gay friends, it is definitely easier for them to be able to be closer." Robert's experience of having friends through his involvement in Delta Lambda Phi aligned with Landon's perspective and iterated,

It's been an opportunity to have friends who understand, I guess,...what it's like to grow up in a community that's not always accepting, and having people just generally there for you without necessarily having that hidden agenda or desire to hook up with you, whether it be romantically or sexually interested.

The experience of building friendship built out of support and trust were significant for these men, and clearly they had an impact on how the men came to see themselves in individual ways. This issue of romantic and sexual interest that Robert highlighted also played out in important ways amongst the men's process of making meaning.

Sexual behavior and same-sex relationships. Within the Seeking Community quadrant, another movement point was *Sexual Behavior and Same-Sex Relationships*. Almost half of the men (eight out of 17) in the study indicated that they have had a same-sex relationship either in high school or in college. Engaging in same-sex sexual behavior or being involved in a relationship with another man seemed to be significant in the process of making meaning of one's identity as a gay man. Especially as most of the men in this study came out during college, the college environment provided them the space to engage in sexual behavior with other men, often for the first time.

The experience of one's first significant relationship was often an important learning experience about one's self. The first relationship was significant as that was the first time that the men were able to engage in a deeply intimate and reciprocal relationship with another man. Matt discussed this when he said,

I think it was the one of the greatest learning experiences of my life for the short three months that it was. Like, it was really weird for me holding his hand in public for the first time....The feeling of being able to hold his hand in public felt

so nice, and those were one of the greatest moments of it. The arguments and feelings of insecurity and jealousy of him maybe talking to other guys, those were definitely the terrible moments....I still feel like I learned a lot.

Matt's relationship allowed him further experiences to reflect critically upon his identity as a gay man, which proved to be critical to him when making meaning of his identity.

Many of the men outlined that their first relationship caused them to be very introspective about their sense of masculinities, especially as it related to sexual roles. The dominant thinking amongst the men as well as their perceptions of others' was that being the top or the penetrator was more masculine or dominant whereas the bottom or the receiver was more feminine or submissive. Therefore, there was a concern by many of the men to be seen as feminine or being the "woman" in the sexual relationship.

Sharing his own experiences, Marc indicated that he and his partner have had to negotiate sex together since both of them prefer to be the top, leading them to "have a lot of dry spells." However, Marc felt that their preference to top had little to do with masculinity or femininity. Other men felt very differently regarding sexual roles and the perception of masculinity or femininity within those roles. Nate expressed his own evolution of thinking about how sexual roles were equated to notions of masculinity or femininity. He said,

I used to have an issue with bottoming versus topping because of gender roles and stuff like that. Really messed with my head, but I've just gotten over that. Fuck gender roles. But back then, it was if you were bottoming, you were like the woman, and if you were topping, you're like the man. So I didn't want to be a woman. I wanted to be a man. So I was like for the longest time, I was so afraid to be on the receiving end of things. But yeah, that doesn't play into my line of thinking anymore. I don't think it matters.

Similarly, Peter had to deal with some of his own struggles around sex roles and his own masculinity when beginning to date his first boyfriend who was a top. He recounted this experience by saying,

It definitely worried me because I don't want to be a bottom bitch. I didn't know if that was something I liked to do because I hadn't done it before, and plus, I just didn't want to be associated with being, you know, not necessarily effeminate, but just the more the person who's being controlled by being the bottom.

Bryan echoed these thoughts by saying, "It's the thing that I don't want to feel like I'm always on the feminine side of having sex. Stuff like that. Because you know, in my head, if you're taking it, then you are more of the woman." Again, this type of thinking supports and continues the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in a resistance to being seen as feminine or womanly.

The reification of equating sex roles with masculinity and femininity typically was the same for the men, regardless of their sex role preference, although, that seemingly shifted over time for some of the men. For instance, Victor discussed how when he first came out, he equated bottoming with being feminine. However, he stated, "Now though, knowing my [fraternity] brothers and knowing what they do in bed, that completely gets flown out." This aligned with Nate's evolving views on his sexual roles and their alignment with masculinity or femininity that was previously discussed within this section. While the meanings they have made of their experiences may have differed, the men had thought about their identities due to sexual activity and sex roles.

Immersion into off-campus LGBT community. The *Immersion into Off-Campus LGBT Community* was another significant movement point within the Seeking Community quadrant. Engagement in the off-campus LGBT community within Danby or Highland Park, the gay communities of San Juan Miguel or Los Feliz, respectively,

were discussed as a key influence of one's meaning making of their identities. In this vein, Matt stated,

Exploring the gay community around campus and around San Juan Miguel, that just – I don't know – it reaffirms or confirms everything that I know about my sexuality and my identity. I definitely learned a lot. I think I learned more through seeing other gays in the community than through a class or program.

Likewise, Victor discussed his involvement as a volunteer at two LGBT-related non-profit organizations in San Juan Miguel as critical in helping him network with leaders within the gay community. Through those experiences, older gay men who helped provide support and advice to him on a range of issues mentored him. These issues included helping him connect and network with others, personally and professionally as well as helping him feel more comfortable sexually and offering advice about his personal health and well-being.

For many of the men, especially those who were 21 years of age or older, participation in the gay bar and club scene also served as key moments of their meaning making because they provided opportunities to connect with others outside of their campus "bubble." By and large, the exposure to the gay community through the bar and club scene also presented the broad spectrum of diversity of individuals within the larger community. Bryan stated,

Since I finished my swim career, I was able to go out to Danby and go out to the bars and stuff, and I met some new friends through that. I'd say that has helped me, I guess, become a little more comfortable, but I've always been just comfortable with who I was, so to say...But I guess since being able to go out and see the community, it's made me a little more comfortable with who I am and be less of 'Oh, I should hide this from people.'

Likewise, Peter recounted being hired as a host at a gay bar and restaurant in Danby as a pivotal moment in his life in helping him connect with the larger LGBT community. He stated,

I was able to work at Woody's this past year and over the summer, it was the best – the absolute best. To be able to go out in Danby and be part of the community and see what all that was like. Yeah, it was great.

Landon and Kevin both often went clubbing in Highland Park and found that experience of dancing with other gay men helpful in establishing their sense of who they were as gay men in community with others who were gay. Landon stated,

I think it was mainly just to see that I wasn't different. There are others like me. So I think that's the more important part besides just having fun and wanting attention, kind of. And then also just to see the bigger scope of things because in high school, it's like the handful of gays, and instead of that, it's like the thousands of gays.

Experiences such as these as well as participation in LGBT pride festivals and parades played a vital role in providing additional spaces where these men could connect with others who were like them and helped them feel a larger sense of belonging and community.

Questioning allegiances. The fourth major theme that emerged from the data was called Questioning Allegiances, which was located the lower right quadrant of the labyrinth model. It was in this quadrant where the men started to question decisions that they had made during college as well as internalized tensions that they experienced between their multiple social identities. Within this section, there were three movement points, which will be discussed below. These movement points included: (a) *Experimentation and risk taking*; (b) *Clarifying campus involvement*; and (c) *Internal tensions of personal identity*. In essence, each of these movement points dealt with the

men engaging in a deep searching and questioning of their values and beliefs and how those matched up to who they were, especially in light of how the men made meaning of their multiple identities. The men experienced an array of tensions within this aspect of their meaning making process: the tension between desire and one's health and well-being, the tension between a yearning for inclusion yet never fully feeling included, and the tensions between disparate social identities that seemingly could not co-exist. Therefore, the men were engaging in a period of questioning to whom and where their loyalties laid, which was critical in their meaning making process. In this section, I will expand my discussion on each of these movement points.

Experimentation and risk taking. One of the movement points within the Questioning Allegiances quadrant was *Experimentation and Risk Taking*. As was discussed in the previous theme of Seeking Community, many of the men found that the immersion or connection to the larger LGBT community off-campus was significant. However, it seemed to be a double-edged sword. Many of the men commented that through their engagement within the off-campus community, they frequently were experiencing a heightened reinforcement of negative images around the gay community, including socialized messages around the hypersexualization of gay men as well as increased alcohol and drug use. By and large, the men discussed making meaning of these messages through experimentation and then processing the decisions they made.

Many of the men who participated in this study indicated receiving strong messages about the hypersexualization of the gay community throughout their college experience. Within their discussions of these hypersexualized messages, the men

seemingly felt frustrated by this aspect of the community yet found themselves falling into the prey as well. To this point, Peter stated,

I think that the thing that we always talk about, and it's one thing that I think is frustrating because it's just again an aspect of our culture and community, is obviously just sex and relationships. Like, that's what's always coming up. Always talking about going out, you know, going out, getting drunk, dancing, like hooking up with people, and now that I'm in a relationship, always talking about, like, how our sex is. Like, 'Oh, who's top? Who's bottom?' And it's so...they know I hate talking about that because it pisses me off but we always do it all the time, and it's just like – I don't know. I like to think that we're kind of an educated group of people who are in tune with progressive thinking, but of course, we can't help but talk about these kinds of things because from all the other gay people we know and from just media's portrayals about what we should be talking about and be concerned with, it is always on our mind. So yeah, that is what we talk about. And I think that every group of gay friends, I feel like that's what they talk about.

Luke reiterated Peter's point when discussing the differences between how men and women made meaning of the act of sex, saying,

For guys, it's totally different, and I think that's totally why sex is known for being more casual for gay men because it's two men together and you're horny, whatever, so that becomes a norm, which is so awful because it creates a culture.

As was the case with both Peter and Luke, the men's experiences with this negative aspect of the gay community left them questioning what that message meant for them in terms of their own lives.

Many of the men expressed feeling a deep tension between their own personal values that at times felt diametrically opposed to the socialized messages they received from others within the gay community. Will addressed this when discussing his experiences of going out dancing and drinking in Danby. He stated, "It tends to be too much about, 'Oh, we're going to go home tonight together' and like at the end of the night, if you're dancing, everyone's looking around like, 'Oh, who am I going to go home with tonight?'" Feeling conflicted by this, Will stated,

I think it's nice to be able to find a guy and kiss and whatever, but I'm not the type of guy to go home with someone and have sex on the first night. That's definitely not what I want to be doing so...that doesn't push me away necessarily, I would say, but I don't like that aspect of it because I feel like I can't just go out and meet a guy who's just more like me, that doesn't necessarily want to rush into just having sex just for the sake of having sex because from my experiences, if you have that kind of relationship, it's very short lived and just purely sexual. You feel the same way the next morning, you still feel lonely...I don't feel any better. I actually tend to feel crappy. It's kind of like, 'Why did I do that?' always...kinda like that was a stupid, drunken mistake.

Will's point about making mistakes was a common point raised by many of the men.

For many of the men, using alcohol and drugs was typically connected to bad or risky decisions. Many of the men spoke about using alcohol or drugs as a way to move past some of their inhibitions. Craig indicated that he is "not really sexually oriented at all as a person." Yet, he found that he was more interested in engaging in sexual desires when he had been drinking. He said, "It only happens when I'm super drunk or something." In his own experience, Landon discussed the fact that drinking alcohol helped him feel comfortable as a gay man. He stated,

I feel like in the beginning, I wasn't as comfortable – like when I first started going out...I definitely think alcohol helps me to not care as much as to what I was doing and...to become a person that I feel like I need to be.

However, Landon later pointed out that getting arrested for drunk driving after a night of clubbing with a friend was a turning point for him in his life. Ultimately, that moment changed his perspective on what it meant to be a gay man, and he made a significant shift in his priorities, which involved his academics and his commitment to his family and boyfriend.

Among the men in this study, very few spoke about personal drug use although a couple of the men did admit to using marijuana or ecstasy with friends at times.

Additionally, at least a couple acknowledged that they had been offered drugs when out

at gay clubs or by others interested in having random sex together. Luke discussed this at length, saying,

Well, I've never done ecstasy or [cocaine] with gay men that I would hook up with. For me, every single time, it's been with my straight friends. Maybe [ecstasy], yes, but I'm also talking...I've had guys ask me if I want to do meth[amphetamine] with them, ketamine, GHB. All the shit that I would never, ever even consider doing. I mean, people could say, 'How could you ever consider doing [cocaine]? Or how could you ever do [ecstasy]?' But in my mind, they're on completely different wavelengths. And these guys are so into it, and it's like this...I don't know. On top of that, if you ask me to do that, I'm going to also assume...I'm going to take it to an extreme, and I'm going to assume that you're having unprotected sex and I'm assuming you have AIDS. I'm going to go straight there. So if you even talk to me about that, I'm going to go straight to 'Get the hell away from me.'

He went on to recount another time when he was with friends from SAU hanging out with some other gay men who were their age, but not in college. He stated, "They asked us if we wanted to do drugs and then basically have a huge orgy with them. And I'm like, 'Hell fucking no. Is this really where this is going?!' And so we just left....It was very uncomfortable." For the men in this study, these experiences involving sex, drugs, and alcohol were very real moments of learning. In these moments, they began to question the shadow aspects of a community in which they were a part and made some decisions for themselves based upon what they valued. Those decisions seemed to be important in helping the men set their own personal boundaries and test their internal values and belief systems.

Clarifying campus involvement. A second movement point of *Clarifying Campus Involvement* emerged as a significant experience within the Questioning Allegiances quadrant. Some of the men involved in traditional fraternities – and to a lesser degree, athletics – often faced feeling a disconnect to others within that organization due to their identity as a gay man and ultimately made decisions about their

involvement in those moments. Each of the men participating in fraternities discussed feeling alienated at times due to the predominantly hegemonic and heteronormative ideals espoused and enacted within the fraternity. As a result, they began to question the allegiance they had previously made to their respective organizations through the experience of being members. To this, Peter stated,

It's not that I necessarily feel uncomfortable because everyone in my fraternity knows and they're very respectful of it, but I still feel like there's just that level of everything is so heterosexual-based that I just kind of feel like an outsider.

