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Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students on Community College Campuses: Coming-Out and Self-Actualization

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Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students on Community College Campuses: Coming-Out and Self-Actualization

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation and how their self-actualization is affected by coming out, using Maslow's theory of human motivation as the main theoretical lens. This study was intended to provide best practices in serving these students to community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and was thus meant to benefit gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) community college students. In-depth interviews with nine self-identified GLB community college students were done to collect data. Findings from this study show factors that are obstructive to GLB students in coming out; the presence of positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's ability to come out and the presence of positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's self-actualization. In addition, findings provide insight into the gaps in resources and services needed by GLB students in order to feel fully integrated into the campus community. Recommendations resulting from this study included replicating the study in other large, metropolitan areas and comparing the results from this study, and conducting the study at suburban and rural community colleges as the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in these areas may be more isolated, less out on campus, and less self-actualized. Finally, a national study using quantitative methods to discover the campus climate for GLB community college students and the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual people on community college campuses should be conducted.

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Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students on Community College Campuses: Coming-Out and
Self-Actualization

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the people who made it possible and supported me throughout the process. First, I would like to thank the courageous participants who shared with me their experiences as gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. Without your honest and meaningful contributions, this work would have been pointless. I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Edwards, and my committee member Dr. Schulman, as your guidance and tough love helped change me from a consumer of knowledge to a producer of knowledge. Next, I would like to thank my family and friends for their understanding when I missed events, trips, dinners, and just hanging out because I was “working on the paper.” Although they will likely not read this, I must also thank my feline sons, C and L. C, who usually laid behind my computer and had his paws on my keyboard and his tail in my tea, reminded me that nothing was so important that I could not afford to take a little “me time” (which, of course, usually meant paying attention to him). L’s non-stop purring and squeaking reminded me to take breaks, relax, and just play for a little while. Last, but certainly not least, I dedicate this dissertation to David, my love, partner, husband, sounding board, editor, research assistant, and soul mate. Thank you for putting up with me during this process, and for believing in me and keeping me from spinning out of control when the pressure was so very high. Your love and support truly made this dissertation a possibility.

Biographical Sketch

Adam L. Rockman is currently the Vice President for Student Affairs at Queens College, City University of New York. Mr. Rockman attended the University of Massachusetts at Amherst from 1987 to 1991 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in May 1991. He attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from 1993 to 1996 and graduated with a Master of Social Work degree in January 1997. He began his doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2011. Mr. Rockman pursued his research in the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students under the direction of Dr. Claudia Edwards and Dr. Jennifer Schulman, and received the Ed.D. degree in 2014.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation and how their self-actualization is affected by coming out, using Maslow's theory of human motivation as the main theoretical lens. This study was intended to provide best practices in serving these students to community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and was thus meant to benefit gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) community college students. In-depth interviews with nine self-identified GLB community college students were done to collect data.

Findings from this study show factors that are obstructive to GLB students in coming out; the presence of positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's ability to come out and the presence of positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's self-actualization. In addition, findings provide insight into the gaps in resources and services needed by GLB students in order to feel fully integrated into the campus community. Recommendations resulting from this study included replicating the study in other large, metropolitan areas and comparing the results from this study, and conducting the study at suburban and rural community colleges as the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in these areas may be more isolated, less out on campus, and less self-actualized. Finally, a national study using quantitative methods to discover the campus climate for GLB community college students and the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual people on community college campuses should be conducted.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In discussing the history of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the United States, many point to 1950 and the creation of the Mattachine Society, the first public organization of gay men in the United States, or the Stonewall Riots that occurred in New York City in June of 1969 as two possible starting points (Bronski, 2011). The news reports and publicity surrounding these happenings as the birth of the gay rights movement were decidedly negative. These well-known events in *gay history* may have been the impetus behind the political movement of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in this country, but the full, unfettered history of these people can be traced back as early as the late 1800s (Bronski, 2011; Eaklor, 2008; Halperin, 2002; Miller, 1995).

Beginning in the 1970s, researchers started proposing theories to explain the development and formation of a gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity (Cass, 1979; Cass 1983/1984; Cass 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden; 1988). These identity development models were an important step in the understanding of and movement toward acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people worldwide, in that previous works focused mainly on a supposed pathology of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In the last four decades, there have been numerous studies looking at the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on college and university campuses in the United States. However, the literature surrounding these students at two-year community colleges is severely lacking (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000).

Campus climate, the prevailing attitudes, opinions, principles, and actions of all community members within an institution of higher learning, concerning women, minorities, and students with disabilities has been researched for nearly 30 years, but Rankin (2003) was the first researcher to conduct national studies on campus climate as it relates to gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students (D'Augelli & Herschberger, 1993; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Sandler, 1986; Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000). Nearly 1,700 students, faculty, and staff on 14 college and university campuses across the United States participated in Rankin's study, which found that 36% of self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) students reported being the victims of harassment on campus due to their sexual orientation, as did 29% of all respondents, including students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, 20% of respondents reported fears of being physically attacked due to their sexual orientation, and more than half of all respondents reported they felt it necessary to conceal their sexual orientation while on campus in order to avoid harassment, attacks, and intimidation.

Rankin's (2003) work was groundbreaking and it added significantly to the knowledge base about gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students. It may also have encouraged other scholars to begin their own studies of the GLB college student population. In fact, the most recent and complete study on the status of GLB students on college and university campuses, Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010), built on Rankin's earlier work. An extensive, mixed-methods study conducted by Rankin et al. (2010) used a survey instrument and open-ended qualitative questions to analyze and synthesize the experiences of more than 5,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer (LGBTQQ) individuals on college and university campuses

nationwide. In this campus climate study, Rankin et al. discovered that these students were up to twice as likely to experience harassment as their heterosexual colleagues. This increased level of harassment found by these researchers and earlier by Rankin (2003, 2005) is important to note, in that Rankin et al. hypothesized that GLB students who experience a more open and welcoming campus with less harassment and violence will have better educational experiences overall.

Research shows that campus climate, or the way in which students view the campus tolerance toward them, affected their learning and development as young adults (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Not surprisingly, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) also found that students who experienced negative campus climates, or those climates where the students faced harassment and discrimination, had lower levels of educational success. Studies done with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on college campuses showed much higher levels of harassment and discrimination against these students versus their heterosexual counterparts (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). This increased level of harassment is important to note in that colleges and universities are clearly not meeting the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students if the educational experiences and outcomes of these students are jeopardized due to a negative campus climate.

The purpose of this research was to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation and how their self-actualization is affected, using Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943, 1965) as a theoretical lens. This study was intended to provide best

practices for community college faculty, staff, and administration in serving these students, thereby benefiting gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students.

Problem Statement

While gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at four-year colleges and universities have been the subject of many scholarly works, very few studies about this population at community colleges have been published (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000). Ivory (2005) accurately noted his disbelief in his claim that “it is alarming that no empirical studies have been conducted” (p. 66) on GLB community college students, and that fewer than six works related to the campus experiences of this student population had been published to date. This startling lack of research dealing with gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students clearly pointed to the need for studies such as this.

The research base with gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students is wide, but none of these studies described the experiences of these students solely at the community college level. In one of the most comprehensive studies to date, Rankin et al., (2010) used a 96-question survey instrument as well as open-ended questions in an effort to analyze and synthesize the experiences of more than 5,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer (LGBTQQ) individuals on over 90 college and university campuses nationwide. These researchers and others (Eyermann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003) discovered that these students were up to twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to experience harassment and discrimination on campus. Such a pervasive attitude on campus is known as the campus climate, and is described as the overall attitudes, actions, and policies of the students, faculty, and staff at an institution of higher education (Rankin & Reason, 2008).

Rankin and Reason (2008) stated that diversity on campus plays an important role in adding positive value to the educational experiences of those within the community, as evidenced by the mission statements of many colleges and universities, which expressly encourage and support diversity. Supporting this argument and the need for studies such as this, an ethnographic study by Evans and Herriott (2004) found that a negative campus climate – one in which GLB students frequently experienced harassment and discrimination – acutely affected the participants of the study. Evans and Herriott stated that these students “became more aware of their own values, identities, and interaction patterns as they related to sexual orientation...and ways in which their perceptions, self-awareness, and behaviors were shaped” (p. 320). Furthermore, Evans and Broido (1999) noted that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who perceived their campus’ climate regarding sexual orientation to be supportive were positively influenced regarding how, whether, and to what extent they were honest about their sexual orientation to others on campus.

Renn (2010) conducted an extensive review of the campus climate literature and found that while researchers had previously studied campus climate as it related to gender, disability, race, and ethnicity, the treatment of campus climate relating to sexual orientation was a new and expanding area of research. Furthermore, Rankin (2005) stated that a campus climate of harassment and discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual students could cause these students not to realize their full potential while at college, thereby affecting their ability to become fully self-actualized (Maslow, 1943; 1965).

In related works concerning campus climate, Reason and Rankin (2006) indicated that students on college campuses routinely dealt with the problems of harassment and discrimination (e.g., negative campus climate), and that this negatively affected the potential benefits of a college education for these students. Reason and Rankin also supported the need for a study such as this by indicating that real, profound, and complete changes are required to ensure that college and university campuses are a positive and healthy setting for all students.

Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora (2001) noted that all college students who perceived a non-discriminatory environment were more open to challenge themselves on issues of diversity, and Flowers and Pascarella (1999) discovered the same results specifically for African American students. The findings of these researchers undoubtedly indicated that the campus climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students profoundly affected these students, and a negative campus climate consisting of harassment and discrimination prevented these students from reaching their potential and is therefore worthy of additional study.