As a result of these feelings, Marc decided to become an inactive member during the Fall semester. He explained his reason by stating,

The experience wasn't that great for me...A lot of their social things were very heterosexual, geared towards that just 'cause they would always promote like, 'There will be a bunch of girls there and then we'll get them really drunk' and all this stuff. I just don't want to participate in that.

Marc's decision to become inactive also resulted in a spending more time with his core group of gay male friends, which included Peter, Luke, and Will. In some ways, through their conversations of their friendship together, they created their own fraternity of sorts through their friendship. When raising this idea with Marc and asking him how other men have influenced how he thinks about his own sense of masculinity, he stated,

Well, through majority men, it makes me feel not very masculine seeing how they're very sports oriented or continuously do male-oriented activities all the time. But I guess now with my new gay fraternity, it's reassuring that we don't have to feed into this male-oriented stereotype.

This relates to the importance of gay male friendships that was discussed earlier in this chapter in terms of the need for affirming spaces and the challenges faced from experiencing heteronormativity and homophobia.

Experiences of homophobia were particularly difficult for some of the men in relation to their campus organization affiliations. Both Marc and Peter specifically discussed their apprehension in taking their boyfriends to a fraternity social and indicated that they would never feel comfortable doing that. Even Luke, who was not involved in a fraternity, spoke about attending a friend's sorority formal and being harassed and insulted by a fraternity man. Likewise, as an athlete, Bryan experienced gender policing by one of his teammates on the swimming and diving team. He recounted being at a swim meet with his teammates and a teammate played a favorite song of his. He stated,

I was really into it, and I was doing some stupid – I don't even remember what I did – but I was really into the song. And one of the guys on the team said, 'Oh, other than being gay' or 'Other than liking guys, that's the gayest thing you've ever done.' And I was just so taken back, I was like, 'Okay, shouldn't be doing that.'

While experience was an isolated incident for Bryan on the swim team, it demonstrated a significant moment of socialization on his part. It was clear that this incident influenced Bryan on how he self-monitored his own behaviors around other men, specifically straight men. Bryan continued his involvement within the swim team throughout his college experience; however, that involvement resulted in limited contact with other gay students on campus and, at times, feelings of tokenization. Often, these experiences seemingly had a negative impact on how these men specifically saw themselves as gay men.

Internal tensions of personal identity. Within the Questioning Allegiances quadrant, a third movement point was called *Internal Tensions of Personal Identity*. For many of the men, the intersections of masculinity and sexual identity seemed muddled and conflicted. Much of the conflict also seemed to be associated with how the men saw

themselves in terms of the saliency of their masculinity as well as their personal backgrounds. Peter, Bryan, and Jonathan indicated through self-identification as being very masculine. Each of the men grew up as competitive athletes and commented that the friendships that they had with their straight male friends continued to be important in their lives. They each also, at one point in their lives, indicated a strong desire to be disassociated personally from the feminine or flamboyant stereotypes usually associated with the gay community. In discussing his views on masculinity, Bryan commented, “My thing with masculinity is that it’s not someone parading down the streets and dancing in drag or like – you know – waving the rainbow flag everywhere.” Instead, he viewed masculinity as “someone that’s comfortable in themselves and someone that’s not feminine.” This viewpoint was an interesting juxtaposition. Ultimately, Bryan’s point equated masculinity and femininity as polar opposites, a view held by many of the men in this study.

Ultimately, with the exception of Mason and Charles, most of the men in the study indicated that their self-perception was that they were more masculine than feminine. Often, the men indicated a stronger value on masculinity rather than femininity. Some of the men felt as though they had to “butch it up” when interacting with other men, regardless of their sexual identity. Discussing the fact that he does this, Luke commented,

When I’m meeting a straight guy and I don’t want him to know that I’m gay, I put this slight façade on to kind of off-set. I do it with gay guys too because it’s like, ‘I want you to see me this way before I just let you know who I truly am.’

This use of façade often represents internalized homophobia as well as reifying heteronormativity. Matt highlighted this by saying, “If I weren’t gay, I would be able to

rate myself more masculine just because I guess heteronormatively speaking, straight guys are more masculine than gay guys.” Rather than interrogating the traditional notions of masculinity and broadening the definition and discourse of what it meant to be masculine, the men often consciously or unconsciously continued to perpetuate hegemonic and heteronormative thinking that, in fact, hurt them by subjugating themselves to the margins.

This reinforcement of hegemonic and heteronormative thinking was also seen in the push and pull tensions that the men demonstrated of discussing many negative associations around traditional hegemonic masculinity yet still desiring to see themselves within that. When discussing masculinity, they often used words or phrases that were seemingly negative, such as “misogynistic,” “being unemotional,” “the more sex you have, the more masculine you are,” “objectify women,” and “you have to be tough.” Yet the men still wanted to be seen as masculine, both in the self-perception of themselves but also by others’ perceptions of them.

Not all of their thoughts on masculinity were negatively associated, however. Throughout the study, there was a growing sense among the participants that their male privilege served as a key influence in how they saw themselves as gay men. Most of the men acknowledged that the saliency of their gender was relatively low in comparison to other social identities; additionally, many stated that they had never really considered their sense of masculinity before and struggled to articulate responses around masculinity. In fact, an important moment happened during the focus group when sharing the initial model with the men. Upon sharing this theme, the men engaged in a deeply reflective and critical conversation about masculinity. For many of the men, this

was the first time that they had spoken to other gay men about their sense of masculinity, with the exception of Jonathan, who had the experience during college of being actively involved within the men's discussion group coordinated by CUO's LGBT Resource Center. The men largely discussed gender roles and the socialization of those roles. Mason commented on feeling the rigidity of traditional hegemony masculinity at the personal intersection of his gay identity. He stated,

I had a lot of trouble identifying what was masculine because I don't like it. I don't agree with it. But I'm part of the system, so I need to understand the reality of what masculinity is.

Mason's tension of disagreeing with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity yet recognizing that his identity as a man included him in the larger system indicated the possibility of broadening the discourse on masculinities. Like Mason, Jonathan discussed feeling burdened by the expectations placed on him by others as well as himself. He stated,

Yeah, it's something I constantly fight every day. Yeah, the whole identity issue because like on one side, I know who I am. I'm more okay with who I am than I ever have been before, but on the flip side, it just is still a constant fight with who I've been told, 'This is who you're going to be. This is who you're going to like. This is what you're going to be. This is going to be your job.' All these expectations that have been laid on me, and it's just a constant struggle of identity with me. And some days are better than others. That's definitely something I can understand right there.

Jonathan's experience of expectations was in some ways similar to the questioning of allegiance that Mason navigated between his gay identity and his role within the Navy. He said,

My allegiance to the Navy – I mean it's a huge allegiance. It's something that I've kind of sacrificed my life to. I think there's a huge conflict there. And just, I remember I had to send up a permission to not wear my uniform on Tuesdays because I have my internship – my Safe Zones internship. I had to – I was very vague in my description. I was like, "Oh, it's for my internship." And then they asked, "What's your internship? Why can't you wear your uniform at your internship?" I was, "Because it's a gay organization." They were like, "Oh, well,

yeah. Don't wear your uniform then." I still think that although the military is accepting gay people now, I still think that there's a master Don't Ask, Don't Tell. It's like, "It's okay if you're gay. But I don't want to hear about it. We don't want to deal with that. And we don't want the organization to be associated with that." So there's still a sort of segregation even though de facto de jour, the law has been passed.

The experience of questioning one's allegiances was a critical component of one's meaning making. In fact, these experiences were characterized by a period of deep and critical self-reflection from the men where they were constantly assessing how they might resolve this conflict. It should be noted that in this stage, the men had not yet taken action; however, it was in these spaces that the men laid the groundwork to take action and resolved the questions of where their allegiances laid. Additionally, this work also represented a move to action that moved the men beyond being complacent in one's place of privilege, such as male privilege or White privilege.

Living in the nexus. The fifth major theme within the Individual Context I called Living in the Nexus. In the model, the visual pathway of the labyrinth appeared to end upon the individual's arrival to the center, which was where Living in the Nexus was located. However, the journey was, by no means, complete. This arrival at the center instead represented a new way of seeing and understanding one's multiple identities, but the individual meandered back through the previous quadrants in an ongoing basis.

Within this section, three movement points were discussed, which included: (a) *Moving from external to internal influences*; (b) *Feeling secure in one's sense of self and multiple identities*; (c) *Resolving the tensions of one's identities: Identity salience*; and (d) *Thinking about the future*. A nexus refers to a joining or connection of ideas; additionally, the nexus represents a center or hub, which is fitting for the center of the labyrinth. The three movement points connected with this idea of living at the nexus

because each explored a different element of arrival: the arrival of relying on one's voice, the arrival of a more integrated sense of self and being, and the arrival of resolve from tensions experienced between spaces, such as one's multiple identities. In essence, this arrival to and exit from the nexus represented a critical step in the men's meaning making process: a new, more integrated sense of who they were as gay men which had been informed by their journey through the labyrinth. This sense of Living in the Nexus will be explored further in this section.

Movement from external to internal influences. A critical movement point within the Living in the Nexus was *Movement from External to Internal Influences*. Among the men, there was a vibrant discourse relating to authenticity and being one's self, which represented a shift from relying on the influences and expectations of others to following one's desires, values, and beliefs. Robert highlighted this personal journey when saying, "Since I've been at Oceanside State, I don't really focus much on masculinity or any of that. I focus on being myself. Just being comfortable with myself, whether masculine or feminine." Similarly, Nate experienced a shift in relying on his own personal strength when becoming a visible gay man as a part of the executive board of his campus's LGBT student organization. Recounting that experience, he discussed the fact that, shortly before his death, his grandfather learned that Nate was gay. His grandfather was not phased by the news, and when his parents expressed concern about Nate being public about his involvement within the organization, he told his parents,

'You know, I just want to hope that everyone can at least eventually be at the place where [my grandfather] was at, and I want to believe that. So I'm going to. And if people aren't like that, then shame on them and I don't care because this is what I want to do.' And I'm sure my grandpa would have been so proud of me for gaining an executive position for something I'm passionate about.

For Marc, his movement to action stemmed from an alignment with his own internal values about what he felt was right in conjunction with an increased confidence in expression his identity as a gay man. Like Marc, Kevin found that as his confidence of who he was as a gay man increased, he found himself listening much more to himself rather than others. He stated,

Nothing's really changed in my life, but my thinking about how my life should be is a lot less shaky. I've just realized that because of my background like in most aspects, this is what is right for me. I just worry a lot less about being behind or being ahead or not doing what I should do or what's expected of me because I don't really think that there's anyone that does know besides me what I should be doing.

This reliance on one's own desires represented that shift from seeking external validation or influence in order to make meaning of one's experiences. Instead, these men were shaping their own constructions of what it meant to be themselves, which included a deeper sense of security in their social identities as well.

Feeling secure in sense of self and multiple identities. Within the Living in the Nexus center, a movement point that emerged was called *Feeling Secure in Sense of Self and Multiple Identities*. For many of the men, they recognized that their experiences in college allowed them to access, examine and understand aspects of themselves that largely had gone unquestioned prior to college, especially the power and privileges the men have. Peter described this as,

If someone asked me to be as in depth as I could [about my identity], then I would answer things like...my socioeconomic status, my education level, all these sorts of things. I would brainstorm to figure out how many different ways I could identify myself. But in this greatest essence, I am just a gay, White male. But I just have a much greater understanding of what it means to be each of those things. And that comes from just experiences I've had through PRIDE, through AS [Associated Students], through Lambda Chi, through classes. Just through those four years of life, so I think that's kind of natural.

That experience of feeling more secure in one's self was common among the men.

Having opportunities for critical self-reflection were important for the men in their meaning making and integration of their multiple identities. For example, Matt spoke of his own strengthened resolve in his identity through participating in the study, saying,

I guess just since it's never that I've ever thought about it, and now that it's brought to my attention, I do see it as more of just being comfortable with myself, and just – I don't know – like in a way, just to not care too much of what others see me as, or think about me, and just be me.

Likewise, Craig felt as though participating in this study made him think about different aspects of his identity more. He stated,

It made me define my sense of masculinity a lot more. It also made me think about the space I'm in. Just how...just more of what my real identity is compared to the expectations because I guess I never thought about the different identities and the expectations those relate to and how they intersect into my own identity, so that's definitely something really nice to think about as well.

Additionally, for many of the men who were seniors and thinking about graduating, opportunities to be self-reflective seemingly allowed them the space to think about how much they had grown and developed over the past four years. Will mentioned this fact when I asked if there had been anything that he had learned about himself through participating in this study, saying,

I guess just like realizing how far I have come in the last four years. Really just when you sit back and think about it, the question that really put it into perspective for me – 'Wow, I really have come far' – was how when you asked, 'How would you have defined yourself freshman year?' It's just like of like, 'Phew...I don't even know the answer to that question because I was in such a different stage, in such a different point in my development then.' And I've just come so far since then, so it's kind of just learning – not learning about that – but just taking a step back and being able to see that development kind of like almost from someone else's perspective. It's like, 'Wow. That's just something to be proud of.'

This was an unexpected and unintended consequence of this study yet one that seemingly was beneficial to the men.

Resolving the tensions of one's identities: Identity saliency. Another movement point within Living in the Nexus was *Resolving the Tensions of One's Identities: Identity Saliency*. One commonality amongst many of the men was the experience of resolving the tensions existing between their multiple social identities through identity saliency. As previously discussed in this chapter, the men first experienced a nascent feeling of tension between their gay identity and some of their other social identities in the Compartmentalizing Identit(ies) quadrant which then became internalized over time as seen in the Questioning Allegiances quadrant. As a result, many of the men used identity saliency as a means to resolve these tensions in meaningful ways within this space in the labyrinth model. This saliency played out in various ways for the men, but essentially, the men made peace with their internal conflicts and moved forward attempting to make meaning of these experiences.

Brandon's tension between his religious identity growing up and his sexual identity was a good example of this phenomenon. As previously discussed, Brandon grew up attending and being actively involved in a conservative Christian megachurch in San Juan Miguel County. After consulting several of his church elders when feeling conflicted with his emerging gay identity, he was kicked out of his church, left feeling extremely alienated and isolated. Ultimately, this experience led to Brandon's atheist identity becoming very salient during college. While this experience of being rejected by his church occurred several years ago, it still played a significant role in how he saw himself as a gay man, especially in terms of his holistic sense of self. He said, "I doubt

any gay person wants to be gay, but it was really hard to come to terms with, to reconcile that....Now I don't believe in God so it's irrelevant, and I just see religion as a construct to control people." While Brandon's rejection was troubling for him, the salience of his gay identity was deemed more important than his religious beliefs, which led him to identify as an atheist activist.

While Brandon became disconnected from a traditional religious community, Matt experienced identity salience in his seeking a spiritual home. Growing up in a religious household himself, Matt was active within his church community and after coming out, he actively sought a religious community that supported both his faith in God as well as his sexual identity as a gay man. For the first couple of years on campus, Matt spent more time concentrating on exploring his gay identity; however, the need for a spiritual home continued to be a priority. Ultimately, he became a member of a progressive, gay-friendly church. He commented,

Knowing that I found a gay-friendly church and knowing that I could pursue my Christian values and like that, I'd say that was one of the greatest things for me....It's really like a dream come true because the slogan for the church when I saw it, it was on a billboard in Danby and it was, 'The church that you would never imagine.' And that's basically what it is. No one imagines you can be Christian and gay at the same time, so I think that's one of the biggest things for me.

Matt's search for meaning of his identities led him to find ways to bridge tensions that are typically assumed to be diametrically opposed. Unlike Brandon, Matt's belief in God and Christian values were aligned in his spiritual journey. However, the commonality between both of these men's stories was that they each found ways to make peace with the tensions they felt between their multiple identities in positive and meaningful ways for themselves.

Several of the other men had similar stories, but not all related to religion. Mason spoke about experiencing a shift in the saliency of his racial and cultural identity during college. During the focus group, I had presented the concept of identity salience as a component of the study's sub-theme and asked for feedback. Mason responded,

I think I can speak about the chaffing of competing values especially with my race. I have been struggling with this because they're both marginal identities, and when you talk about your identities, I feel like I have to choose one or the other. When I'm with my Filipino crew, I have to be less gay and not emphasize that as much. When I'm with my – I guess when I'm interacting in gay spaces, I have to play down my Filipino identity for the majority culture.

Mason's chaffing feeling between both identities created that tension of allegiance: With which identity should my allegiances lay - my gay identity or my Filipino identity? And ultimately, Mason did not feel as though he could necessarily put either identity completely aside. This was important for his meaning making and continued to be an aspect of his developmental work to attempt to bridge these identities.

Thinking about the future. Within Living in the Nexus, one final movement point was *Thinking about the Future*. Many of the men who were seniors or recent graduates discussed their worries and anxieties about what came next for them after college and how life as a gay man might be different. As previously mentioned, there was an emphasis on moving from external to internal influences seen within this phase of the men's meaning making, but this also joined with a more far-reaching outlook. Luke discussed this by saying,

I'm coming into this new part of my life where I'm going to be on my own...I mean, I'm not going to be defined by my parents pretty soon. It's going to be me. I'm going to be defining who I am.

This was not presented as a worry or concern necessarily. Rather, it was just an acknowledgement of one growing up, an added component to being independent.

Another aspect that the men discussed was considering how being gay might be different in the workplace than on their college campus. In discussing his future, Will acknowledged that he had not taken his sexual identity into consideration much in terms of his career aspirations. Yet, he had recently applied for the Teach for America program, and the recruiters were seeking applicants who were willing to work in the southern part of the United States, which brought up some feelings of fear and trepidation. He recalled telling the Teach for America recruiter directly,

I identify as gay, and that's really one thing that I'm concerned about. Going to somewhere like that, that's probably going to be maybe a huge problem potentially." So I've been thinking a lot about that, and going forward, it's going to be something that plays into how I feel about something that I'm doing, what I'm getting out of it, how I'm liking my job even though it wouldn't be something that seems like a big deal. It really is.

As some of the men discussed their experiences of homophobia and heterosexism in the workplace, Mason had a realization that he may also experience something similar as he enters his career in the Navy. He stated,

When [Luke was] talking about discrimination, like your manager and stuff, I'm like, 'Oh crap. What if my CO [commanding officer] doesn't like me? Dammit.' Sometimes I forget about the gay part even though I think I shouldn't.

Ultimately, Mason's sudden acknowledgement of forgetting about his gay identity represented one commonality for each of the men's journey of making meaning of their multiple identities: it was far from over. As previously mentioned, the journey through the labyrinth was a meandering one; it was not a sprint. The journey to the center as well as the movement back out winded an individual through each of the four quadrants and the center, allowing for an individual to reflect upon those key influences and continue their meaning making of them.

Summary of Findings

Three research questions served as the foundations of this study; these included:

(1) How do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years; (2) In what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men; and (3) What are the critical influences during college that influence gay men's meaning-making process? For the 17 gay male participants in this study, their process of making meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of gender and sexuality was highly complex and circuitous. The men throughout their lives processed the socialized messages, often steeped in heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, in powerful ways. These messages from one's peers, family, education, religious communities, and media reinforced to these men that their gay identity was outside of the societal norm and that one's sexual orientation was intrinsically linked with one's masculinity.

However, the experiences of the men in this study provided further insight into how they collectively and individually made meaning of these messages throughout their time in college. From the data collected during their interviews, journal responses as well as a focus group with eight of the participants, a theoretical model emerged from the data representing how these men came to understand their holistic identities. This theoretical model, known as the labyrinth model, was briefly presented in this chapter and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The labyrinth model provided a sense of how this group of men engaged in the process of meaning making around their multiple identities from two specific contexts: the Societal Context and the Individual Context. Each context informed the other through a reciprocal relationship, particularly as the model was a nested system whereby

the Individual Context was situated within the Societal Context. The Societal Context wrapped around the labyrinth, which represented the Individual Context, and contained two major themes: (1) Socialization of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Inherent Tensions and (2) Heteronormativity and Homophobia as Internal and External Influences. Within these two themes, there was an emphasis on how systemic forms of oppression were exerted on individuals as well as internalized, at times. The men of this study demonstrated explicitly and implicitly ways in which heteronormativity, homophobia, and heterosexism conjoined in powerful and occasionally painful ways thereby affecting how they came to make meaning of their identities as gay men. Often, these experiences were around the men not feeling as though they conformed to the traditional notions of what it meant to be a boy or man as well as how their process of coming out as gay men was affected by internalized homophobia.

Within the Individual Context, the five major themes pertained to the individual experiences of the men in this study. These major themes represented the four quadrants of the labyrinth as well as its center, which included: (1) Sense of Sameness Disappears; (2) Compartmentalizing Identit(ies); (3) Seeking Community; (4) Questioning Allegiances; and (5) Living in the Nexus. For the men, their meaning making process of their gay identities started in the Sense of Sameness Disappears quadrant with a personal awareness of that they were not heterosexual, followed by coming out publicly to others regarding their identity. At the same time, those societal messages regarding what it meant to be a man in the United States continued to play into how the men saw themselves, and they often were complicit in perpetuating these hegemonic notions through their interactions with others by disassociating with gay men who were too

flamboyant or serving as gender role enforcers amongst friends and peers. Some of the men, particularly for the White men, also experienced a troubling of their sense of privilege by coming out. For many, this was the first time in their life when they experienced discrimination or alienation through a marginalized identity. As a result, this had a profound effect on how they saw themselves as gay men.

One outcome of this experience of troubling one's privilege led to the second quadrant of the labyrinth model, which was Compartmentalizing Identit(ies), where the men often viewed themselves in relation to others and segmented aspects of their identities in certain environments. The men largely attempted to mirror other men in terms of behaviors, thoughts, and actions yet experienced dissonance with this because of their identities of being gay. Additionally, the lack of other gay men who were like them, either in person or through media images, created difficulties in their own self-concept, leading to feelings of alienation and isolation. Many of the men began, within this quadrant, to become aware of tensions that existed between their sexual identity and other their other social identities, including race, religion, and socioeconomic class. Lastly, the men also projected a false sense of confidence to others through posturing, especially to straight men as well as other gay men.

Through these previously discussed experiences, there was a strong message among the men to feel a sense of community and inclusion on their campuses, which was represented in the third quadrant of the labyrinth, Seeking Community. For the men I interviewed, they acknowledged their college environments to be largely safe spaces for them as gay men although there were occasionally issues of bias and hate that would occur on campus. However, the men largely sought out opportunities to connect with

others in meaningful ways, particularly through LGBT-related organizations and campus leadership roles. For the men, finding other gay men as friends or intimate sexual partners was important, and this happened in multiple ways, often through campus involvement or the use of technology. Additionally, being immersed into the larger LGBT community also provided an opportunity to network and connect with an expanded social network of LGBT individuals as well as accessing different resources than those offered on campus, such as bars and clubs.

The fourth quadrant, Questioning Allegiances, within the labyrinth represented a period of the men's meaning making process where they began to question who they were, the decisions they had made pertaining to personal life choices and their campus engagement, and began to align themselves in order to be congruent to their internal value and belief systems. In this quadrant, the men questioned their desire for certain risky behaviors, including random sex and hooking up as well as alcohol and drug use, and the consequences of engaging in those behaviors. Additionally, many of the men involved in traditional fraternities and athletics began to question whether those spaces continued to work for them and provided them what they wanted or needed in terms of connections with peers. Finally, the men's awareness of tensions from the Compartmentalizing Identit(ies) quadrant became much more alive, and as a result, the men assessed the ways in which those identities co-existed and how they were diametrically opposed to one another.

The movement through each of these four quadrants led the men to enter the center of the labyrinth, known as Living in the Nexus, where the men gained further understanding of their holistic sense of self and concentrated on relying on their own

internal voice rather than the influence of others, such as their parents or older adults. Additionally, the tensions experienced in the Compartmentalizing Identit(ies) and Questioning Allegiances quadrants were resolved through identity salience within this space of the men's meaning making process. The men also began to be contemplative about their lives after college and prepared to embark on a new journey for them in terms of understanding who they were in relation to their multiple identities.

These findings were significant in providing new insight on the meaning making process of gay men in college and how they came to understand their multiple identities. In this next chapter, I discuss what these findings mean through the application of the labyrinth model in conjunction with the three major research questions. Second, I provide the limitations of this study. Then, I also provide implications for student development theory and how this study may inform that field of study. Also, I frame implications and recommendations for the professional practice of higher education professionals to assist gay men in college in making meaning of their multiple identities. Lastly, I also address implications for future research to continue addressing new questions that this study's findings raise for scholars.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use constructivist grounded theory to investigate how gay men in college came to understand and make meaning of their multiple identities, especially the intersections of their gay identity and their sense of masculinities. 17 biologically male gay-identified students from three different institutions located in a metropolitan area of Southern California served as the study participants. These men represented a range of racial and ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic class identities as well as a wide array of campus involvement experiences. Their lived experiences and insights helped to answer the study's three main research questions, which were:

- 1) How do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years;
- 2) In what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men; and
- 3) What are the critical influences during college that influence gay men's meaning-making process?

The study's findings presented in Chapter Four served to answer these three guiding questions.

In this chapter, I present a discussion of the study's findings. First, I present the emergent theoretical model. Second, I discuss the findings in conjunction with relevant literature and research as it relates to the study's research questions. Third, I provide an overview of the study's limitations. Next, I discuss the implications of these findings to

theoretical development and future research. Lastly, I offer recommendations for professional practice stemming from the findings.

Theoretical Model

The findings discussed in Chapter Four acknowledged that two contexts were at play with one another: the Individual and Societal. The Individual Context contained five larger themes, which included: (1) Sense of Sameness Disappears; (2) Compartmentalizing Identit(ies); (3) Seeking Community; (4) Questioning Allegiances; and (5) Living in the Nexus. Additionally, the Societal Context included two themes: (1) Socialization of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Inherent Tensions and (2) Heteronormativity and Homophobia as Internal and External Influences.

The discussion of different contexts within the findings relates back to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work in ecological development. Similar to Bronfenbrenner's work, the Individual Context is at the core of this research; however, various developmental factors and their influence on one's development are rooted in mutuality. The Individual Context is nested within the larger system, which has a significant interplay with the individual's lived experiences. Likewise, the Individual Context also has an influence in multiple ways on the Societal Context, including but not limited to coalition building within the gay community to lead towards efforts of social change. Some of the participants within this study specifically mentioned the issue of California's Proposition 8, the anti-gay marriage referendum that was passed in 2010; they noted that they actively engaged with others within the LGBT community as well as straight allies to work to protest the initiative. Ultimately, this example of social activism moves Individual Context concerns to the Societal. Thus, the nested system between the

Individual and Societal Contexts maintains a sense of fluidity and movement that has an influence on the development of the individual over time.

Arriving at the labyrinth. Daloz Parks (2011) writes, “We all need stories to live by, symbols to anchor our meanings by, and songs and dances that confirm that we belong with each other within a yet larger reality” (p. 276). This resonated in my own work of making meaning of the experiences of the men in this study as well as my own. In an effort to represent the men’s individual experiences within both the individual and societal contexts, I began to reflect and meditate on symbols and images that might represent their process of meaning making. A sort of convergence happened during this time period of the data analysis. At the time, I was having some resistance to journaling in the “traditional” sense of qualitative inquiry; in fact, I experienced a dread of opening up my running Word document and typing up my thoughts. Instead, I started to draw. I was attempting to make my own meaning of the larger categories emerging from the many codes and understand how they worked together. Large sheets of newsprint started to fill with works, diagrams, and various colors. Out of this work, I began to draw groupings of concentric circles with dotted lines, but that did not quite work for me. The next day, I returned to the drawing, and when reviewing my past work, I came to the image of a labyrinth to represent the sense of journey that the men undertook in their lives. In this next section, I discuss the metaphor of the labyrinth and journey.