Although many studies have addressed the experiences and needs of GLB students at four-year colleges and universities (Evans & Broido, 1999; Eyermann & Rankin, 2003; Rankin, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo, 2002) a general understanding of the lives of these students specifically at the community college level is severely lacking. This dearth of necessary information created a situation where gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges are not fully understood, appreciated, or served.

Theoretical Rationale

To gain insight into the impact of the on-campus experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, this study examined the lives of students attending community colleges through the critical lens of Maslow's theory of human motivation and self-actualization (1943), Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994). The primary theory for this study was Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943), which offered insight into the extent to which GLB students have environments where they can engage in the process of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1965). Next, the stage theories of GLB identity development; Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994) were reviewed in order to make the connection between self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1965) and coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. While Bilodeau and Renn (2005) reported that such stage theories of GLB identity development were flawed due to small sample size and samples usually consisting mostly of men, they nonetheless provided a valuable theoretical base to this study.

Maslow's theory of human motivation. Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist and sometimes known as the father of American humanistic psychology. Maslow was trained as an experimental-behaviorist, but questioned the distinctly positivist methods used by fellow psychologists in the 1940s to draw their conclusions (Hoffman, 2008). Maslow was influenced by scholars such as Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Erik Erikson. Maslow's theories have been regularly

criticized for being scientifically unsound (Hoffman, 1999), and not taken seriously due to a lack of empirical support (Sommers & Satel, 2006).

Introduced in 1943, Maslow's theory of human motivation attempted to use clinical psychological theories of human behavior as a foundation in order to help explain what motivates people. Maslow asserted in his theory that there are five basic needs common to all humans. These needs are arranged in hierarchical order but are nonetheless interrelated. According to Maslow, if a person does not satisfy any of the earlier needs, it would essentially halt a person from moving forward and from meeting his or her subsequent needs. The first, and hierarchically most important, set of basic needs that drive human motivation are the physiological needs, including hunger, thirst, sleep, and sex. Maslow (1943) stated that if the physiological needs were not adequately met, "all other needs may become simply non-existent or be pushed into the background" (p. 373).

Maslow (1943) argued that once the set of physiological needs have been sated, the next set of needs that must be met are the safety needs. This set of needs included being free from illness, living in a world with as little disruption as possible and based in structure and routine, and naturally, the need to feel unaffected by physical danger. Assuming the safety needs are gratified, a person may next move on to the love needs. The set of love needs generally consisted of friendship, affection, belongingness, and a deep connection with other human beings. Maslow was careful to separate sex, a physiological need, from the love and affection sought out in this stage of the hierarchy. After a person fulfilled the set of love needs, his or her esteem needs would be the next addressed. Maslow defined people's esteem needs as an enduring and unwavering "high

evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others” (p. 381), and indicated that gratification of this set of needs would lead to personal strength, self-confidence, and competency.

The final set of needs in Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy, and the most relevant to this study, is self-actualization. Maslow defined self-actualization as “the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of” (p. 382). In short, self-actualization refers to a person’s desire for self-fulfillment in doing and being exactly what he or she is meant to do and be; a self-actualized person lives entirely to his or her potential. Maslow (1965) later described self-actualization more concretely, arguing that life consists of a series of choices. He suggested that a self-actualized person would always make choices leading to personal growth, rather than choices that are safe or easy. Maslow’s theory of self-actualization (1943) provided insight into the coming-out process, which many in the GLB population eventually experience. Furthermore, Cass’s (1979) identity synthesis stage and D’Augelli’s (1994) entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community stage, as explained below, offered a clear relationship between coming-out and self-actualization.

In explaining his theory of self-actualization, Maslow (1965) asserted that being honest with and taking responsibility for oneself is of paramount importance to realizing a state of self-actualization. Furthermore, Maslow argued that speaking honestly about oneself, including thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, and fears is a courageous, self-actualizing work of growth. Maslow also stated that ending lies and misconceptions people tell publicly about themselves is an important part of actually discovering who they are as a person, and to becoming self-actualized. This provides a clear link between

self-actualization and the process of coming out. Coming out is an act of being honest with oneself and expressing that honesty to significant others in one's life, and therefore serves to break the illusion and end the lie that the person is heterosexual. Following this line of thought, it became evident that the act of coming out is a courageous one, and is therefore self-actualizing in nature (Cass, 1979; Maslow, 1965).

Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation. Vivienne Cass is a clinical psychologist and sex therapist with a theoretical base in Erikson's psychosocial perspective as well as Gestalt therapy. Other researchers have been influenced by Cass, including D'Augelli (1984) and Troiden (1988). Cass had many critics, most notably Kaufman and Johnson (2004), who argued that Cass's work did not take into account socio-cultural factors that could impact identity development. Furthermore, these researchers argued that the nature of the social stigma and its management practices have changed since the inception of the model. In addition, Troiden became a critic of Cass's model due to the model's root in a negative societal view of homosexuality, as well as the required linear model of its progression.

Utilizing interpersonal congruence theory as a framework, Cass developed her theory of homosexual identity formation (1979) in an attempt to describe the process by which gay, lesbian, and bisexual people "acquire the identity of 'homosexual' as a relevant aspect of self" (p. 219). According to this researcher, Homosexual Identity Formation is a six-stage process during which a person gradually moves from an identity of heterosexual to one of homosexual. Akin to Maslow's (1943) theory, Cass's model is linear and does not permit a person to move to the next stage until the current stage is realized.

Cass (1979) argued that people generally begin with an entirely heterosexual identity because they are forced into such an identity by a societal structure that is not accepting of homosexuality. While this is an important foundational element to Cass's theory, it is also one of the theory's most profound weaknesses (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Troiden, 1988). Although society may have been generally unaccepting of homosexuality in the late 1970s, there has been significant movement toward greater acceptance of homosexuality in the last 30 years. One of the ways in which this movement is evident is in the fact that 21 states and the District of Columbia currently outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation, when no such laws existed at the time Cass developed her theory (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2013). Furthermore, 17 states and the District of Columbia afford full marriage rights to same-sex couples, rights that did not exist anywhere before 2004 (Freedom to Marry, 2013). Such movement toward greater acceptance of homosexuality weakens Cass's argument that most GLB individuals begin their Homosexual Identity Formation with a heterosexual identity. Cass (1979) recognized this limitation of her own theory by noting that changes to her model would be required as societal changes in attitudes, mores, and beliefs occurred.

Stage one of Cass's (1979) theory, known as Identity Confusion, is characterized by one's first realization that some of his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors might be considered homosexual. Since, according to Cass, a person starts from an entirely heterosexual identity, this incongruence is enough to cause the individual significant confusion. The individual at this stage begins to question his or her very identity as a heterosexual person and accepts the possibility that he or she may be GLB.

Stage two of Cass's theory is entitled Identity Comparison, and is defined by the individual feeling an incongruence with his or her burgeoning sexual orientation and self-identity. Where the individual in stage one might ask him or herself "am I homosexual?" (p. 223), in stage two, he or she will think "I may be homosexual" (p. 225). A key component of stage two is the individual feeling different from others and experiencing a state of alienation and isolation from the rest of society. Individuals in this stage will often question if they are the only ones in the world experiencing such feelings, and will attempt to make connections with social, religious, and civic groups in order to reduce the feelings of isolation.

Identity Tolerance, stage three of Cass's (1979) theory, is characterized by the individual feeling comfortable moving away from the heterosexual identity and toward the homosexual identity. Cass noted "this increased commitment is commonly expressed in the statement 'I probably am a homosexual'" (p. 229). As indicated by the title of this stage, individuals will tolerate, but not quite accept their identity as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and they will likely seek out connections with other GLB individuals.

The person in stage four, Identity Acceptance, continues making connections with other GLB people in an attempt to normalize and legitimize the new homosexual identity. The identity is accepted at this stage, and individuals may begin 'testing the water' by disclosing their identity as a GLB person to significant others in their life. This is clearly the stage when the process of self-actualization begins.

Stage five of Cass's (1979) theory is entitled Identity Pride, and is exemplified by the individual making a strong commitment to his or her homosexual identity and preferring it to the heterosexual one. This typically appears as an outright rejection of the

former heterosexual identity and most things associated with that identity, such as traditional gender roles and marriage. According to Cass, the individual in stage five will develop feelings of anger and will adopt an activist, us vs. them point of view. A typical statement by someone in this stage might be “how dare you presume I’m heterosexual?” (p. 233). Finally, the individual enters stage six, Identity Synthesis. A person fully integrating his or her identity as a GLB person into one’s entire life characterizes this stage. The sexual orientation is no longer the defining aspect of the individual’s persona, but rather an integral part of the whole.

As discussed later in this chapter, two of the research questions to which this study sought answers were about the factors that inhibit or support gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation. Cass’s (1979) theory of homosexual identity formation provided a sound base from which to answer this question. For example, there may be different factors determining whether a community college student comes out, depending on what stage of development the individual is in, according to Cass’s model. Additionally, it would be useful for higher education practitioners to know if a community college student in the Identity Tolerance or Identity Acceptance stage (Cass, 1979) looks for a senior college with an active GLB student organization. Conversely, other questions, such as whether a community college student in the Identity Pride stage will entirely reject the idea of continuing his or her education at a senior college in favor of going to work for a GLB rights organization must be considered.

D’Augelli’s model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. Anthony D’Augelli is an American clinical psychologist and researcher with interests in contexts

and social institutions, as well as populations of special interest. D'Augelli's research into the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population was heavily influenced by Cass (1979). In his model of identity development and sexual orientation, D'Augelli (1994) argued that sexual orientation identity, in contrast to conventional wisdom, is a social construction that is fluid and changes with time and circumstance. D'Augelli noted the following regarding how a person acquires a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity:

“Becoming” lesbian, gay, or bisexual requires two processes. On the one hand, it involves a conscious distancing from heterosexist essentialism – the person must become “ex-heterosexual” and cast off the mandated identity of mainstream culture. She or he must also create a new identity oriented around homosocial and homosexual dimensions. Constructing a complex “essence” is the task. (p. 313)

While D'Augelli made no reference to Cass's (1979) theory of homosexual identity formation as discussed earlier in this chapter, it appears evident from these statements and the similarities between the models that D'Augelli's model was influenced by Cass's theory.

D'Augelli (1994) noted that a person's self-acknowledgement as a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person is a “revolutionary act” (p. 314) in that it serves as a vehicle by which a person can cast off the socially constructed and imposed heterosexual identity.

According to D'Augelli, this self-acknowledgement is important because heterosexism and homophobia are social constructs that are engrained in us deeply from an early age. Therefore, it can be a very long process for a GLB person to accept his or her newer identity while rejecting the former heterosexual one.

One can easily connect D'Augelli's description of accepting one's sexual orientation as a revolutionary act to Maslow's (1943; 1965) descriptions of self-actualization, as well as to stage six of Cass's model. Similar to Cass, D'Augelli explained that the development of a non-heterosexual identity is further complicated by the fact that heterosexuality is considered by most to be the natural orientation, and that deviating from this natural orientation can be the cause of significant and negative self-consciousness that would not otherwise exist. As previously mentioned with regard to Cass's model, recent advances toward greater acceptance of homosexuality (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2013; Freedom to Marry, 2013) may also weaken D'Augelli's argument that heterosexuality is considered more normal than homosexuality.

Based on a lifespan human development framework that stems from the belief that individuals will continue to mature and change throughout their lives, D'Augelli (1994) noted that the maturation of one's sexual orientation is a long-term process, and one that can transform throughout one's life. D'Augelli's model consisted of six interconnecting processes: (1) Exiting the heterosexual identity; (2) Developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status; (3) Developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity; (4) Becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual offspring; (5) Developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status; and (6) Entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community. While there are many similarities between D'Augelli's six processes and Cass's (1979) six stages, an important differentiation is that an individual may move back-and-forth between D'Augelli's processes, while in Cass's model he or she may only progress in linear order from stage one through stage six.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the identity development of GLB students at community colleges in New York City and to prepare higher education practitioners to address the needs of these students. Research shows that GLB college students are up to twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to experience harassment and discrimination on campus (Eyermann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). In spite of these findings, a survey conducted by Campus Pride, a leading national organization seeking to create a safer campus environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college students, found that less than 15% of the nearly 5000 colleges and universities in the United States included sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies (Windmeyer, 2006). While it is disheartening that GLB college students experience harassment and discrimination twice as much as heterosexual students, no studies have focused solely on the needs and experiences of GLB community college students. This study sought to understand the on-campus experiences of GLB students at community colleges, including the campus climate for these students, as well as how higher education practitioners can best address their needs.

Using qualitative research techniques, this study examined the potential on-campus factors that inhibit or support students in coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual while attending community college. In-depth interviews were conducted with gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students in order to gain insight into their on-campus experience and the extent to which those experiences contributed to their well-being, growth, and development. Maslow's theory of self-actualization (1943, 1965) was used as the main theoretical lens for this research

Findings from this study are of significant value to community college faculty, staff, administration, and leadership in delivering the best possible services to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. This included leading to a better understanding of the campus climate experienced by GLB community college students, and assisting in reducing the harassment and discrimination they face. This increased understanding may help practitioners to eliminate this as a barrier to these students being open about their sexual orientation and becoming fully self-actualized (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Maslow, 1943; Maslow, 1965; Rankin et al., 2010).

Research Questions

This study examined the experiences of GLB students at community colleges to gain insight into how their on-campus experiences affected their ability to achieve their highest level of self-actualization. The research questions answered as a result of this study included: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students.

Significance of the Study

Rankin (2003), in an extensive mixed-methods survey of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people on college and university campuses, found that 36% of self-identified GLB students reported being the victims of harassment on campus due to their sexual

orientation. The benefits of this study were that higher education practitioners, both at the community college and senior college level, would gain an increased understanding of the experiences and needs of GLB students. This understanding would include the developmental stages these students undergo, how the stages relate to their experiences on campus, and the climate of harassment and discrimination these students face.

Such an understanding would invariably lead to better decisions by administrators regarding best practices and policies related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. The scarcity of research surrounding GLB community college students indicated that the findings from this study would significantly contribute to the literature on these students. Furthermore, this study would raise the public awareness of the fact that this population experiences discrimination and harassment on campus at rates nearly twice that of the general population (Eyermann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). This increased awareness would lead to greater overall acceptance of and support for GLB students at community colleges, and would ultimately benefit the greater society in that these students would be better adjusted due to their higher levels of self-actualization.

Definitions of Terms

It is important to note that many of these terms (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, homosexual) are not fixed, as individuals invariably choose to label themselves in different and unique ways at various stages in their lives. As noted by Eyermann and Sanlo (2002), many college students may not self-identify using the terms “gay,” “lesbian,” or “bisexual,” but they might feel more comfortable simply describing themselves as being attracted to members of the same sex. For the purposes of this study, however, the following terms are operationally defined as noted:

Ally – a heterosexual person who advocates for and supports members of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. In broader terms, Washington and Evans (1991) defined an ally as “a person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population” (p. 195).

Bisexual – a person who has sexual and affectional attraction toward both sexes. Pope and Reynolds (1991) noted that a bisexual person may be “simultaneously attracted to both men and women” or conversely “may experience sequential relationships with men and women” (p. 206). This latter description may cause some confusion as the bisexual person in a relationship with someone of the same sex may self-identify as gay or lesbian, or as heterosexual when in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

Coming Out – the act of publicly and honestly acknowledging the fact that a person is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Of great importance to this definition, Wall and Evans (1991) further described the coming out process as a person not only realizing and accepting the fact that he or she is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but also deciding how and when to tell other people. They noted that this process is especially difficult in that “the decision to come out to another person involves disclosing one’s sexual side, which is, for the most part, viewed as being a private matter” (p. 31).

Gay – a man who has sexual and affectional attraction only toward other men. Levine and Evans (1991) were careful to distinguish between identities surrounding the term gay as opposed to homosexual. They described gay as a more positive term that connotes a connection with the gay and lesbian communities, rather than the clinically used term of homosexual.

Heterosexism – prejudice and antagonism shown by heterosexual persons towards homosexuals; discrimination against homosexuals (Heterosexism, n.d.). For the purposes of his model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development, D’Augelli (1994) defined heterosexism as “the belief that ‘normal’ development is heterosexual and that deviations from this identity are ‘unnatural,’ ‘disordered,’ or ‘dysfunctional’” (p. 314).

Heterosexual – a person who has sexual and affectional attraction only towards members of the opposite sex.

Homophobia – irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals and/or homosexuality. O’Bear (1991) noted that such “intense prejudicial feelings often result in the belief in powerful negative stereotypes and discriminating actions against people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual” (p. 39).

Homosexual – a person who has sexual and affectional attraction toward members of the same sex. Levine and Evans (1991) noted that this is often considered negative term in that it is used largely as a clinical diagnostic label and ascribed universally to people who may self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Lesbian – a woman who has sexual and affectional attraction only toward other women. Levine and Evans (1991) indicated that some women who associate themselves with a radical feminist perspective might view the lesbian identity as political choice rather than an innate sexual orientation.

Queer Theory – the academic discipline surrounding gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and their history. Studies focusing more on sexuality and sexual acts (Sullivan, 2003), as well as gender and feminism (Butler, 1990; Wilchins, 2004) are included under the general rubric of Queer Theory.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation and how their self-actualization is affected, using Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943, 1965) as a primary theoretical lens. Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994) were also used to support this research. This study was intended to provide best practices in serving these students to community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and was thus meant to benefit gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. The researcher drew upon Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943), specifically its treatment of self-actualization (1965) as a theoretical base.

Two stage theories of identity development were described as a means to connect the proposed study with a relevant theoretical framework of how community college students may come to understand their identities as GLB people. These theories included Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994). Finally, it was noted that the process of coming out for a GLB community college student is likely an act of self-actualization, as described by Maslow (1943; 1965).

Following the discussion of the theoretical rationale and the purpose of this study the research questions were outlined as follows: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in

coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students.

Finally, the study was described as significant due to a number of reasons. This study was important in that higher education practitioners, both at the community college and senior college level, would gain an increased understanding of the experiences and needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, and therefore be able to combat the harassment and discrimination that these students face on campus as described by many researchers (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). This understanding would further include the developmental stages GLB students undergo (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Maslow, 1943), and how the stages relate to their experiences on campus and the climate of harassment and discrimination these students face.

Such an understanding would invariably lead to better decisions by administrators regarding best practices and policies related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. The scarcity of research surrounding GLB community college students indicated that the findings from this study would significantly contribute to the literature about these students. Furthermore, this study would raise the public awareness of the fact that this population experiences discrimination and harassment on campus at rates nearly twice that of the general population (Eyermann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). This increased awareness would lead to greater overall acceptance of and support for GLB students at community colleges, and would ultimately benefit the greater society

in that these students would be better adjusted due to their higher levels of self-actualization.