Labyrinth as a journey. The metaphor of the labyrinth is used as a means of representing the experience of the participants of this study. Stemming from Greek mythology, the labyrinth was designed by King Minos in Knossos as a trap for the fabled Minotaur, a half-man, half-beast, who was slayed by Theseus, who was given thread by

Ariadne to use as he journeyed the dark maze in order to get back out (Kingsley, 2010).

The labyrinth represents “a journey into the center of our own beginning, the achievement there of a quest for wholeness, and the subsequent return to our divine source” (SUNY Postdam, n.d., ¶ 3). However, the idea and use of labyrinths have evolved over the years, with them now being “regarded as a more solemn undertaking associated with ritual and spiritual and religious journeys” (Kingsley, 2010, p. 90). Additionally, the use of labyrinths as both a meditative and spiritual practice within higher education has emerged in counseling and for some spiritual practices, as indicated through an Internet search and multiple institutions (i.e., University of California, Santa Barbara, Goucher College, and SUNY Potsdam).

Applying the labyrinth as a model. Within the context of this study, the labyrinth indicates one’s journey of development. Daloz Parks (2011) points out that the language around journey “is a language of transcendence, crossing over, reaching, and moving beyond” (p. 65). For the men in this study, their journey of meaning making was often characterized by moving beyond the ideas of their former selves and moving toward a more integrated sense of who they are. In some ways, their journey also represented the story of Theseus, the hero in Greek mythology, who navigated the dark and frightening walls of the labyrinth to slay the Minotaur, which related to the representations of stereotypes and external influences of what it meant to be a gay man. The battle with – and then the defeat of – the Minotaur represented the liberation of external influences and a reliance on one’s meaning making and movement towards self-authorship. The men’s meaning making of their multiple identities was sometimes painful and difficult yet liberating, aligning with the journey metaphor in conveying “a

sense of movement down into, through, and beyond the swamps of confusion or despair” (Daloiz Parks, p. 65).

Through their stories, I began to see the men’s experiences as a sense of journey, largely a journey to understand who they were and how their multiple identities played a role in their lives. This journey was not linear at all; rather, the circuits within the labyrinth were representative of the meandering nature of the path these men experienced in college in making meaning of their identities. Additionally, the design of the labyrinth itself seemingly creates a set of borders dividing the labyrinth into four quadrants and the interior center, which fit the five main themes within the individual context.

Throughout the labyrinth, there is a set of markers that signify the “movement points” (Torres & Baxter Magolda), or sub-themes of this study’s findings. These movement points represented critical influences through interactions with important people, events, or experiences (A. Stevens) when the men moved forward or backwards in terms of their journey of meaning making. At each of these movement points, the men made further meaning of themselves and their identities in significant ways, either positively or negatively which then corresponded to the direction of their movement forward or backward. Additionally, there was also the potential for the men to leave some of these movement points in hiatus and come back to them as they continued their journey throughout the labyrinth. For example, the process of coming out in the Sense of Sameness Disappears theme may be represented in the lower-left quadrant of the labyrinth model, but it was clear that the coming out process continued throughout one’s life in many different contexts. Even in the center of the model, Living in the Nexus, the men came to understand and made meaning of the importance of their multiple identities

of being a gay men and what that meant for their futures when they will navigate in new settings outside of the college environment the need to come out to others who might be new friends, colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances and the inherent risks associated with that in the larger societal context. The emergent model of the men's meaning making process is presented in Figure One. In the next section, I discuss the labyrinth model in relation to the study's research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Three research questions served as the framework for this study investigating how gay men came to make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of gender or masculinities and their sexual identity. Within this section, I will outline my interpretations of the data to answer the study's research questions.

Making Meaning of Multiple Identities

The first research question was: how do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years? From the findings of this study, the participants' process of meaning making was circuitous and evolving. Daloz Parks (2011) situates the developmental process of finding meaning and purpose among young adults as a three pronged model including "(1) becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond – to act – in committed and satisfying ways" (p. 12). Daloz Parks' model was both consistent as well as different from the men's journey of making meaning of their multiple identities within this study.

For the men, the intersections of their sexual orientation as gay and their gender identity as male created some important juxtaposition in terms of "composing their

reality” (Daloz Parks, p. 12). Most of the men referenced their childhood and characterized “feeling different from other boys” and understanding – albeit not well at first – that they often were seen as different from their peers as well as their family members. The men in this study discussed reactions to this, which largely fell in two camps: (1) push down one’s gay identity internally and be vigilant in reifying traditional hegemonic masculinity and internalized homophobia or (2) try to fly under the radar and face the consequences as they come along. Both had significant consequences that continued to play a role in the men’s self-concepts as well as how they operated, behaved and viewed the world around them.

By coming out and finding one’s voice as a gay man, the men largely were seeking their truth, and they placed a large value on the freedom of doing this. Several of the men discussed the fact that while they had a substantial amount of fear and anxiety of coming out as well as some experiences of homophobia and heterosexism, they found it liberating to be open about their sexual orientation. Being an openly gay man was, in fact, their truth, and the ability to enter into conversations and discourse about what that means in LGBT-positive spaces was essential to their development and strengthening efficacy to continue being out. As one’s identity of being gay grew, most of the men began to understand the other aspects of themselves that were also salient in terms of social identities and opportunities for engagement with others on campus.

Lastly, the ability to act in accordance to one’s identities and values was an important aspect of how the men made meaning of their multiple identities. As discussed within the fourth quadrant of Questioning Allegiances, some of the men moved from thought to action by clarifying their student involvement experiences. For example,

Marc's decision to become inactive within his fraternity stemmed from both a need for having more personal time for himself but also because the notions of heteronormativity and heterosexism were deeply rooted within the framework and structure of his fraternity. Similarly, those men in the study who were seniors or recent graduates discussed the complex issue of taking up one's identities outside of the college environment and the need to be thoughtful of this. There was a strongly expressed need to give careful and thoughtful consideration about what it means to be out at work but also how important one's ability to be open about being gay really was. Within the focus group, the men's discussion around this topic was poignant in highlighting Daloz Parks's concept of acting in committed ways, which was connected with Kegan (1983) and Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2008) concept of self-authorship.

The Intersection of Identities

In answering the second research question for this study, which was: In what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men, there was a multiplicity of answers of how one's multiple identities intersected for the participants. In this section, I frame the various ways that one's identities converge and influence one's growth and development as gay men, including factors of race, socioeconomic class, and religion. Additionally, I explore how the men experienced these factors within both the individual and societal contexts within the labyrinth model.

Intersections of masculinities and sexuality. Most of the men in the study navigated their identities of being gay men in a similar movement: (1) *compartmentalization* to (2) *experiencing tensions between their gender and sexuality* to (3) *working toward integration*. Through their experiences in high school and their early

years of college, all of the men experienced an awareness that they were gay yet many of the men chose to not come out for several years after this initial awareness. This aligned with Cass's (1979) stages of identity confusion and comparison and D'Augelli's (1994) exiting heterosexuality stage. The college environment seemed to be critical to the men coming out as gay men, which was similar to Rhoads' (1997) findings on his ethnographic study of gay college men as well as R. Stevens' (2004) work on gay college men. For example, Robert discussed his experiences of being a student at a large state university in Texas and not feeling safe in that environment to come out; it was not until he transferred to OSU that he was able to come out, mainly due to the supportive campus climate and a strong support system of friends on campus. This is just one example of a tension felt between one's identity and one's space.

However, the men experienced tensions in terms of the intersections of their sexuality and their sense of masculinity. The men largely commented on the societal expectations and messages that they had received through socialization of media, schools, religion, families, and their peers of what it meant to be a man. Many of those messages seemingly came across as negative; however, it was still important to the men to be seen as masculine – or at the very least have a masculine self-concept. Throughout the study, many of the men stressed the fact that masculinity is more valued than femininity and that they had learned that throughout their lives, especially by either observing or experiencing homophobia and heterosexism as a means of enforcing gender roles. For instance, Mason spoke at length about his struggles to connect with other men, even gay men within the community. His experience of being told by another gay man that he was too flamboyant and that the man did not feel comfortable being friends was a painful

reminder that gay men as well as other men and women continue to exert homophobia and heterosexism to enforce gender norms and roles, leaving Mason to feel isolated. Likewise, Mason's two most significant roles during college were being a resident assistant and being in the Naval ROTC program, two spaces in which were diametrically opposed in terms of his identity as a gay man. Throughout his four years at OSU, Mason constantly compartmentalized aspects of his gay identity in fear of being removed from the ROTC program due to his sexual identity as well as experiencing harassment from male peer cadets who suspected that he was gay. Mason's story matched up with Rhodes' (1997) research on the coming out process for gay and bisexual men in college where the experiences of harassment and alienation were often seemingly a component of one's coming out experience.

Other men, especially those who had a very masculine self-concept, experienced a reverse sort of tension between their sexuality and their masculinities. Jonathan and Peter, in particular, identified as very masculine, and in some ways, they could "pass" or "cover" as being straight identified. As a result, their performativity as men allowed them access to certain experiences that others may have been precluded from, such as Peter's experience of rushing for his fraternity and not being open about his sexual orientation because he thought that some of the fraternity brothers who were a part of Associated Students with him may have already known he was gay. In essence, this notion of "passing" or "covering" was a sort of compartmentalization of their identity. By "passing" or "covering" their sexual identity to others, they were complicit in allowing others to assume that they were heterosexual rather than attempting to challenge others' assumptions of what it meant to be a gay man.

After experiencing this sense of tension between their sexuality and masculinity, many of the men then moved to integration of their identity as a gay man. The men engaged in critical internal dialogue to align their actions and behaviors to their values. For example, in the quadrant of the labyrinth model called Questioning Allegiances, some of the men, such as Luke and Will, were activated by experiences they had within the gay community that did not seem to align with their personal values or expectations. The messages that they were internalizing about the gay community, such as the emphasis on sexual behavior or alcohol use, did not always match up with their own personal values or what they wanted for themselves. In some cases, they had experimented with some of those behaviors, but found that they did not want to continue down that road. As a result, they consciously made decisions to no longer engage in those behaviors. Thus, they allowed their internal values to guide their decisions and their identity as a gay man rather than prescribed messages that did not match up well. This behavior seemed to support D'Augelli's stage of *Entering LGBT Community* and Cass's stage of *Identity Synthesis*, which both addressed a more integrated sense of one's identity as a gay individual. This aspect of arriving at a more integrated sense of self is essential when considering the journey one takes to make meaning of the integration of the multiple intersections of one's identities.

Intersections of race and gay men. Throughout their lives, race, socioeconomic status, and religion played a substantial role in how students in this study made meaning of their multiple identities, especially their gay male identity. Those men who were from privileged identities, such as White and upper or upper-middle class, often experienced difficulty in coming out as gay. Jonathan, Nate, and Peter each discussed experiencing

depression as well as either suicide ideation or attempts whereas none of the other men discussed these mental health issues. This was a somewhat surprising finding within this study. For those men who identified as men of color, they often discussed the tensions they experienced within the context of their families and cultures. For example, Craig, Robert, Mason, and Matt each highlighted the fact that their cultural backgrounds influenced in various ways their ability to come out, especially to their families. Many of the men of color discussed the fact that they were not out to their families, but that there was a complicit understanding or assumption that they were probably gay. Cintrón (2000) highlighted this type of behavior of a complicit acknowledgment of one's sexuality by friends and family, especially given the predominance of *machismo*, a type of hegemonic masculinity rooted in Latino cultures. As a result, the men tended to bring aspects of their identities forward depending upon the contexts they were in. For example, being at college, one could be more open and expressive of his sexual identity whereas at home, one tried to "pass" as heterosexual. Additionally, some of the men of color also discussed feelings of fetishization, especially from White men. Landon, in particular, spoke of this phenomenon as an Asian man going out clubbing in Highland Park and the competitive nature of other gay Asian men trying to attract White men. This finding has important implications for how the compartmentalization of one's identities had an overall impact on one's sense of self.

Intersections of socioeconomic class and gay men. As was previously mentioned, socioeconomic status played a significant role in one's development. The men who were from upper-class or middle-class backgrounds often were White, out to their families with full or at least limited support, and were overrepresented at the private,

religiously-affiliated institution site in this particular study. Many of these men followed traditional masculine scripts; thus, they tended to become involved in traditional social fraternities and athletics. They were also the men who more often experienced depression and/or suicidal thoughts or attempts, which may reflect higher levels of gender role conflict, defined as “a psychological state where gender roles have negative consequences or impact on a person or others” (O’Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 2010, p. 32). In common language, gender role conflict for men exhibits itself as the fear of femininity (O’Neil et al.). As a result, these gay men, especially those who were choosing to enter into and maintain membership in spaces that are less-affirming of both gender and sexual identity diversity (i.e., athletics, fraternities) may experience more gender role conflict leading to higher levels of mental health issues.

Those men who were from lower socioeconomic classes were often first-generation college students, often men of color, and worked at least one job during college. How these men embodied and performed their sexual identities seemed to depend upon different contexts. For example, Mason, a Filipino man, and Kevin, a biracial man of Irish and Japanese heritage, identified as less masculine than all of the other men. They each indicated a sense of security within their masculinities yet an acknowledgement that their family and cultural backgrounds allowed them some freedom to be who they were. However, Robert, a Latino male, identified as relatively masculine. Additionally, he indicated that his family’s emphasis on him finding a girlfriend to settle down and marry was something that he still considered, even though he had accepted that he was gay. In fact, while he was studying abroad in China this fall, he had given thought to dating a woman until he realized that that would not be the right thing to do for

his own sense of self. The contextual piece of race certainly had an influence within this particular intersection of socioeconomic class and gay men.