Chapter 2 will provide a carefully selected topical review of the literature that is relevant to the research problem, theoretical rationale, and research questions. Chapter 3 will detail the research design methodology, research context, participants, data collection, and data analysis for the proposed study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study, and Chapter 5 will discuss the interpretation of the results presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this chapter was to present an analysis and interpretation of research literature related to the topic of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students on Community Colleges Campuses: Coming-Out and Self-Actualization. Rankin et al. (2010) and others (Eyer mann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003) discovered that gay, lesbian, and bisexual college and university students were up to twice as likely to experience harassment and discrimination on campus as their heterosexual counterparts. This alarming statistic unmistakably points to the need for scholarly research studies concerning the lived experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at four-year colleges and universities have been the subject of many scholarly works since the 1990s, but very few studies about this population specifically at community colleges have been published (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000). Due to the significant lack of available literature surrounding GLB students at community colleges, the majority of this chapter focused on the experiences of these students on four-year college and university campuses. This chapter began with a discussion of Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943) and its treatment of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1965), and progressed to related homosexual identity formation theories (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1988) and an introduction of Queer Theory (Butler, 1990; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004). Following

this, a number of topic analyses dealing with GLB students on four-year college and university campuses were examined. Finally, a conversation regarding the scant literature dealing specifically with GLB students at the community college level was presented.

The analysis and synthesis of this literature showed that although there is an indelible link between gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, there is enough difference to warrant extensive study on the community college population. Finally, this section demonstrated and supported the need for continued research in this area, as desired by numerous researchers (Ivory, 2005; Leck, 1998; Leider, 2000; Ottenritter, 1998; Rankin, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010; and Renn, 2010).

Review of the Literature

Maslow's theory of human motivation. Introduced in 1943, Maslow's theory of human motivation attempted to use clinical psychological theories of human behavior as a foundation in order to help explain what motivates people. Maslow asserted in his theory that there are five basic needs common to all humans. These needs are arranged in hierarchical order but are nonetheless interrelated. According to Maslow, if a person does not satisfy any of the earlier needs, it would essentially halt a person from moving forward and from meeting his or her subsequent needs. The first, and hierarchically most important, set of basic needs that drive human motivation are the physiological needs, including hunger, thirst, sleep, and sex. Maslow (1943) stated that if the physiological needs were not adequately met, "all other needs may become simply non-existent or be pushed into the background" (p. 373).

Maslow (1943) argued that once the set of physiological needs have been sated, the next set of needs that must be met are the safety needs. This set of needs included being free from illness, living in a world with as little disruption as possible and based in structure and routine, and naturally, the need to feel unaffected by physical danger. Assuming the safety needs are gratified, a person may next move on to the love needs. The set of love needs generally consisted of friendship, affection, belongingness, and a deep connection with other human beings. Maslow was careful to separate sex, a physiological need, from the love and affection sought out in this stage of the hierarchy. After a person fulfilled the set of love needs, his or her esteem needs would be the next addressed. Maslow defined people's esteem needs as an enduring and unwavering "high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" (p. 381), and indicated that gratification of this set of needs would lead to personal strength, self-confidence, and competency.

The final set of needs in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, and the most relevant to this study, is self-actualization. Maslow defined self-actualization as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of" (p. 382). In short, self-actualization refers to a person's desire for self-fulfillment in doing and being exactly what he or she is meant to do and be; a self-actualized person lives entirely to his or her potential. Maslow (1965) later described self-actualization more concretely, arguing that life consists of a series of choices. He suggested that a self-actualized person would always make choices leading to personal growth, rather than choices that are safe or easy. Maslow's theory of self-actualization provided insight into the coming-out process, which many in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population eventually experience.

Furthermore, Cass's (1979) 'identity synthesis' stage and D'Augelli's (1994) 'entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community' stage, as explained below, offer a clear relationship between coming-out and self-actualization.

In explaining his theory of self-actualization, Maslow (1965) asserted that being honest with and taking responsibility for oneself is of paramount importance to realizing a state of self-actualization. Furthermore, Maslow argued that speaking honestly about oneself, including one's thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, and fears is a courageous, self-actualizing work of growth. Maslow also stated that ending lies and misconceptions a person tells publicly about him or herself is an important part of actually discovering who one is as a person and becoming self-actualized. This provided a clear link between self-actualization and the process of coming out. Coming out is an act of being honest with oneself and expressing that honesty to significant others in one's life, and therefore serves to break the illusion and end the lie that the person is heterosexual. Following this line of thought, it became evident that the act of coming out is a courageous one, and is therefore self-actualizing in nature (Cass, 1979; Maslow, 1965).

Homosexual identity formation and queer theory. Cass (1979) developed what is perhaps the most complete and oft-reviewed theoretical model of GLB identity formation. While other studies at the time focused mainly on the problems faced by GLB people (Warren, 1974; Williams & Weinberg, 1971), Cass was the first to offer a theoretical model that explained how individuals actively developed the identity surrounding their sexual orientation. In a later discussion surrounding a conceptual understanding of homosexual identity, Cass (1983/1984) noted the following:

Identity refers to organized sets of self-perceptions and attached feelings that an individual holds about self with regard to some social category. It represents the synthesis of own self-perceptions with views of the self perceived to be held by others. Where self-perceptions and imagined other's view of self are in accord, then identity may be said to have developed. Homosexual identity, then, evolves out of a clustering of self-images which are linked together by the individual's idiosyncratic understanding of what characterizes someone as "a homosexual."
(p. 110)

This statement appears to lay important groundwork to Cass's work, in that she took the bold step of normalizing homosexual identity formation by connecting its relationship to one's overall identity development, a theme that would exist in later gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity models (D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1988).

In an effort to further test the validity of her theory of homosexual identity formation, Cass (1984) conducted a quantitative study using a convenience sample of 178 gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, and had them complete two instruments designed to measure their self-predicted stage of identity development. Cass believed that a person experienced his or her identity first emotionally, then subsequently via behaviors. The results of this study were significant in that participants in stages one, two, four, five, and six of Cass's (1979) model were likely to self-report behaviors consistent with the profile for their stage. Another important outcome of this study was Cass's (1984) statement that her model "differs from most others in its rejection of the commonly held assumption that people perceive the acquisition of a homosexual identity in a negative light" (p. 147). While this statement is encouraging and perhaps a sign of societal changes that occurred

since the publication of her model, it is not necessarily a valid assertion. As mentioned earlier, the fact that Cass's model had people starting from a heterosexual identity indicated that such an identity would be a 'normal' starting point from which change can and will occur.

Troiden (1988) proclaimed his own model of Homosexual Identity Development which was expressly critical of Cass's (1979) theory. Troiden criticized Cass in that her theory made some faulty assumptions, most notably its base in a negative societal view of homosexuality and the linear model of its progression. Troiden's model consisted of four stages – sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment – that are similar to and easily compared with Cass's six stages. The main difference between Troiden's and Cass's theories is that Cass assumed a linear progression through the stages, including the notion that a person must move sequentially from stage one to stage six. Conversely, Troiden argued "identity development is a horizontal spiral, similar to a spring lying on its side," (p. 105) and that a person in his model could progress in any direction, not just linearly. Troiden's criticism of Cass is certainly valuable, but Cass's model remains an often referenced and often criticized backbone of homosexual identity development theories.

Following Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988), and clearly influenced by both, D'Augelli (1994) proposed his own six-stage model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development which included (1) Exiting the heterosexual identity; (2) Developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status; (3) Developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity; (4) Becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual offspring; (5) Developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status; and (6) Entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community. While

similar in content, a major difference between Cass and D'Augelli was that the former's model required a person to move sequentially through the stages, while the latter's allowed for vertical, horizontal, and diagonal movement between stages. The interconnectivity and multidirectional movement between D'Augelli's stages seems to be related to Troiden's (1988) model discussed earlier in this chapter.

Important to the discussion of identity formation was a study conducted by Kaufman and Johnson (2004), which takes a critical eye to earlier stage models of homosexual identity formation such as Cass (1979), Troiden (1988), and D'Augelli (1994). Kaufman and Johnson critiqued previous models by noting that they were based on an assumption that homosexual identity formation is somehow different from the identity formation of other potentially stigmatized individuals and groups. Further limitations of stage models discussed by Kaufman and Johnson included the tendency to depict the stages as a direct or linear process, with a specific goal to be obtained in each stage, and that they do not adequately account for participants' differences in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Kaufman and Johnson conducted semi structured interviews with a convenience sample of 20 gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals obtained using a multiple-start snowball approach. While this method of obtaining participants may be common in such studies, a criticism of this technique is that participants will likely recommend other similar-minded individuals to be participants, thus potentially skewing the results. In an effort to understand fully how gay men and lesbians develop and maintain their sexual orientation identity, Kaufman and Johnson (2004) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 gay men and 10 lesbians. They discovered that this subject matter was better understood

using the themes from Symbolic Interactionism, Reflected Appraisals, and Situational Identity Negation, rather than stage theories of sexual identity development, such as Cass (1979) and D'Augelli (1994). Kaufman and Johnson (2004) found that there were three main themes related to the development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity in their study participants: the importance of reflected appraisals, the complexity of identity disclosure, and the importance of romantic relationships.

Regarding reflected appraisals, participants in the study regularly noted that the information they perceived from others was of profound importance to their sense of self and their sexual orientation (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004), and indicated that more positive the reflected appraisals led to more positive identity development and maintenance. In the theme relating to the complexity of identity disclosure, Kaufman and Johnson noted that although individuals may be able to disclose their identity to loved ones, disclosure may be significantly more difficult in situations such as work or school environments, or with less positive family and friends. Finally, the creation, maintenance, and disclosure of romantic relationships, including garnering respect and acceptance of the relationship from significant others in one's life is a major theme of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development according to Kaufman and Johnson.

Upon review of the basic components of various models of GLB identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1988; D'Augelli, 1994; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004) explained above, there is a natural progression toward a discussion and analysis of the academic discipline surrounding gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and their history, also known as Queer Theory. Although the origins of Queer Theory are not definitively known, it is believed that it resulted from a number of factors. Turner (2000) determined

that two of these factors included changes in social mores in Europe and in the United States after World War II, as well as economic and political growth that led to more women being on college campuses and in the work place. This influx of women, whether heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual, joined with the growing number of visible gay and bisexual men who were already in these public venues (Turner, 2000). Once these and other factors were firmly in place, a large amount of scholarly work about gay, lesbian, and bisexual people was published beginning in the mid- to late-1990s (Croteau, 1996; D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995; Sanlo, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1994). This research, coupled with the emerging area of Feminist Theory, came together in the form of Queer Theory (Butler, 1990; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004).

In order to examine the history of Queer Theory, a review of Sullivan (2003) is important. Sullivan explained that gay, lesbian, and bisexual social and political movements, which began in the late 1960s, were based on the assumption that issues of gender and sexual orientation should be the primary aspects of one's identity. Furthermore, Sullivan indicated that the use of the word 'queer' is purposeful and describes a community of people who not only share a common sexual orientation, but one that actively allows for diversity of thought, action, and nomenclature in relation to sexual orientation. Although similar to Sullivan (2003) in their basic tenets, Butler (1990) and Wilchins (2004) approached Queer Theory from the viewpoint of gender and feminist theory. Butler's work provided an historical tour of feminist theory, which while informative, did not directly relate to the subject of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses. However, Butler offered a valuable point-of-

view with her assertion that gay men and lesbians may exaggerate heterosexual traits as means of defending against their homosexuality.

Much like Butler's (1990) work, Wilchins's (2004) primer on the intersection between Gender Theory and Queer Theory provided an interesting historical context but stopped short of making any connection to gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students. In an historical description of the beginning of the gay rights movement, Wilchins explained that there were two types of homosexuals: avowed and militant. Avowed homosexuals, much like today's 'closeted' GLB college students, would not publicly confirm or deny their sexual orientation. Conversely, militant homosexuals, similar to 'out' or self-actualized GLB college students today, were entirely open about their sexual orientation. It seems easy to make the connection from Wilchins's two types of homosexuals to a discussion concerning which of these types is more self-actualized than the other (Maslow, 1943, 1965). As discussed next, this relates to the struggle current GLB college students have with how open and honest they can be regarding their sexual orientation.

Life on college campuses for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Rankin (2003) conducted an extensive mixed-methods study with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people on college and university campuses, in which a 35-item survey and follow-up qualitative questions were used to gather information about this group's experiences while on campus. This study of campus climate, or the prevailing attitudes, opinions, principles, and actions of all community members within an institution of higher learning (Rankin & Reason, 2008), was the first of its kind to assess the experiences of GLB people at higher education institutions. Students, faculty, and staff on 14 college and

university campuses across the United States completed and returned nearly 1,700 surveys. Some of the main results of this study were that 36% of self-identified GLB students reported being the victims of harassment on campus due to their sexual orientation, as did 29% of all respondents, including students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, 20% of respondents reported fears of being physically attacked due to their sexual orientation, and more than half of all respondents reported they felt it necessary to conceal their sexual orientation while on campus in order to avoid harassment, attacks, and intimidation. Relating back to Maslow (1943, 1965), it is clear that GLB students who feel they must hide their sexual orientation are likely to be less self-actualized than those who do not feel this need.

Rankin's (2003) work was groundbreaking and it added significantly to the knowledge base about gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students. It may also have encouraged other scholars to begin their own studies of the GLB college student population. In fact, the most recent and complete study on the status of GLB students on college and university campuses (Rankin et al., 2010) built on Rankin's earlier work. An extensive, mixed-methods study conducted by Rankin et al. (2010) used a survey instrument and open-ended qualitative questions to analyze and synthesize the experiences of more than 5,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer (LGBTQQ) individuals on college and university campuses nationwide. In this campus climate study, Rankin et al. (2010) discovered that these students were up to twice as likely to experience harassment as their heterosexual colleagues. This increased level of harassment found by Rankin et al. (2010) and earlier by Rankin (2003) is important to note, in that Rankin et al. (2010) hypothesized that GLB students who

experience a more open and welcoming campus with less harassment and violence will have better educational experiences overall.

Student leadership and its impact on self-actualization. The research has also shown that there is an overall improved experience of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on college campuses when the students are increasingly involved and take on leadership roles (Renn, 2007). Renn's study provided insight into GLB student leaders and their experiences on college campuses. Renn conducted a qualitative study in which she interviewed 15 students in positional and non-positional leadership roles in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student organizations at three colleges and universities in the Midwest. Renn discovered that the students who assumed leadership responsibilities in these organizations were more open about their sexual orientation on campus, and were therefore able to increase their support networks. Renn (2007) also noted that the outcomes from this study revealed a cycle in which students' increased leadership in these organizations led them to having a more publicly visible, or 'out,' identity as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person, as well as a more unified identity consisting of their sexual orientation and leadership identities. While leadership identity among GLB college and university students was not the focus of this project, it is certainly worth mentioning as an area that is potentially connected to coming out and self-actualization for these students.

One of the locations in which gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students can enhance their leadership skills is the GLB student group/center found on many college campuses. Teman and Lahman (2010) combined Queer Theory and constructivism into a theoretical framework for their qualitative study in which they interviewed five

undergraduate and one graduate GLB student leaders in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, ally, and queer (LGBTQA) student center on a Midwestern university campus. These researchers found that the LGBTQA student center was a vital resource and provided essential support to these student leaders. The support network provided by the LGBTQA student center helped these student leaders with issues such as being openly GLB on campus, and the ability to deal with harassment and disparate treatment. The students in this study reported being better leaders as a result of their participation in the LGBTQA student center.

Taking a different, yet valuable perspective on gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and leadership is a study conducted by Horne, Rice, and Israel (2004), which examined how heterosexual student leaders viewed GLB students on campus. During a scheduled break in a voluntary training program for student leaders, the researchers asked a convenience sample consisting of 86 student leaders (85% of whom reported a heterosexual orientation) to complete the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men – Short Form (ATLG-S, 1994) survey, the Attitudes Regarding Bisexuality – FM (ARB-FM, 1999) scale, the Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals (IAH, 1980), the Political Correctness-Sexual Orientation Scale (PC-SO, 1999), and a demographic questionnaire. A few major concerns exist about this study, including the fact that the convenience sample was selected from participants attending a voluntary student leadership training program on one college campus in the southeastern United States. The limitation of having such a small sample selected from a limited, self-selected group is likely to reveal data that are only significant from that group rather than being generalizable to the larger community.

While studies showed how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in leadership roles achieve higher levels of self-actualization (Renn, 2007; Teman & Lahman, 2010), findings from Horne et al. (2004) showed that heterosexual student leaders held negative attitudes toward GLB students. Horne et al. conducted multiple analyses of variance to determine if there were any significant gender and ethnic differences related to these attitudes and found none. However, the researchers found that a positive relationship was found in the participants' attitudes about GLB people if they had friends or family members who identified as being GLB. This is an important finding in that it supports the notion that the more gay, lesbian, and bisexual family and friends a heterosexual person has, the more positive their overall attitude toward homosexuality (Horne, Rice, & Israel, 2004). In their discussion of the study, Horne et al. offered valuable best practices recommendations, including a suggestion that professionals on campus ensure their student leadership training programs incorporate ways to change students' negative attitudes toward the GLB colleagues.

Gaps in the literature. With a firm understanding of some of the issues gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students face on campus, it is important to discuss why this research is necessary. Eyermann and Sanlo (2002) conducted a review and analysis of student satisfaction and quality of life surveys collected at a large, public, research university on the West coast of the United States from 1996 through 1999. The quantitative evaluation showed no significant difference in the number of respondents identifying as heterosexual, while the number identifying as GLB more than doubled in this time. These researchers determined that a factor in this increase was the labels used in questioning students about their sexual orientation. They indicated that many students

may not self-identify using the terms ‘gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ or ‘bisexual,’ but they might feel more comfortable describing themselves as being attracted to or sexually active with members of the same sex. In discussing implications for practice, the researchers noted that in order to provide the best services for GLB students, it is first necessary to adequately document their existence on campus not only using traditional sexual orientation labels, but also with questions regarding their sexual attraction.

Also illustrating the need for continued research on the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual college and university students is a review of the literature conducted by Renn (2010). Renn’s review illustrated that gaining an understanding of how undergraduate and graduate programs address GLB issues could benefit higher education scholars. Renn further declared that theoretically sophisticated research on GLB college and university students is slower and less prolific than the research done on this population in primary and secondary education settings. Renn’s review of the available literature clearly supported the need for additional research on GLB students on college and university campuses.

The role of faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education. As the need for continued scholarly research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students has been firmly established, the next step in this progression is to look at what responsibilities college and university staff members have to this marginalized group. Rankin (2006) questioned whether higher education professionals have fully addressed the needs of GLB students, and if sufficient resources are being afforded to support these students. Rankin noted that previous studies on students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) showed that students who were in an environment they perceived to

be inclusive and accepting had better overall academic experiences than those who perceived their college or university environment to be racist and discriminatory. In Rankin's (2006) study, she was able to connect the issues of racism in the studies with HBCU students and those done with GLB students who experienced discrimination. Rankin clearly expressed the fact that there is an overall lack of scholarly research on GLB college students. In discussing the responsibility of colleges and universities to ensure full inclusion of GLB students through programs and initiatives, Rankin (2006) insisted that we must employ continued and practical research to measure the success of these programs, and not just continue to use existing programs and initiatives simply out of convenience.