One's socioeconomic class also seemingly had an impact on their involvement within the larger LGBT community. Many of the men who were upper-class or middle-class discussed going out within Danby or Highland Park with friends and enjoying time drinking alcohol or going clubbing together. Access to these spaces required a certain amount of financial capital with the cost of cover charges, fashionable clothes, and costs of alcohol. Landon spoke about the fact that he was often quite aware of his class when engaged with the larger LGBT community and its emphasis on fashion, appearance, and materialism. In his own case, he spoke about the tensions that occasionally arose between his boyfriend, who was from an upper-class background, and his own experience of being in the lower-middle class and how they viewed money differently. As a result, there was often a component of class privilege that played out for those within the gay community who come from backgrounds with higher levels of social and economic capital.

Intersections of religion and gay men. Similar to the conversation on class, sexual orientation, race, and gender, religion added another layer of complexity to one's identity development. Almost all of the men discussed that religion and gay identity were typically incongruent with one another. This was presented in a variety of ways. Bryan highlighted his friend's recent conversation with his family regarding his sexual identity as a gay man and his family's difficulties with that due to their religious background. Many of the men – Jonathan, Matt, Brandon, Luke, and Peter – each discussed their own personal experiences of growing up within religious households and

how they negotiated their gay identities in light of their families' ideas around religion. For some, such as Brandon and Peter, that experience led them to take on a more atheist identity whereas individuals such as Matt set out to find religious communities that were welcoming to the LGBT community. However, this splintered journey of religion was not the case for every participant in this study.

Charles's experience of being raised in a Buddhist family had a significant impact on how he looked at his own identity as a gay man that seemed to be very different than the rest of his peers. Throughout his interviews, he indicated that his sexual identity was something that was deeply private for him and that he did not give much consideration. He indicated that he would be open about his identity if someone asked, but he disclosed that he was not out to his family and would not come out until he had found his life partner. From the Buddhist philosophy, his performance as a gay man was founded in humility in an attempt to not experience disidentification from his family and larger sense of being. In fact, his humanity was deeply wrapped within his Buddhist philosophy, and as a result, how he engaged his sense of self, particularly his sense of sexual identity, was far different from his peers who operated mainly from a more Western perspective. This was an important finding from the research and certainly created an implication for how Eastern philosophies or perspectives on religion may differ in terms of sexual identity than more Western, Judeo-Christian perspectives.

Students attending the religiously affiliated institution in this study largely spoke of a welcoming campus culture for them as gay men. However, those who were more involved in leadership positions in the campus's LGBT student organization spoke directly at how the religious doctrine that underpins the campus's mission and vision

seemed to be contentious around issues of sexual identity. A few of the men, Peter, Marc, and Will, spoke of the group's efforts to hold a campus-wide dance for members of the LGBT community and the university administration's initial resistance to the event. Specifically, Peter spoke about his experience of that event and using it as a launching point to ramp up the dialogue around sexual orientation issues on campus and building alliances with other student organizations, such as Associated Students, to confront the administration's hypocrisy of their espoused value of inclusion and diversity and their actualized stance to not allow the event to happen on campus. Thus, the college environment played a significant role as well contextually in terms of how these men also experienced messages around the tensions of sexuality and religion.

Context matters: Religion and sexuality. This experience of the college environment serving as an agent of socialization also was an example of how the Societal Context within the labyrinth model influenced individuals attending that college or university. For example, Marc seemed extremely activated by the administration's resistance to the dance as well as the anti-gay marriage stances taken by senior officials within University Ministry on campus during the Proposition 8 campaign in California. Marc did not identify as Catholic yet chose to attend SAU, a private, Catholic-affiliated institution. The Societal Context of the labyrinth model involves issues of structural and institutional heterosexism and heteronormative ideals and values. SAU's stance as a Catholic institution reinforced and subscribed hegemony, patriarchy, and heteronormativity in its stance against gay marriage, and as a result, Marc, as a student, experienced institutional homophobia because of the institution aligning its religious doctrine with a statewide policy that prohibited individuals such as Marc to marry a

same-sex partner in California. Conversely, that feeling of oppression and discrimination also activated Marc and others to become more involved in advocating for LGBT rights and serving as activists engaged in that social rights movement. This type of action represents the reciprocal movement and interplay between the Individual and Societal Contexts within the labyrinth model.

Critical Influences on One's Development

In answering the previous two research questions for this study, an important final component is understanding the key moments of one's college experience that either help or hinder one's meaning making of his or her multiple identities. To this end, the third and final research question for this study was: What are the critical influences during college that influence gay men's meaning-making process? Within this section, I address those critical influences that seemingly served as "movement points" (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004) for the men and their capacity to make meaning of their lived experiences as it relates to their social identities. I have attempted to limit my judgments on these critical influences being positive or negative and instead frame them as moments of critical self-reflection and learning for the men.

LGBT-affirming spaces. Involvement in LGBT-affirming spaces, such as student organizations, academic curriculum, and campus-wide programs relating to the LGBT community was often discussed by the men in this study as helpful to their meaning making process. Most of the men interviewed had some level of engagement in an LGBT student organization on campus, whether it was their campus's LGBT student union or a speaker's bureau program. Overwhelmingly, the men indicated that those spaces allowed them to connect with others like them, be their authentic selves, and

broaden their social support network including straight allies who participated in those organizations, which connected to R. Stevens' (2004) findings on gay men in college. In his study, R. Stevens found that LGBT-affirming spaces led to increased connections with other like-minded students, faculty, and staff who became the men's support network. Likewise, involvement in a gay and bisexual male fraternity was also seen as helpful in being in contact with men expressing a range of sexual identities as well as masculinities. The brothers of Delta Lambda Phi, the gay, bisexual and straight male progressive fraternity, seemed to find their experiences of connecting within the organization significant in challenging one's assumptions, especially around hegemonic masculinity. In particular, Matt and Victor both spoke about challenging heteronormative and hegemonic masculinity ideas and values within the organization; however, it must be noted that the structure of a fraternity still operates from a place of exclusion: to those who are not able to afford the dues, to those who may be male, but not biologically so, and also as an organization that replicates notions of hegemonic masculinity by the use of the word "fraternity." These ideas particularly connected with the work of Yeung, Stombler, and Wharton (2010) in their work on challenging and reifying hegemonic masculinities in a gay fraternal organization. Yeung, Stombler, and Wharton found that the men in their study welcomed an array of performative masculinities from their members, they largely continued to uphold hegemonic masculinity by the exclusion of women and transgender individuals into their fraternity. Thus, while the fraternity claimed to be progressive, they did not actually transgress the fraternal structure in ways that they could have.

Academic curriculum on LGBT and gender issues was important opportunities for learning and critical self-reflection for some of the men. Gonyea and Moore (2007) agreed with this finding as they found from their quantitative analysis that those men who were 'more out' about their sexual identity more often reported engagement in "active and collaborative learning activities than both their 'straight' and 'less out' peers, suggesting that personal openness is related to some aspect of this benchmark" (p. 9). For example, Mason spoke at length about his LGBT literature course that he was taking and how much reading about others, even fictional characters, who were gay, lesbian, or bisexual helped him consider who he was. Likewise, Kevin discussed his experience of confronting a peer in a communications class where the students were talking about the use of the word, "gay," and his peer was trying to defend her friends' use of the phrase, "That's so gay." Through the experience of discourse with this student, Kevin was energized and activated to speak up, take action, and educate others about how the use of words such as "gay" or "fag" are hurtful and homophobic when stated in such a context. Pascoe's (2009) work discussed the discourse around the use of "that's so gay" and "fag" as a means for others to reinforce hegemonic masculinity by gender role enforcement within high school settings. However, the use of these slang terms as a means of gender policing was clearly still alive and well among college students. Through academic curriculum opportunities and public discourse, it seemed as though the men who had been enrolled in these classes, such as Mason, Kevin, and Victor, were able to be more thoughtful about their own sense of identities, advocate for themselves in terms of being a gay man, and confront homophobic remarks from one's peers. This was a significant

element of meaning making in terms of finding one's voice (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Daloz Parks, 2011).

Engaging in programs that were LGBT-positive provided similar outcomes as LGBT-affirmed organizations and coursework. These programs varied in nature, but they included involvement in and facilitation of an undergraduate student men's discussion group, LGBT housing programs, and social justice trainings on LGBT or gender issues. Additionally, attending social events geared towards the LGBT community on one's campus, such as barbeques or dances, often served as important first steps at becoming involved in the LGBT community at one's institution. In Jonathan's experience, being a member of the men's discussion group at his institution served as a vital opportunity for him to unpack his own deeply rooted assumptions about what it meant to be a man, particularly those steeped in hegemonic masculinity. As the facilitator of this group, he learned more about himself through mistakes he made and took responsibility for them. Others, such as Landon, Kevin, and Mason, participated in in-depth trainings around social justice issues, including topics around lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity, gender identity and expression, in positional leadership roles they held on campus. Each of these men discussed these experiences as significant for them to apply what they learned into action, both for themselves as well as in the groups in which they were leading. As a result, these educational opportunities served a direct need for helping students make meaning of their multiple identities.

Finding community with other gay men. In many ways similar to the previous section, finding community with other gay men was important for the men in this study. Each of the men in this study discussed having at least one other gay friend with whom

they spent time. For many of the men, the friendships formed with other gay men were critical in helping them through the coming out process, either virtually such as Luke's friend made through Facebook or in person, such as Will reaching out to Peter after experiencing his breakdown his first year of college when struggling with his gay identity. In many ways, these friendships became surrogate families where the men would often feel closest to their gay friends and be vulnerable and authentic with one another. Jonathan articulated this during the focus group when discussing how important his friends were yet many of them were older than he was and how hard it was to not have his best friends living across the hall from him any longer. In essence, his friends moving away after college forced him to become more dependent upon himself rather than seeking external influences, which indicated that Jonathan may be in Baxter Magolda's (2001) crossroads stage or what Daloz Parks (2011) referred to as being shipwrecked. In other words, Jonathan was growing up and having to make meaning of his lived experiences more or less on his own.

Jonathan's disorientation and movement to be more self-reliant related to the center of the labyrinth model, Living in the Nexus, where the men began to identify what it meant to be a gay man after college. The men I interviewed, especially those on the cusp of graduating or who had recently graduated, spoke about the difficulty of the transition from college life and often having to begin building one's support network of friends over again. They identified that during college, there were meaningful opportunities to connect with one another through organizations, events, and programs. However, many of the men felt as though the only way to meet other gay men after graduation would be through going to bars. Some of the men seemed to struggle with

this notion, and they largely were unsure of how this might affect their lives after college. Regardless of their concern, it must be acknowledged that the men desired a network of gay friends moving forward after college.

Engagement as or with peer mentor. An interesting finding through this study was the significance of either being a peer mentor or mentee. Surprisingly, however, none of the men in this study was involved in a formalized mentoring program for gay men. Yet many of the men discussed the impact and influence their older friends had on their sense of self. In particular, Nate discussed Peter being a role model for him on campus. While they were friends, Nate felt as though Peter provided more than friendship. Instead, he coached him through various situations, served as a sounding board, and modeled for him a way of being that may not have fallen into stereotypes of the gay male archetype. While I highlighted Nate and Peter's mentoring relationship, many of the other study participants identified similar individuals who held these roles in their lives, such as Brandon and his friend, Blake, as well as Sean and his best friend from the U.S. Military Academy. These peers played an especially vital role in helping the men make meaning of their experiences as most of them expressed a lack of older gay men serving as role models, including out faculty and staff on their respective campuses.

Intimate relationships with other men. Being engaged in an intimate relationship with other men was a powerful learning experience for the men who had that experience during college. For many of the men, whether they had a same-sex relationship or not, they correlated certain ideas of masculinity and femininity around sexual roles (i.e., bottoming as an expression of submission or femininity and topping as an expression of domination or masculinity). However, most of the men found

themselves challenging those assumptions once they were in relationships through sexual experimentation. Often, the expression of one's sexual behaviors reinforced their sex role preferences, but there was a shift in the masculine or feminine value placed upon that role. Peter's first significant relationship with another man was an example of this shift of thinking. Prior to the relationship, he equated the act of being the top aligned with being the masculine one in the pair. However, through the relationship, he did experience being both the top and the bottom with his boyfriend and found his notions of what is masculine and what is feminine to be altered significantly.

However, sexual behavior was only one small aspect of experiencing an intimate relationship with another man. Matt shared his experience of his relationship of three months being a huge learning opportunity for him because it was the first time that he could publicly express his sexuality with another person in public. The sole act of holding his boyfriend's hand in public served as a declaration of his identity as well as a personal form of activism by challenging heteronormative ideas. This was a very positive aspect of meaning making around his identity; however, Matt also shared that there were challenges such as feelings of jealousy, anger, and frustration between his boyfriend and himself. Those emotions might have been challenging yet still provided Matt quite an opportunity to learn more about himself and continue to grow as a young man was essential for his future relationships with other men. As a result, the experience of being in an intimate relationship with another man provided a substantial amount of fodder to help the men in this study to make meaning of what it meant for them to be gay men.