Furthering the discussion of research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, D'Augelli and Grossman's (2006) work examined some practical and ethical considerations for conducting research with this vulnerable population, as well as some limitations of current research in this area. Their research consisted of a longitudinal study (1999-2004) of over 500 self-identified GLB youths in New York City who were willing to discuss in-depth details about their lives, including stigmatization they had experienced due to their sexual orientation, and the impact such stigmatization had on their mental health. The researchers recruited a convenience sample primarily through social service organizations that provided services to GLB youth, and secondarily via personal referrals (respondent driven sampling) from current participants. Of particular interest in this sampling was the acknowledgement by the researchers that an abundance of caution must be taken when involving GLB youth in research, due to the potential

harm of inadvertently driving these participants away from programs and services they may otherwise need.

D'Augelli and Grossman (2006) and Diamond (2003) agreed on an important issue related to research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. All agreed that as GLB youth are studied more frequently, new conceptual models for conducting this research are needed. Where D'Augelli and Grossman (2006) failed to indicate what these conceptual models might include, Diamond (2003) discussed the necessity that researchers question participants not only about their sexual orientation, but also about their same-sex and opposite-sex attractions, fantasies, and behaviors. Doing so would free participants who do not self-identify as anything other than heterosexual to participate fully in such studies. This suggestion clearly supports what Eyermann and Sanlo (2002) reported about how GLB students may or may not use labels such as 'gay,' 'lesbian,' or 'bisexual.' Diamond (2003) continued by asserting that research should consistently compare GLB and heterosexual youth, rather than solely looking at within-group variations among GLB youth. According to Diamond, "this approach can yield important new insights and can enhance clinical interventions on a range of topics, such as stigma and labeling; peer support and peer victimization; continuity and discontinuity in developmental processes; boundaries between friendship and romance" (p. 496) and many others. This criticism also appears to coincide with Kaufman and Johnson's (2004) later work.

In addition to conducting scholarly research, others believe that college and university professional staff must do more to support the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student population. In a professional practice paper regarding how senior student affairs

officers can be supportive allies to GLB students, Roper (2005) indicated that simply being aware and open to the needs of this community is of paramount importance. Roper mused that a primary responsibility of senior student affairs officers is to create and maintain a strong sense of community on campus. Roper further declared that a senior student affairs officer must “develop, articulate, and lead by a philosophy that supports the education, well-being, and success of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) students” (p. 83). Roper continued by stating that the leadership of senior student affairs officers will be very important in achieving the goal of a positive campus climate for GLB college and university students across the country.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people at commuter and community colleges. As the faculty advisor to a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student group on a large, Midwestern commuter college campus, Leck (1998) provided a first-person narrative of her experiences as well as suggestions for best practices. Leck described the GLB student group on a commuter campus as an “oasis” (p. 375); the only place where students who likely live with their parents and work at least part-time in order to pay for their school expenses could be open about their sexual orientation. Leck asserted that residential campuses allow for more anonymity and therefore more tolerance and acceptance of GLB students, thus pointing to the need for these student groups and supportive administration at commuter colleges. Leck’s best practice suggestions for commuter colleges included providing opportunities for GLB faculty and staff to serve as role models and advisors for these students, ensuring the existence of institutional non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, and developing and maintaining relationships with off-campus organizations that serve the GLB community. Leck’s work

clearly recognized that GLB community college students are different from their counterparts at four-year colleges and universities, and therefore require further study and support.

Drawing from Leck's (1998) narrative, Ottenritter (1998) presented a professional practice paper in which she provided a framework for assessing how well community colleges address the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Ottenritter introduced her Institutional Assessment of Sexual Minority Status Checklist (1998), which indicated three functional domains for assessment: education, services, and procedures and policies. The researcher asserted that community colleges should operate and assess their services to GLB students within these three functional domains, as these are the areas in which community colleges are assessed for their overall achievement. Finally, Ottenritter suggested several best practices by which community colleges can serve GLB students. These best practices included getting to know these students and their faculty and staff counterparts, challenging the status quo regarding discriminatory language and symbols on campus, and setting inclusive policies as well as modeling appropriate behavior.

Seminal works about gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students.

In the first scholarly work of its kind, Baker (1991) delineated the needs of gay and lesbian students at community colleges as they relate to heterosexism, or the harassment and antagonistic behavior expressed toward non-heterosexual people. Baker provided numerous examples of heterosexism at community colleges, including course and textbook content, student services, peer support, library resources, and academic advisement. Baker then indicated that such institutionalized heterosexism causes many negative aspects to campus life, including a lower overall quality and diversity of

education, endurance of a sexist environment in which women and non-heterosexuals are demeaned, preservation of and prejudicial actions against any traditionally oppressed group, and an increased level of internalized oppression among GLB people on campus. Finally, Baker asserted that the best way to eradicate heterosexism on community college campuses was for faculty, staff, and administrators to become better educated about this issue and actively participate in its elimination.

Building on Baker's (1991) work, the second major scholarly work surrounding gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges was published nine years later. Leider (2000) indicated at the beginning of his work that additional research on GLB students at community colleges was conspicuously absent from the available literature on GLB students at institutions of higher education. In his review, Leider noted that conducting research on GLB students at community colleges may be complicated due to the difficulty in determining the size of this population, as well as the fear that researchers who wish to study this population may be perceived as GLB, thus becoming the target of discrimination themselves. Leider discussed major needs of GLB students at community colleges, including the ability to establish relationships with their peers and the GLB community on campus, and institutional support services such as faculty and staff who are open about their sexual orientation. Finally, Leider (2000) indicated that GLB students at community colleges are routinely subjected to harassment, and that researchers, faculty, staff, and administrators must pay attention to the needs of these students.

Ivory (2005) published the third, and final, major scholarly work directly related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges. Ivory's work discussed the

barriers to researching these students, including reluctance on the part of the students to identify themselves as GLB due to the stigma associated with such identification.

Another barrier presented by Ivory is the failure of these students to report cases of violence and harassment perpetrated against them, although they are more likely to be the victims of harassment and discrimination on campus. Ivory correctly noted, as did Baker (1991) and Leider (2000) before him, that no empirical studies dealing with GLB students at community colleges had been conducted, and that fewer than six works surrounding the campus experiences of this student population had been published to date. Ivory then provided best practice recommendations to community college administrators, including increasing campus safety for GLB students, providing comprehensive programs and resources in support of this population, and linking with off-campus agencies, programs, and services.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a topical analysis of important research surrounding the issues and experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on college and university campuses. The topic of life on college campuses for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students included works by Rankin (2003, 2008) and Rankin and Reason (2008). Reviews of Renn (2007), Teman and Lahman (2010), and Horne et al. (2004) provided a background for the topic of student leadership and its impact on self-actualization, while Eyermann and Sanlo (2002) and Renn (2010) were reviewed to show gaps in the literature. The topic regarding the role of faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education included works by D'Augelli and Grossman (2006), Diamond (2003), Rankin (2006), and Roper (2005). Leck (1992) and Ottenritter (1998) provided context in the topic of gay, lesbian,

and bisexual people at commuter and community colleges, while reviews of Baker (1991), Leider (2000), and Ivory (2005) comprised the topic of seminal works about gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students.

The chapter began with a review of Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943, 1965), then progressed into three major homosexual identity formation theories (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984; D'Augelli, 1994; Troiden, 1998), as well as an introduction into Queer Theory (Butler, 1990; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004). Some of the major findings of the studies reviewed throughout this chapter include very clear results from studies indicating that gay, lesbian, and bisexual college and university students were up to twice as likely to experience harassment and discrimination on campus as their heterosexual counterparts (Eyermann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). Furthermore, it was noted that while GLB students at four-year colleges and universities have been the subject of many scholarly works since the 1990s, very few studies about this population specifically at community colleges had been published to date (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000).

Through the course of reviewing the relevant literature presented here, it became evident that there is an urgent need for empirical research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges. As discussed throughout this chapter, researchers such as Ivory (2005), Leck (1998), Leider (2000), Ottenritter (1998), Rankin (2006), Rankin et al. (2010), and Renn (2010) expressed the need for additional scholarly research on the status and experiences of GLB community college students. While the literature surrounding this population on senior college and university campuses is becoming more abundant each year, it is a fact that GLB students at community colleges have been the

main subject of no more than ten scholarly publications in the past twenty years. As noted in the literature discussed herein, there were significant barriers to conducting research with GLB community college students. However, this gap in knowledge must be filled. Chapter 3 will detail the methodology, research context, participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures used in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

This study examined the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges to gain insight into how their on-campus experiences affected their ability to achieve their highest level of self-actualization. The research questions considered in this study included: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students. Although much research has focused on the experiences and needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at four-year colleges and universities, an understanding of the lives of these students specifically at the community college level is lacking (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000).

Due to the nature of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people being a historically marginalized group and the fact that this subpopulation of college and university students experiences harassment and discrimination up to twice as much as heterosexual college students (Eyermann and Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010), this study was conducted with an advocacy/participatory approach to research. Creswell (2007) noted that a central theme of an advocacy/participatory research study should include a plan of

action to better the lives of the members of the marginalized group who will participate in the study. This was achieved in this study by answering the research question surrounding the discovery and implementation of best practices for higher education practitioners at community colleges in order to best serve GLB students. Furthermore, Creswell stated that advocacy/participatory research attempts to “unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination” (p. 22). Creswell’s description of advocacy/participatory research coincided with the theoretical rationale for this study, in the argument that the process of coming out as GLB can be described using Maslow’s (1943, 1965) theory as a self-actualizing event.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) described the role of phenomenology in qualitative, interview-based research as “understanding social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be” (p. 26). The central purpose of this study was to lead to a greater understanding of the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in the community college setting. Considering this purpose as well as Kvale & Brinkmann’s description of phenomenology, it was concluded that a qualitative methodology consisting of in-depth, phenomenological interviews with participants was the most appropriate and effective way to conduct this study. Using this research design ensured that the participants’ individual voices and stories were heard, while also providing the researcher with the data necessary to effectively complete the study.