Involvement in leadership roles. The majority of the men involved in the study held some type of leadership role on their campus, and those experiences provided them developmental challenges for growth. Serving in a leadership role provided the men an opportunity to be a positive role model for other gay men on campus and also provided increased visibility for the LGBT community on their campus. Whether it was as a resident assistant (Mason) or Associated Students president (Peter), an orientation leader (Kevin) or a founding member of a traditional social fraternity (Nate), these men were engaged with others, gay or straight, male or female, and attempting to make their institutions a better, more vibrant place. By and large, the men took their responsibilities as student leaders seriously but also felt a great deal of pressure, from stress they placed on themselves but also feeling the weight of the LGBT community on their shoulders. For example, Bryan, Peter, and Kevin each spoke about their anxieties of being the “only one” of their organizations who was an out gay man. Often, these men felt as though they were constantly in a fishbowl and on display to others. While they often felt supported by their peers within their organizations, that support was limited because most of their peers could never understand their experience fully because they were not gay themselves. These roles were often experienced as a double-edged sword: helpful for one to learn more about himself, especially his capacity to lead, but at the same time occasionally isolating and lonely. As a result of these feelings, the men often spent a good amount of time working to process their experiences and using them to correct some mistakes made and stretch themselves in other environments that may have felt challenging, such as social environments with peers and future leadership roles.

Ongoing exposure to heterosexism and heteronormativity. The final critical influence that seemed to be significant was one's continued exposure to heterosexism and heteronormativity. Involvement in athletics and fraternities particularly reinforced messages steeped in heteronormativity and homophobia. Bryan's experience as an athlete on campus was significant; however, much of his time during college was spent disassociating with the LGBT community because his teammates reinforced socialized messages about what was appropriate or not appropriate with him in terms of being a man as well as being a teammate. While he claimed that he felt accepted by his teammates, he also provided examples of experienced homophobia, such as a teammate calling him out for being "too gay" when dancing to his favorite song. Likewise, both Peter and Marc spoke about the fact that they would never even think about taking their boyfriends to their fraternity socials, but it was understood that would not be appropriate to do in the first place. These messages sent a strong signal to gay men about the boundaries of inclusion by straight men as well as what will be accepted and what will not be in terms of being "too gay" for these heteronormative spaces. Ultimately, straight men in these spaces served as gender enforcers of heteronormative standards. As a result, the gay men experienced tensions between wanting to fit in with those men and having to compartmentalized aspects of themselves in order to do so. This led to some real consequences within their lives, including more explicit internalized homophobia and transphobia as well as a disassociation, at times, from other gay and bisexual men who might have been seen as more feminine or flamboyant.

The experience of homophobia and heterosexism can also be difficult for some gay men in relation to their families. For instance, Brandon, Craig and Jonathan

experienced explicit and implicit messages of homophobia from their family members. Political ideologies, religious beliefs, and cultural norms played a large role in these family members' beliefs about homosexuality, and as a result, they internalized and externalized those beliefs to others, including some of the men who happened to be gay themselves. Brandon, Craig, and Jonathan each shared how difficult and sometimes painful it was to hear these messages knowing that it was affecting the relationships they had with their families. In many ways, Brandon and Craig also compartmentalized these painful experiences and attempted to indicate as though they were not as difficult as they may have been, which was very much rooted in hegemonic masculinity. By suppressing the pain and emotions of the experience, they were attempting to deflect the question whereas Jonathan's suicide attempts stemmed from that compartmentalization. Jonathan knew that he no longer could keep those thoughts inside, and as a result, he was able to articulate those emotions, but admitted that it was through the therapeutic relationship that allowed him to do so. In this vein, continued exposure to environments that were homophobic and heteronormative for these men may lead to the internalization of these messages and unhealthy coping mechanisms and mental well-being.

As previously mentioned in regards to families, certain religious beliefs around sexual orientation may have also reinforced hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and homophobia in challenging ways. Several of the men, Brandon, Craig, Landon, Matt, and Luke, discussed growing up in religious communities. Often times, these men experienced a difficult struggle between their emergent gay identity and their religious beliefs in high school and/or college. Brandon's experiences of being removed as a member of his church due to his gay identity was particularly challenging for him, and as

a result, he often pointed to that experience as a moment of learning where he abandoned his belief in God and turned to a strong identity as atheist. Landon's experience of being a pastor's son was another example of the difficulty one has with integrating religion and sexual orientation. While he indicated that his parents were supportive of him, he also acknowledged that he had to keep his sexual identity hidden from extended family members, members of his parents' church, and his larger community to avoid his parents' experiencing any shame due to his sexual orientation. This sense of compartmentalization again can be difficult, and as a result, does not allow the men to be their authentic selves in all spaces. Additionally, they also had the experience of limited support from those individuals who should be closest to them; in his case, Landon's parents could never be public about their support of him as a young gay man because it would go against the religious doctrine to which they subscribe. As a result, these messages continued to play a significant role in one's meaning making and served as moments where the men experience a developmental crisis (Erikson, 1980). They may continue to cycle through that experience until it can be resolved in a healthy way (Erikson, 1980). There was evidence of this by some of the men, like Luke, who spoke of spending time asking God to allow him the opportunity to concentrate on understanding his gay identity and then he would come back to understanding how to integrate his spirituality within that context. This demonstrated a sort of learning loop for Luke in terms of gaining a more secure sense of his sexual identity prior to bridging that to his religious identity. These experiences served as valuable meaning making opportunities yet were challenging and painful for the men in the moment. Thus,

continued reflection and deep inner work to make meaning of these experiences was critical in order to advance in one's development.

Limitations

There are several limitations within this study. First and foremost, grounded theory methodology is not meant to be generalizable (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). This study was limited to the experiences of the 17 attending three different universities in Southern California; thus, the research findings cannot be representative of all gay men, either at those specific institutions or elsewhere. Likewise, the data from this study must be understood in the context of the time that it was collected which was during the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters.

There was some participant selection bias that did occur within this study. By using various campus administrators as points of contact for the research, there was a substantial number of participants who completed the online participant demographic survey who were involved in LGBT organizations and took advantage of various LGBT-related services on campus. However, through participant recruitment efforts via Facebook, I was able to reach some students who did not participate in LGBT student organizations yet were still on those organization's list-serves or Facebook groups. Thus, I was careful during participation selection from the demographic survey to attempt to diversify the pool of participants as much as possible. However, the available number of students who did not have this perspective was rather low.

Another challenge within the study was the participants' varied developmental stages. Each of the participants was in a different place in terms of understanding his sexuality as well as his gender. Likewise, one's capacity for meaning making was also a

limitation amongst the participants. For example, several of the participants openly discussed that they have never fully considered how their multiple identities intersect and how they inform one another. However, this perspective was also helpful when looking at the developmental factors for one's meaning making, a key finding of this study. I utilized various strategies, such as multiple interviews, the MMDI activity and the use of journals, to attempt to help these participants capture their thoughts about these aspects of their overall identity.

Lastly, the participant pool for this study was limited to the participants who met the outlined research criteria via the online participant demographic survey. Not everyone who participated in that survey met the criteria, and as a result, I was not able to fully capture the full diversity of social identities and/or campus involvement experiences based upon the available pool of potential participants. There were no participants who identified as Black or African American, Native American or Jewish through the online survey, which is not surprising given their relatively low numbers at the three institutions serving as research sites. However, those social identity affiliations are not represented amongst the participants in this study, and therefore, it is still unknown whether their meaning making process of understanding their multiple identities may be different from the men who participated in this study.

Implications for Educators

From the findings of this research study, there are some important implications for the professional practice of higher education faculty, staff, and administrators as it relates to assisting gay men on their campuses. In this section, I present three main areas that may make a significant difference in assisting the growth and development for gay

men studying at colleges and universities as well as advocate for professionals to rise to the occasion to meet these students where they are at.

The Importance of Counter-spaces

For the men in this study, finding spaces where they could be authentic was critical to their development. These spaces were both physical, but also virtual. Involvement within LGBT-related student organizations, classes, and programs were often just as important as connecting with others through social media, such as Facebook and MySpace, as well as chat functions through various video games. These spaces offer the men the ability to connect with others who are like them in terms of their sexual identities, reflect upon their own sense of self, and situate themselves in spaces that often allowed them to just be themselves without judgment. These spaces are similar to the idea of counter-spaces for people of color, which are defined as “sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 70). Scholars (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso; Tatum, 2000) have found that counter-spaces are important for students from marginalized and underrepresented groups yet the literature has specifically addressed students of color using these counter-spaces. However, through this research, it is clear that the notion of counter-spaces also may be useful for gay students as well. Many of the men discussed experiencing some forms of heterosexism and homophobia during their college experiences, and as a result, finding spaces where they can be in community with others like them and create positive social support networks creates an opportunity to build a counter-space that addresses their needs. Higher education professionals should continue to provide opportunities for gay

students to connect together in meaningful ways, especially in light of multiple forms of oppression that affect these students on individual, group and structural levels.

Self-Reflection as Critical Influence

The opportunities for learning through self-reflection were seen as significant for the men in this study. Those men who were engaged in self-reflection activities, both in the classroom as well as through their campus involvement, tended to have a more secure sense of self as well as a deeper understanding of the tensions or limitations on which they still needed to work. Self-reflection, while a broad concept, was seen in a host of ways throughout the research. For example, Mason discussed the importance of reflecting on the readings for his LGBT literature course and understanding how the characters he identified with, including Molly from Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, may have represented aspects of himself. Additionally, Jonathan spoke of the importance of being involved in a therapeutic relationship where he is asked to be self-reflective of his experiences and process through the tensions he feels within his identities on a regular basis. These are just two poignant yet very different examples of self-reflection; however, both proved to be important.

This importance on self-reflection supports the findings of other scholars who have investigated the meaning making (Daloz Parks, 2011) and self-authorship literature (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008; Kegan, 1982; Pizzolato, 2008). The ability to be deeply self-reflective is an indicator of more advanced levels of cognitive development (Kegan) as well as a signpost that one is increasingly listening to one's own internal voice rather than external influences for answers or direction (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008; Daloz Parks, 2000, 2011; Pizzolato, 2008). In her work, Daloz Parks (2011) highlights the

work of William Perry, the famed theorist on cognitive-structural development, recalling that he often said “that part of learning the art of life is to discover that there is not just a still, small voice but a whole committee of voices inside – parents, family, teachers, advertising, threats from competitors, expectations of friends and colleagues – and the challenge is to become a good chairperson” (pp. 110 – 111). Many of the men I spoke to in this study are beginning to understand Perry’s claim in that they are making meaning of all of the messages they receive yet processing those intentionally to make the best decisions for themselves as possible. Additionally, many of the men recognize that they still have continued work to do internally and that their identities are indeed fluid. Through this process of interviewing, journaling, and thinking about their identities, each of the men made some important connections in their life stories and what that means for their future. Being self-reflective, even through this study, then provided them some potentially new insights in which they might use moving forward.

The Need for Mentors

Almost all of the men in this study spoke about the importance of having peers who were friends but also mentors to them. Many discussed that these individuals served a vital role in their life, both through talking openly about common issues and experiences relevant to their sense of identities as well as through action where the men learned by observation of their peer mentor(s). Nardi (1999, 2000) indicates that this is quite common among gay men where friendships become surrogate families and mentoring-type relationships are commonplace. Additionally, this finding is particularly salient and important when thinking about the environmental context of higher education. Daloz Parks (2011) highlights the fact that higher education is ripe as a mentoring

environment whereby students can engage with others in critical conversations about meaning and purpose. Likewise, there is a growing emphasis on the use of peer mentoring within higher education (Williams, 2011a). Through formal peer mentoring programs, some important outcomes are met. Williams (2011b) writes, “The very act of teaching others solidifies learning for students. And the very act of connecting to others in that kind of relationship builds the sort of community our institutions aspire to be” (Williams, p. 98). In an attempt to connect the study findings to additional literature within the field, it seems as though the implementation of peer mentoring programs for gay students might be a beneficial way to increase social support and provide learning opportunities to both the mentor and the mentee. These experiences, especially if rooted in strong leadership and pedagogical support, would be helpful for students to be more self-reflective, allow for students to receive coaching at multiple levels, and attend to the recruitment, retention and attrition of gay students on campus.

Similarly, supporting the creation of informal mentoring relationships would further assist these efforts. These relationships occurred, as demonstrated by the men in this study, through friendships developed over one’s college years as well as through social media connections. Higher education professionals should attempt to consider ways in which they can promote and help sustain students’ connections with one another throughout their college years. For the men in this study, many of them connected with their closest friends through out-of-class experiences, mainly through involvement in student organizations. In particular, connecting with others through LGBT-positive organizations, programs or events was particularly salient for the men. As a result, professionals in higher education should continue to provide these services for gay men

to connect with one another and begin to build relationships that are meaningful and important for their identity development and meaning making.

Earlier within this section, there was a brief discussion of Daloz Parks's (2011) work on higher education as a mentoring environment. In her book, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Daloz Parks describes how mentoring has increasingly become less frequent within our ever-changing world. She remarks that mentoring relationships may serve "as a vital social art and a cultural force" which "could significantly revitalize our institutions and provide the intergenerational glue to address some of our deepest and most pervasive concerns" (pp. 13 – 14). While it is clear that one's peers maintain a high degree of influence on one's development, it must be said that few of the men in this study named older gay men working with them as advisors, faculty members, or student affairs professional staff members as role models. Komives (2000) puts forth a call to action for higher education professionals to "inhabit the gap" of knowing and doing by being congruent in one's values through their actions, professionally and personally (p. 31). Higher education professionals, especially those who identify as gay, must be willing to bring themselves to their work holistically and help mentor, advise, and coach young people in meaningful ways.

This implication for professional practice is important yet the dangers of doing so are real. As a gay man working in higher education, I found myself working at a small, private, liberal arts college on the East Coast and being the only openly gay man in the entire Division of Student Affairs. While I sometimes felt tokenized as the only gay man, I also felt strongly that I needed to serve as an advisor and mentor to the students

involved in the campus's LGBT organization. However, when I moved across the country and began working at CUO, I did not feel as though I needed to be as much of a mentor or a role model with LGBT students because the campus had an LGBT resource center and a vibrant array of student organizations dealing with aspects of LGBT identity. Instead, I played into the myth that the students on campus could get what they needed from the folks who had been designated to work with them directly through their job responsibilities; thus, I was absolved from having to share my "gay" identity to work with me often.

I believe that many of us who work in higher education, especially in student affairs administration, hold an assumption that there is a wealth of openly gay men working in our field and that the gay students on campus are able to find them and see them as role models and resources. Yet through this study, my own assumptions about this were not supported. I work currently or have worked at two of the research sites within this study – and in fact, I knew a few of the study participants (Craig, Jonathan, and Kevin) peripherally prior to the research. As I was analyzing the data, I started to feel a sense of guilt for potentially not doing enough for students like Craig, Jonathan, and Kevin who I had known during my time at CUO yet did not take under my wing and mentor as an openly gay man. In my log, I copied and pasted a conversation that I had on January 6, 2012 via Facebook with a friend, who served on the peer debriefing team. I wrote,

"So many of these men seemingly lack role models – although there are a few who do talk about other gay (and some straight) men who have served as role models/mentors to them who are either student affairs professionals or faculty. But by and large, there aren't many. And when one says that I am a role model to him because I'm doing this research on campus – that actually makes me sad because my influence is really so miniscule....The saddest part though is that

three of these men, I knew at CUO – not well, really, but they were involved in things that I coordinated or led. Craig is one of them.”

My friend responded,

“So this makes me see your work as really important in terms of providing a counternarrative for our field. There may be a lot of gay folks in the field, but they are not bringing their full selves to work, so students still do not see them as gay....My question would be why? Like, if we trace some stuff back, mine was due to safety. I also think some prep programs don't do a good job emphasizing why bringing your full self to work is important.”

I share this insight to call for professionals, like myself, to step forward and bring themselves fully to our work knowing that for some, there is a risk involved around one's safety, personally and/or professionally. Ultimately, one must make the best decisions he, she or ze can in assisting others as well as him-, her, or himself. However, gay students on campus will indeed benefit by the important interactions they would have with professionals who can connect with them meaningfully around the intersections of their multiple identities.

Implications for Student Development Theory

The literature on college student development theory largely serves as the underpinnings to this research study through the pre-existing research on gay identity, men's identity, and multiple identities development. Since this study explored how gay men in college came to make meaning of their multiple identities, there are certain implications from the findings that are particularly useful when exploring college student development theory. I will present those implications below.

Over the past decade, there has been a call amongst scholars advocating for a move to holistic student development, mainly using an intersectional lens (Abes, 2009; Abes & Kasch, 2009; Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxter

Magolda, 2008). This research study aims to contribute to the research in the field around this work. Baxter Magolda (2008) highlights the fact that traditional student development theory segments students into various aspects of self, including cognitive-structural, psychosocial, and social identity development. Yet, by using an intersectionality perspective, scholars are able to explore how the overall self-concept of one's self intersect and converge for one's development. For example, this study was specifically focused on one's sense of masculinities or gender and sexual orientation. However, throughout the findings, dimensions of race, socioeconomic status, and religion were discussed by the participants and examined within various contexts as it related to the study's three research questions. It is essential that scholars continue to build upon the foundational theories that inform our work (Cass, 1979; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; D'Augelli, 1994; Erikson, 1980; Kegan, 1982) in order to advance the field of student development. Using intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995) and other critical perspectives (Abes, 2009; Abes & Kasch, 2009) allows for a more nuanced understanding of student development within the context of one's environment as well as how systemic forces, such as power, privilege, and oppression, may impact one's development. This emerging scholarship and research may equip professionals to understand better the developmental processes current students are going through in college.

The emerging field of men and masculinities studies has had an impact on the scholarship on college men, as previously discussed in Chapter Two (Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards, 2007; Harper & Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2006; Laker & Davis, 2011). Yet much of the research has been focused on the majority culture of White heterosexual men. This research study is an effort to addressing that gap in the literature. The

experiences of non-heterosexual and transgender men are often pushed to the margins (Kimmel, 2008). This research study specifically focused on gay men, and the findings from this study about how gay men grapple with hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity throughout their lives is significant. Scholars within student development theory should continue to examine systemic factors that often play into students' development, such as hegemony, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. As the findings of this study show, these concepts largely influence the ways that these men navigate their worlds as well as how they come to make meaning of their multiple identities. Expanding the scholarship on college men, including non-heterosexual and transgender male identities, would continue a vital discourse needed to support young men's growth and development within higher education.

Situating our understanding of college student development in the context of the college environment is an important aspect that should be acknowledged by scholars within higher education. By using ecological developmental models (Astin, 1970; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), scholars and practitioners have the opportunity to gain further perspective on the multiple layers of development occurring within individuals in different contexts. One of my assumptions from this research study was that the experiences of the gay men at each of the three different research sites would be very different based upon the campus culture and environment. Each of the institutions had similarities yet also significant differences that make them unique from one another. However, through the data analysis, all of the men felt as though their campuses still identified that they attended an institution that had a "masculine culture," exhibited by an emphasis on fraternity life, athletics, and upholding a certain masculine Southern

California “look,” which was typically described as a fit body type and clothing that included tank tops, board shorts, and other apparel that reinforced the men’s ideas around masculinity. While there may have been slight differences between the campuses in terms of the prevalence of their fraternity cultures, emphasis on sports and athletics as well as St. Andrew’s University being a religiously affiliated institution, these were not substantial enough to provide major distinctions in how the men made meaning of their multiple identities. To the men in this study, their college environments – while acknowledged as safe spaces – still reinforced notions of heteronormativity and heterosexism that pervaded their daily lives, which connects to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) concept of the macrosystem and how larger systemic issues can affect one’s environment in significant ways. While the differences may not have been significant within the findings from this study across the three research sites, the different levels at the micro-, meso-, and macrosystems within one’s environment certainly did play a significant role in the development of the men. Bronfenbrenner’s concepts of the micro-, meso-, and macrosystems, in many ways, connect to Baxter Magolda’s (2008) call for holistic development models seeing that ecological development models situate the individual in multiple levels of his or her environment and how those environments influence him or her in critical ways. Scholars should pay particular attention to these issues, especially as the field of higher education moves toward a more holistic view of student development.

Lastly, this research was grounded in the meaning making of multiple identities, and the findings of this research were largely connected to the existing literature on meaning making and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda; 2001; Daloz Parks, 2000, 2011; Pizzolato, 2008). Recent research in this area demonstrates many efforts at

understanding the intersections of meaning making and other aspects of social identities, such as ethnic identity (Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, & Podobnik, 2008; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004), lesbian identity (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, 2009), and men (Harris, 2007). However, little attention has been paid explicitly to gay men; thus, this research study contributes to lessening this gap in the literature. Learning from gay men how they come to understand and be critically reflective of their sense of masculinities and sexual identity makes an important contribution to the existing literature on student development theory. Through the findings, it was clear that the majority of the men had never really considered their sense of masculinities before, largely due to their male privilege. Additionally, they often had difficulty separating their gay identity from their male identity as the two seemingly were so fused together as a way of seeing and navigating their worlds that they would often not be able to provide answers about their sexuality or their masculinities without discussing the intersections of both identities. This finding was substantive in terms of understanding how one's sense of self is largely informed through an intersectional lens. By using this intersectional lens when exploring processes of meaning making, scholars may be able to understand the holistic development of the individual and the impact of his/her/hir environment has on the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Through this study's findings, it is clear that there are additional questions that should be explored, especially within student development theory. In the next section, I provide implications for future research in this area.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study have important implications for future research. The old adage of the best research inspires more questions than answers may hold true within this work. In this section, I present some larger areas of investigation that would be useful to investigate in relation with the findings of this study.

Broadening The Research on Men

The focus of this particular study was narrowed to investigating the experiences of birthsex gay men, those men who identify as gay and who were born biologically male. However, it is imperative to understand how other men who might identify as queer, bisexual, pansexual or fluid sexual identities come to make meaning of their multiple identities. In looking at the research on gay college men, it is clear that the use of “gay” as a label is limiting and more students are resisting terminology of their sexual orientation that limits or narrows their sense of attraction or orientation (Dilley, 2010; King, 2005; Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1990, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). Through this particular research study, there were several men who identified outside of the “gay” label who expressed interest in participating in this research, many who identified themselves as men of color. As a result, it would be helpful to open up this research and investigate terminology as it relates to one’s other social identities, including race, religion, and social class.

Additionally, it is important to learn more about how transgender men come to make meaning of their multiple identities within the college environment. Recent scholarship indicates that transgender or gender non-conforming students are more likely to consider dropping out of college, have higher levels of concern regarding personal safety on campus and avoid coming out as trans due to their safety concerns (Rankin,

Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). As a result of this insight, one can infer that trans men may have some significant experiences beyond those discussed as a part of this research that inform scholars and practitioners about how they make meaning of their multiple identities, especially their construction of gender and sexuality. Also, recognizing that trans identity is a gender identity rather than a sexual identity, the experiences of trans men and the range of their sexual identities would also be important to explore as it relates to this study. These pieces are current gaps in the literature that should be filled by emerging research in the future.

Analysis Through Critical Theory Lens

While the concept of intersectionality, which stems from Critical Race Theory, was used within this study to explore the intersections of one's multiple identities, the analysis of the data was not done from a critical lens. However, doing so would be an important contribution to the field of higher education, especially to analyze, interrogate, and situate the data to provide new ways of seeing the aspects of the individual and societal contexts. For example, analyzing the societal context of the study's theoretical model using a queer theory lens would help question the concept of heteronormativity and its influence on the socialization of the men in the study. An example of this would be Abes and Kasch's (2007) work where the authors analyzed Abes's work on the meaning making of lesbian college students using queer theory to interrogate the structural elements of heteronormativity and heterosexism to provide some new perspectives from participants' experience and their development. Applying these critical lenses would be helpful as a way of interrogating the status quo, which tends to

support dominant ideology that in this case relates specifically to heterosexual privilege within the United States.

Through the use of a critical analysis, one can also come to understand how the status quo is reinforced and reified from generation to generation through individual, institutional and structural heterosexism, which is enacted by explicit and implicit means. For example, Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) highlight the concept of microaggressions that students of color face every day. These microaggressions are “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, p. 60). While these scholars discuss microaggressions in the context of racial insults directed toward students of color, the term can also be applied to gay students who experience homophobic comments and insults directed to them. In some cases, the men within this study experienced these types of messages from their classmates, family members, as well as strangers. The experience of microaggressions can negatively impact the development of one’s sense of identity, and they can be powerful in terms of their influence, as was the experience of some of the men of the study. Mason’s involvement in the Naval ROTC program and Luke’s experiences of being in straight bars with female friends both presented some particularly challenging environments for the men to be a part of and led to potentially dangerous situations for their own personal safety. By looking at the data from this study from critical perspectives, researchers might be able to move to question underlying assumptions and societal norms that continue to subjugate marginalized populations through dominance, power and privilege.

Longitudinal Research Related to Meaning Making of Multiple Identities

While the findings of this research makes a contribution toward the gap in the literature on how gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities, longitudinal research efforts would be helpful in demonstrating how students continue to process and reflect upon certain experiences that might be significant then and there. For this research, the participants were occasionally asked to reflect upon the critical influences that had happened in the past, such as their coming out stories. For many of the men, these memories had happened a few years prior to our interviews together. Thus, the men were relying on recollection rather than their experience of that situation in the here-and-now. By investigating the phenomenon of how gay men make meaning of their multiple identities over time, researchers can understand how certain developmental components of one's cognitive, psychosocial and social identity development influence one's meaning making process. As previously mentioned, some scholars are looking at aspects of this work, but in segmented communities such as ethnic identity for Latino/a students (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004) and lesbians (Abes & Jones, 2004). Increased attention to the intersections between meaning making and identity development can be helpful in also identifying what programs, services, and opportunities within the college environment may be significant, either positively or negatively, in helping students and their meaning making development.

Understanding Research as Intervention

While this research was not intended as an intervention of the men's meaning making, it was clear that some of the men found that the self-reflection that they engaged in around their multiple identities throughout the research served as transformative. In the first interview, many of the men indicated that they had rarely given much thought to

their gender identity or male privilege. However, in the second interviews, they often would admit that they had continued to think about those particular aspects of themselves through the journaling process or the interviews. This level of critical thinking reflected increased meaning making of their sense of self, and as a result, the research process helped the men think about themselves in ways that promoted further development. In her research on White anti-racist feminist students, Linder (2008) experienced a similar phenomenon where her participants were a part of “transformative research” whereby they became more committed to anti-racist work and became increasingly self-aware of themselves through the research process. Ultimately, additional investigation of this phenomenon of transformative research could provide useful tools to scholars interested in finding ways to help students become more reflective, advance their critical thinking capacities, and increase their ability to make meaning of their lived experiences. Related to this, scholars might also be able to identify those key moments during one’s college experience that serve as movement points (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004) or positional shifts (Kegan, 1982) which serve as developmental markers for individuals, advancing or regressing depending upon the context or situation. By investigating these aspects of one’s involvement in transformative research, it would be useful to understand how these experiences may affect students and their development well beyond the college environment.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented a set of implications and recommendations based upon this research study’s findings. Specifically, I offered a theoretical model based upon the study’s findings that outlines the process by which the participants came to make

meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sense of gender and sexual identity. The labyrinth model serves to provide a glimpse to the long, circuitous journey that these men take through the four quadrants of Sense of Sameness Disappears, Compartmentalizing Identit(ies), Seeking Community, and Questioning Allegiances to the center of the labyrinth, Living in the Nexus, and one's journey back out through the quadrants at a different level of the nexus. This model also provides a glimpse at the interplay of a nested system between the Individual Context and Societal Context, which is important in understanding how the college environment as well as other developmental factors influence one's sense of self.