The study consisted of in-depth interviews with study participants. Stake (2010) noted that some of the main purposes of interviews are to gather information held only by the individual participant, and to discover specific details that researchers in a detached observer role are not able to discern. Since the purpose of this study was to lead to a better understanding of the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students, it is evident that discovering specific information held discretely by each participant was an important goal. In order to gain this in-depth understanding of the experiences of GLB students at community colleges, individual interviews were conducted with study participants. Furthermore, Stake declared that experiential research, including interview-based research, “usually does not seek simplicity or the best explanation, but a collection of interpretations” (p. 63). As the need for collecting and interpreting individual experiences was paramount to this study, a qualitative methodology using in-depth interviews was the most logical choice.

Positionality. Important to this discussion was the concept of positionality, as the potential relationships that exist between the researcher and participants are of paramount importance to the research design (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher not only held a high-level administrative position within the City University of New York, although not at the community college level, but has also been an openly gay man for 30 years. These unique perspectives of the researcher, as an openly gay man and an administrator within the City University of New York system, created a level of both insider and outsider positionality for the researcher (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Insider positionality, acquired through his identity as a gay man, was useful to the researcher in developing the relationships Maxwell (2005) described, as the researcher was able to connect with the

participants in ways that garnered deeper levels of trust and greater sharing of information. However, outsider positionality was experienced due to the researcher's role as a high-level college administrator with perceived power over the student population. This may have affected the level of trust exhibited by participants and may have limited the ability of participants to speak to the researcher freely and honestly.

Research Context

The research context for this study included the campuses of the seven community colleges within the City University of New York (CUNY) system, where the participants were registered students. Yin (2011) explained that conducting qualitative research in a field setting should begin with the researcher making deliberate choices about the location(s). Noting Yin's caveat, the most appropriate setting in which to conduct this research was 'in the field' where the GLB community college students were located. Conducting this research on community college campuses would have enabled the researcher to witness the participants in their specific environments, but this did not occur throughout the study given that the majority of respondents requested their interviews occur in a location other than their own campuses. At their request and partly due to concerns of confidentiality, two-thirds of the participants chose to be interviewed in the researcher's office located on a different City University of New York (CUNY) campus.

Established in 1847, CUNY is a comprehensive, public, urban university system consisting of 11 senior colleges, seven community colleges, and six 'schools,' including graduate, law, journalism, professional studies, public health, and honors. The total enrollment in all 24 colleges and schools is well over 250,000 full- and part-time, degree-

seeking students, while in the seven community colleges alone there are nearly 98,000 full- and part-time, degree-seeking students enrolled (CUNY Office of Institutional Research, 2012, March 23).

According to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research (2012, July 17), the student body at the CUNY community colleges is 58% female and has a mean age of 24 years; 41% of the students attend school part-time, 44% have a native language other than English, and 42% were born outside of the U.S. mainland with the top countries of birth being Dominican Republic, China, Jamaica, Guyana, and Bangladesh. The race/ethnicity of the CUNY community college students is 0.3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 15.4% Asian, 29.2% Black, 37% Hispanic, and 18.1% White.

Additionally, 46% of these students come from households with annual incomes less than \$20,000, 65% are Pell Grant recipients, 48% are the first generation from their families to attend college, 16% are supporting children of their own, and 30% work for pay more than 20 hours per week while in school (CUNY Office of Institutional Research, 2012, July 17).

While a scant 1% of all self-reported couple households in the United States are same-sex couples (United States Census Bureau, 2011), well-known studies place the total number of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the United States at somewhere between 3.5% and 10% of the entire population (Gates, 2011; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1948). Gates (2011) further estimated that 8.2% of Americans report having engaged in sexual behavior with members of the same sex, and 11% admit to being attracted to members of the same sex.

Research Participants

The research participants for this study consisted of nine students who were at least 18 years old, were currently or recently enrolled at one of the community colleges in the CUNY system, and who self-identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. CUNY Office of Institutional Research (2012, April 12) indicated that as of the fall 2011 semester, there were nearly 98,000 people enrolled as undergraduate students at CUNY's six community colleges. A seventh community college opened in the fall 2012 semester, but available enrollment data did not include this college. With the most conservative estimates of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the United States being 3.5% of the total population (Gates, 2011), it can be concluded that at least 3.5%, or 3,430 of the 98,000 CUNY community college students self-identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) noted that in phenomenological studies the sample size may be quite small or exceedingly large, but that these types of studies are better suited to a more profound treatment of a smaller number of participants than a superficial handling of a larger sample. The intended sample size for this study was 10 to 15 participants, but great difficulty in finding participants willing to share their lived experiences with the researcher resulted in a slightly smaller final sample. Ultimately, nine students were identified and chosen by the researcher to participate in in-depth, phenomenological interviews.

The participants were chosen as a purposeful sample, and were identified through two main sources. First, the researcher contacted the Directors of Student Life and the Vice Presidents for Student Affairs at the CUNY community colleges (Appendix A) and asked them to distribute an introductory letter (Appendix B) to the GLB student groups

and the larger student population as appropriate. As a high-level administrator at a CUNY college, the researcher had direct knowledge that the Directors of Student Life and Vice Presidents for Student Affairs were likely to have significant student contact on their campuses and were therefore able to forward the introductory level to potential participants.

During the course of four months, the researcher received numerous inquiries from potential participants who had received the introductory letter (Appendix B) or who were notified of the study by word-of-mouth. Some potential participants who contacted the researcher did not ultimately participate in the study due to at least one of the following factors: they did not meet the minimum criteria of being at least 18 years old, being currently or recently enrolled at one of the CUNY community colleges, and self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; after initially contacting the researcher and the researcher following up with them, they declined to participate or did not schedule an interview; or they scheduled an interview, did not show up, and did not respond to further contact by the researcher.

In an effort to reach more potential participants, the researcher asked each participant to make referrals of their own. This type of snowball sampling, described by Creswell (2007) as a way to identify cases of interest from others who understand the level of information being sought by the researcher, is generally used to find participants in hard-to-reach populations such as the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student population. Yin (2011) noted that snowball sampling is an effective form of sampling, but should be done purposefully and not out of convenience. It was necessary to use this technique in an effort to reach potential participants who were not 'out' regarding their sexual

orientation, who were not involved in GLB student group activities but who had friends or contacts in the GLB student community, or who had left the community college campus in question. As snowball sampling is not random and therefore carries with it potential bias as a sampling method, it has been frequently used by researchers who study hard-to-reach populations (Browne, 2005; Meyer & Wilson, 2009; Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009). While each participant was asked to make referrals, only one participant was identified in this way.

Also important to recognize was that fact that a high-level administrator directly contacting students to request their participation in the study could have been misconstrued by participants as coercive. Therefore, in an effort to eliminate this potential for unintended coercion, the researcher did not initiate contact with students. Only students who were referred by others they trusted and who contacted the researcher of their own accord were considered for participation in the study.

In order to further protect participants from unintended coercion and to protect their anonymity before, during, and after the interview process, the researcher requested that participants only used pseudonyms, and offered interviewees multiple means of participating in the research. For example, participants had the choice of being interviewed via telephone in addition to in-person interviews at a location of their choosing. Ultimately, all participants chose to be interviewed in-person. Finally, the researcher informed the potential participants via the introduction letter (Appendix B), informed consent document (Appendix C), and email at the time of scheduling the interview, that their decision to participate or not participate would have no direct

advantage or detriment to them as a student in the CUNY system. All participants received a \$50 gift card as an incentive to participate in the study.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Pre-interview instruments. The instruments that were used to collect data consisted of an introduction letter to the college administrators who were in a position to identify potential participants (Appendix A), a letter of introduction from the researcher to the potential participants (Appendix B), and an informed consent document (Appendix C).

The researcher electronically sent an introduction letter (Appendix A) and introduction letter to potential participants (Appendix B) to the Vice Presidents for Student Affairs and the Directors of Student Life at the seven CUNY community colleges from which participants were to be identified, and then followed with an explanatory and clarifying telephone call to these administrators. One of the community colleges declined to offer their students the opportunity to participate in the study, indicating that as a new college they did not have a mechanism in place to properly evaluate such research requests.

In-depth interviews. The main instrument used in data collection was a list of 23 interview questions created by the researcher (Appendix D). In order to test the 23-question instrument and validate that participants would understand the meaning of the interview questions and respond in such a way that would garner the type of data required for this study, the researcher convened a panel of experts very familiar with this population and how to conduct research with them. This panel included a social justice educator, consultant, and former higher education professional with over 25 years of

experience working with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; a former university student affairs professional and current educator, social justice trainer, consultant, and minister with over 30 years of experience working with GLB students; and a diversity educator, consultant, and former university student affairs professional with over 30 years of experience working with GLB students. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D) were used to elicit data from participants, including the individual stories and experiences of each participant.

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D) were partially adapted from the Campus Pride 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People Report and were used with the permission of the author (Appendix E), and were chosen to align with the following research questions: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Potential participants contacted the researcher to indicate their desire to participate in the study. Once potential participants made contact via telephone or email, the researcher asked them if they met the minimum criteria of being at least 18 years old, were currently attending or recently attended a CUNY community college, and self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. If the potential participant answered that he or

she met the minimum criteria, the researcher and participant scheduled a date, time, and location for the interview. At the designated interview date, time, and location, the researcher asked the participants to read and sign an informed consent document (Appendix C).