Additionally, I presented a discussion of the findings through the three research questions that frame this study which are (1) How do gay men make meaning of their masculinity and sexuality during their college years; (2) In what ways do gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity intersect for gay men; and (3) What are the critical influences during college that influence gay men's meaning-making process? Throughout the discussion, I highlight the multiple ways that the men in this study experienced their intersections of masculinities and sexuality as well as how different aspects of one's social identities, such as race, socioeconomic status, and religion, influenced their overall sense of self. I also discussed the critical influences one experienced in college that served as movement points for meaning making in their overall development.

From the discussion of research findings and the theoretical model, I detailed implications for student development theory, future research and scholarship as well as professional practice. The findings of this study result in an array of recommendations

for scholars and practitioners in terms of understanding the intersectionality of one's social identities as well as how the meaning making process of those identities is influenced within the college environment. In this chapter, my recommendations and implications for practice and research are offered as a means for further insight into assisting our knowledge base to help gay men in college come to make meaning of their multiple identities.

Closing

"It's like we're writing our own rulebook. It's hard, but hopefully [we] are on the same page....It's not like you have the answers, and it's not that I have the answers. We're just kind of going through this." Luke's comment still plays in my mind, even five months after he said it. While he was referring to being in a same-sex relationship at the time, it seemingly represents so much more than that one aspect of being a gay man. For all of the men in this study, they were indeed writing their own rulebook, an ever-changing blueprint of what it means to be a gay man in college. Throughout their lives, they have learned what it means to follow (and break) the rules and have a keen sense of how those experiences have influenced how they think about themselves as gay men. As Luke said, "It's not like you have the answers, and it's not that I have the answers." In essence, the answers are still unfolding for the men, and their process of making meaning of the truth is wrapped up in their lived realities. For these men, their process of meaning making plays out like an individual walking a labyrinth as meditative practice, moving from the sounds and experiences of the external world around them to a reliance on one's inner voice to find the answers to life's important questions. That journey of meaning

making is the creation of the rulebook, and the gay men from this study are on their way to seeking those answers. The world awaits them.

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Appendix A:
E-mail and Facebook Group Solicitation

Dear <OSU/CUO/USA> student,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my dissertation. For this study, I am examining how gay men in college come to understand their multiple social identities, specifically their sexual orientation and their gender as men here at <OSU/CUO/SAU>. Based upon your experiences as a student here, I would love to include you in this study.

The time commitment would be approximately 5 - 6 hours total, which will include at least two one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and some journaling over the span of a few months.

I hope that you will consider participating in this study. Note that your participation in this study is voluntary.

Please let me know your decision on whether or not you would like to participate by <date>. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me at (518) 469-2125 or via e-mail at danieltillapaugh-15@san Diego.edu.

Sincerely,

Dan Tillapaugh
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Leadership
University of San Diego

Appendix B:
Participant Demographic Survey

Masculinities and Sexualities Amongst College Men Study
Fall 2011

Name:
Email regularly checked:
Cell phone Number:
Birthdate (including day, month, and year):

Major(s):
Minor(s):
Cumulative college GPA:

Check which most closely applies to you:

I am/was an undergraduate student at:
Oceanside State University
California University, Oceanside
St. Andrew's University

I am currently:
A first year/freshman
A sophomore
A junior
A senior
A recent graduate (0 – 1 year out of undergrad)
A recent graduate (1 – 3 years out of undergrad)

I identify my sexual orientation as:
Gay
Bisexual
Heterosexual
Fluid/pansexual
Queer

I identify racially as:
African American/Black
Asian Pacific Islander
Latino/Hispanic/Chicano
Biracial/Multiethnic
Native American/American Indian
White/Caucasian
Other: (text box)

I am "out" to:

- All of my friends and family
- Some of my friends and family
- None of my friends and family

In the text boxes below, please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

Please list any involvement in any college extra-curricular activities, including leadership positions held (if applicable).

Please list any honors, awards, or achievements received during college, including the year(s) received (if applicable).

Appendix C:
E-mail Invitation for Interview

Dear [First Name],

Thank you for participating in the online survey regarding my dissertation study exploring how gay men in college make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their sexual identity and their sense of masculinities/gender. (I REALLY appreciate it!)

I would like to have our first interview together in the near future, so I am hoping to identify some time now that you might be able to hold in your calendar. Would you have any free time (approximately an hour and a half) the week of [date] to meet with me?

Please let me know at your earliest convenience.

Additionally, if you'd like to meet informally prior to the start of the interviews, I am also happy to do in order to answer any questions that you may have and learn more about the study. Just let me know if you wish to set up that meeting as well.

I look forward to hearing from you.

All my best,
Dan

Appendix D:
Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Guide Protocol First Interview

Welcome to participant, introduction of myself, discussion and completion of informed consent.

Introductions:

Tell me a bit about yourself.

Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity Activity

Using the worksheet provided, I want to know a bit more about your social identities, such as your race, your gender, etc. At the center of the atom, you'll see the nucleus, which represents your core. Each of the rings represents a certain aspect of your identity, which is labeled accordingly. Thinking about aspects of your identity *in general*, I would like you to distinguish the importance of that particular identity to you. You would represent that by placing a solid dot on each of the rings. If that particular identity is very important to you, you will draw the dot close to the nucleus. If it is not important to you at all, then you will place the dot towards the farthest edges of the ring.

In the text box below, please describe for me how you would identify your multiple social identities that may be included above, but also others that may be missing.

Sexual Identity:

When did you first realize that you might not be heterosexual?

How did you come out to your family? What feelings did you experience when coming out?

What has your experience been like coming out to your closest friends?

Did you ever have to negotiate coming out to your roommate(s)? What was that experience like? How did you manage that?

What messages did you hear and/or see about being gay growing up? Who were those messages coming from? How did you negotiate your own identity based on these messages?

What factors, if any, have helped you feel comfortable with your sexual identity here at OSU/CUO/SAU?

What factors, if any, have hindered you feeling comfortable with your sexual identity here at OSU/CUO/SAU?

Masculinity:

What comes to mind for you when you hear the word: "masculinity?"

Based upon how you think about "masculinity," where would you place yourself in that? Explain your answer for me.

Can you describe for me what you believe it means to be a "man?" How has that idea shifted over the span of your life?

What factors, if any, have helped you feel comfortable with your sense of masculinity here at OSU/CUO/SAU?

What factors, if any, have hindered you feeling comfortable with your sense of masculinity here at OSU/CUO/SAU?

College Experience:

Tell me about what led you to attend this specific university? What were the reasons why you chose to attend here?

What is your thought process like when you decide to “come out” to someone on campus? What feelings do you experience? How do you make the decision to “come out?”

What have been some of the most significant (either positive or negative) experiences and/or events you have had in college? What made them significant? (If necessary, follow up regarding significant experiences and/or events related to their sexual identity and/or gender.)

Have you been a part of a program, an organization, or a class during college that helped you explore your sense of gender? Your sexual identity? If so, what were the specifics of that experience?

What resources, if any, on campus have you taken advantage of as it relates to your identity as a gay man?

Intersectionality:

Do you believe that masculinity and sexual identity are intertwined? If so, how? If not, why? Based upon your answer, how has that played out within your own life?

Do you feel as though some of your other identities have helped you establish your sexual identity? Can you give me some examples of how that’s played out for you?

Do you feel as though some of your other identities have hindered you establishing your sexual identity? Can you give me some examples of how that’s played out for you?

Thinking back to the activity about your multiple identities I had you do earlier in our interview, have you ever considered how those individual identities have played a role in how you understand who you are in totality? If so, how?

Can you explain to me why some of your identities are more core to you than others? What makes them more core? Are you satisfied with that? Or do you feel that sometimes it’s different and they compete with one another? Can you give me some examples for this?

Semi-structured Interview Guide Protocol Second Interview

(Some questions from the first interview that were not asked will move to the second interview.)

Introduction:

Since our last discussion, have you done any further thinking about your multiple identities at all? If so, what have you been thinking about?

Has anything significant happened in your life since our last meeting? (Follow up questions, as necessary.)

Masculinity:

When thinking about your time in college specifically, what messages have you received about what it means to be a man?

How have other men played a role, if at all, in how you think about your own sense of your masculinity? Has this shifted over your life? If so, how?

How have women (and trans individuals?) played a role, if at all, in how you think about your own sense of your masculinity? Has this shifted over your life? If so, how?

Sexual Identity:

Do you have friendships with other gay or bisexual men? If so, can you describe your friendships with other gay or bisexual men?

Do you have friendships with straight men? If so, can you describe what your friendships are like with them?

In what ways have your relationships, as friends or intimate partners, with other men influenced your identity as a gay man? Explain your answer.

Intersectionality:

Thinking back to your first year of college, how would you have answered the question "Who am I?" What has changed from then to now for you in terms of that answer? How do you account for that change?

Have you experienced any shifts in understanding any dimensions of your social identities over your college years? If so, what has shifted? How do you account for that shift?

How has your cultural background (i.e., race, ethnicity, religion) influenced your identity as a gay man?

College:

Have you found OSU/CUO/SAU to be a welcoming place for you as it relates to all of your multiple identities? If so, tell me more. If not, can you expand on this for me?

Are there particular people at your university that have had an impact on who you are, especially as a gay man? Who are these individuals? How have they played a role in your life?

Appendix E:
Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity Worksheet

Participant ID: _____

Notes

Adapted from Jones & McEwen (2000) & Abes, Jones & McEwen (2007)

Revised image designed by C. Sclafani

Appendix E:
Criteria for Grounded Theory Studies

Credibility

Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic?
 Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? Consider the range, number, and depth of observations contained in the data.
 Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?
 Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?
 Are there strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?
 Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment – and *agree* with your claims?

Originality

Are your categories fresh? Do they offer new insights?
 Does your analysis provide a new conceptual rendering of the data?
 What is the social and theoretical significance of this work?
 How does your grounded theory challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices?

Resonance

Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience?
 Have you revealed both liminal and unstable taken-for-granted meanings?
 Have you drawn links between larger collectivities or institutions and individual lives, when the data so indicate?
 Does your grounded theory make sense to your participants or people who share their circumstances? Does your analysis offer them deeper insights about their lives and worlds?

Usefulness

Does your analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds?
 Do your analytic categories suggest any generic processes?
 If so, have you examined these generic processes for tacit implications?
 Can the analysis spark further research in other substantive areas?
 How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?

(Charmaz, 2006, pp. 182 – 183)

Appendix F: Journal Prompts

Between now and our last interview, please respond to as many of the journal prompts provided as possible. These are meant to be “freewrite” responses. There is no right answer. Rather, this is meant to be an opportunity for you to be reflective about yourself and your own lived experiences. I would strongly encourage you to take some time to be contemplative and reflective about your responses. The more detail and thought that you provide, the richer the data will be. It is completely voluntary to complete this aspect of the research, and you may choose to answer as many of the prompt questions as you would like.

What does it mean to be a gay man at OSU/CUO/SAU? What is that experience like here on campus? Do you feel like you “fit” into that general type or experience yourself? How do you feel about that?

Thinking back on your college experiences, have you ever experienced a time(s) when you’ve thought about multiple social identities (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)? What exactly prompted that thought(s)? How did you come to understand those multiple identities?

In what ways (if any) did this interview process or research influence or alter your thinking about identity? Have you ever discussed these issues with anyone before going through this process? If so, can you identify with whom and what you discussed?

Have you ever felt empowered by your gender during college? If so, can you describe that experience(s) in detail?

Have you ever felt empowered by your sexual identity during college? If so, can you describe that experience(s) in detail?

Have you ever felt empowered by your multiple identities of being both gay and male in college? If so, can you describe that experience(s) in detail?

Have you ever felt disempowered by your gender, your sexual identity, and/or your multiple identities of being both gay and male in college? If so, can you describe that experience(s) in detail?

Discuss with as much detail as possible any experiences, events, or moments during college that have been significant to your identity as a gay men.

What experiences and/or challenges do you believe other gay men on your campus may be going through? Have you spoken to other gay men about what they are experiencing? Do you think that those discussions have made an impact about your own thinking about your overall sense of who you are?

Appendix H:
Focus Group Script

Welcome students and ask them to briefly introduce themselves. Share that the purpose of this focus group interview is to share initial findings from the individual interviews and their journals and get your perspectives and feedback.

I will share the initial findings, including themes and supporting data and quotes, from the interviews. I will provide a handout that includes these findings. I will walk through the findings so far and ask them to comment on the findings. I will specifically ask:

Which findings or quotes do you particularly agree with?

Which findings or quotes do you particularly disagree with?

Since our interviews last semester, have you thought any more about your multiple identities? If so, what have you thought about?

Do you have anything to add to any of the findings or quotes that I've presented?

Additionally, I may ask some follow-up questions based upon the participants' responses to these questions to garner some additional information.

I will end the focus group interview by asking if there is anything else they would like to add about anything we have discussed or anything they may think is related.

Appendix I:
Participant Consent Form

**University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board**

Research Participant Consent Form

For the research study entitled:
**Toward an Integrated Self:
Making Meaning of the Multiple Identities of Gay Men in College**

I. Purpose of the research study

Daniel Tillapaugh is a doctoral student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he/she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is: to understanding how traditionally-aged gay men in college make meaning of their multiple identities, specifically their gender and sexuality.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to: participate in at least two interviews, each lasting approximately one hour to an hour and a half in length, during the Fall semester; respond to journal prompts provided to you between the first and last interviews; and participate in a focus group discussion to give feedback about the initial theory that emerges from all of the data collected from participants in Spring 2012.

You will be audiotaped during the interview and focus group. Your participation in this study will take a total of approximately 5 hours and 30 minutes.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day:
San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

Additionally, you may access your specific campus's counseling center resources, if needed:

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand how gay men in college come to understand their sense of masculinity and their sexual identity.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. **You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Daniel Tillapaugh

Email: danieltillapaugh-15@sandiego.edu

Phone: (518) 469-2125

2) Cheryl Getz, Ed.D.

Email: cgetz@sandiego.edu

Phone: (619) 260-4289

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix J:
Example of Study's Facebook Page