The researcher recorded each interview using two Zoom H1 Portable Digital Recorders and took handwritten notes using a standard pen-and-paper technique in order to ensure redundancy. The researcher maintained the signed consent forms in an unmarked file in a locked file cabinet in the home of the researcher, to which only the researcher has access. All digital recordings and the related transcriptions, as well as transcriptions of the researcher's handwritten notes were kept on a locked and password protected computer at the home of the researcher, and did not include any identifying personal information. Only the researcher and related, contracted others, such as research assistants and a transcriber who signed confidentiality agreements had access to the digital recordings, which will be destroyed in December of 2015. The digital recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber who signed a non-disclosure agreement and guaranteed the confidentiality of voice recordings sent to her and the transcriptions she created and sent back to the researcher.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) noted that the purpose of a phenomenological study such as this is to uncover and understand the individual human experience of participants. Bloomberg and Volpe, in explaining how a phenomenological researcher makes sense of the data, explained that:

The researcher reflects on essential themes that constitute the nature of this lived experience. The researcher then writes a description of the phenomenon,

maintaining a strong relationship to the topic of inquiry. Phenomenology is not only a description, however; it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experience (pp. 32-33).

Noting Bloomberg and Volpe's advice, semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) were used to collect the personal stories and experiences of each participant.

The researcher intended to triangulate the data by conducting focus groups, but found that identifying additional participants was not possible. To protect participants' confidentiality, the researcher coded all interview recordings, transcripts, and related documents with a pseudonym. These documents are maintained separately from the personal information collected on the informed consent document, so nobody but the researcher is able to link the collected data to a specific participant.

The researcher reviewed and coded the transcribed interviews and researcher's notes in order to analyze the data in an attempt to answer the stated research questions, which included the following: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students.

Saldaña (2009) defined a theme as "a phrase or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (p. 139). During phase one of the coding process, the researcher first read all of the transcripts in order to gain a general understanding of

the lived experiences of each participant. After the first read, the researcher then carefully read each transcript and line-by-line noted similar ideas, words, and phrases used by participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Some of these similar ideas, words, and phrases included descriptions of the participants' living situations, family dynamics, experiences with heterosexism and homophobia, involvement with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club on campus, and feelings of belongingness and aloneness while on campus. During phase two of the coding process, the researcher performed a second round of coding in order to group similarities in the data. In this round of coding, 158 discrete codes were arrived at inductively, or, developed by the researcher upon examining the data (Saldaña, 2009). A full list of the 158 initial codes appears in Appendix F, and examples of the entire coding process appears in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Examples of the Coding Process

Participants' Words and Ideas	Initial Codes	Theme	Sub-Themes
I felt alone. I had no GLB friends. I don't know anyone here like me. I don't tell anyone I'm gay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introverted • Feeling alone 	Obstructive factors to coming out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home life
I found them by accident when I was looking for the chorus room. They are like a family to me. I never thought I'd be secretary of the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLB student group-found accidentally • GLB student group-involved • More comfortable around GLB people 	Positive campus experiences-coming out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLB student club
Someone dropped the (rainbow) flag and threw it in the garbage. Student in classed called teacher "faggot." Professor said only heterosexual couples have children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced heterosexism • Experienced homophobia • Negative impact of discrimination 	Negative campus experiences-coming out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterosexism and homophobia among college faculty • Hostility
I don't come to college to say that oh I'm gay, I come to study. At the end of semesters and when I got my grades and all that is when I feel accomplished.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not talk about sexual orientation • Self-actualization tied to academic achievement 	Positive campus experiences – self-actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic success

Next, the researcher executed phase three, a third cycle of coding which placed the coded data into more refined themes. Phase three was then repeated in order to ensure that all of the data were sufficiently coded and prepared for analysis. Because no major empirical research had previously been done with gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students, the researcher used ‘a priori coding,’ in that he looked for evidence of human behavior as described by the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. Upon completion of the coding process, the researcher studied and refined the codes into six major themes that coincided with the research questions, and further refined the data into 18 sub-themes.

The major themes, obstructive factors to coming out, positive campus experiences – coming out, negative campus experiences – coming out, positive campus experiences – self-actualization, negative campus experiences – self-actualization, and best practices, and sub-themes are presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Themes and Sub-Themes Derived from Participant Interviews

Themes	Sub-Themes
Obstructive Factors to Coming Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home life • Safety
Positive Campus Experiences – Coming Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust in peer groups • GLB student club • Community acceptance • Faculty support
Negative Campus Experiences – Coming Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling marginalized or alone • Heterosexism and homophobia among college faculty • Hostility
Positive Campus Experiences – Self-Actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic success • GLB student club
Negative Campus Experiences – Self-Actualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blocked access
Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for faculty, staff, counselors • GLB student club • Syllabus language • GLB curriculum • Scholarship • Community outreach

In progressing through this process, the researcher created a master code book, which provided a reference point to code the data according to specific labels, including essence, significant statements, meaning units, and textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007).

Summary

The methodology of this qualitative, phenomenological study consisted of four major parts: the research context, research participants, instruments used in data collection, and data analysis. The context in which this study took place was six of the seven community colleges in the City University of New York System, and the research participants consisted of nine gay, lesbian, and bisexual students from these colleges. The participants were chosen as a purposeful sample from those who learned of the study through various means and contacted the researcher to indicate a willingness to participate. The instruments used in data collection consisted of an introduction letter to the college administrators who helped identify potential participants, a letter of introduction from the researcher to the potential participants, an informed consent document, and a list of interview questions created by the researcher. Interviews with participants were recorded and transcribed, and then the researcher performed three cycles of coding which ultimately grouped the data into six major themes and 18 sub-themes from an original set of 158 codes. Finally, the data were cross-analyzed as described in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation and how their self-actualization is affected. This study was intended to provide best practices in serving these students to community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and was thus meant to benefit gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. The researcher drew upon Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943), specifically its treatment of self-actualization (1965), as a main theoretical base, as well as Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994).

In this chapter, the results generated from in-depth interviews with nine gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students were reported by viewing and analyzing the data from the perspective of the stated research questions. This chapter began with a review of and brief answers to the four of the research questions that drove the study, and then progressed to a more in-depth discussion of the data analysis and findings. The data analysis and findings section was organized to address each of the four research questions. This section also presented six major themes and 18 sub-themes that were generated as a result of the coding of the data. Finally, a summary of the results was offered and discussed.

Research Question 1: What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation? The data showed that community college students were inhibited from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation when one or more factors were present. These factors included an unstable or unsafe home life, a lack of feeling safe in other areas of life, feeling marginalized or feeling alone, heterosexist and homophobic behavior in others, and hostility in others.

Research Question 2: What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation? An analysis of the data showed that the experiences a gay, lesbian, or bisexual student had on campus could help or hinder them in coming out. The experiences that supported gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in coming out included the presence of and access to a GLB student club, trust in peer groups, acceptance by the larger college community, and a supportive environment in the classroom. Conversely, the factors that impeded students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation included feeling alone or marginalized, heterosexism and homophobia experienced on campus, and acts of hostility perpetrated by others.

Research Question 3: What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students? The data showed that the self-actualization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students was bolstered when the students experienced high levels of academic success, and when they had access to a gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club on campus. Contrary to this finding, students who felt

as if their access to gay, lesbian, and bisexual clubs and services was blocked experienced a hindrance to their self-actualization.

Research Question 4: What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students? The data reflected six best practices that practitioners could employ to best serve gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges. These best practices included training faculty, staff, and counselors on issues relating to the GLB student population, ensuring the existence of and access to GLB student clubs on campus, guaranteeing that all course syllabi include language prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, instituting a GLB or ‘queer studies’ curriculum, and providing scholarship and community outreach opportunities.

Data Analysis and Findings

As a result of his 25 years of professional experience working with gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students at the four-year college level, the researcher was already aware that there was a large body of research on this population. Upon reviewing the existing literature, it quickly became apparent that GLB students at community colleges were not a significant or specific part of the available research. This, coupled with the researcher’s personal experience as an out gay man for 30 years, had significant influence on the choice of the topic of this research. Adding to this influence was the fact that in the last three decades, 21 states and the District of Columbia have passed laws outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2013). Furthermore, 17 states and the District of Columbia afforded full marriage rights to same-sex couples in the last 10 years (Freedom to Marry, 2013). The relative speed with which

public policy and public opinion regarding homosexuality have changed in the last few years and the researcher's own experiences 'growing up gay' on college campuses confirmed this as an important area of research.

Descriptive analysis. Prior to presenting the findings, the researcher felt it was profoundly important for the reader to 'meet' and gain an understanding of each of the participants. As this type of research aims to understand the lived experiences of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), a biographical sketch of each participant was created by the researcher. Furthermore, a very brief description of each participant is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Descriptions of Study Participants

Participant	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Gender	Age
Aaron	White	Gay	Male	22
Ashley	Hispanic	Homoromantic Bisexual	Female	20
Carolyn	Dominican American	Lesbian	Female	19
David	Filipino Chinese	Homosexual	Male	19
Joseph	African American/Haitian	Gay/Same Gender-Loving	Male	25
Lily	African American	Bisexual	Female	18
Meredith	Mexican American	Lesbian	Female	22
Michael	Peruvian	Gay	Male	31
Xander	Dominican	Gay	Male	20

After the biographical sketch of each participant, this chapter presented an analysis of the data and findings, presented by the research questions to which they speak, as well as a summary of the results.

Overall, the participants were a relatively diverse group of students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 31, with the mean age being 21.7 years; five were male and four were female; all nine described themselves differently with regard to their race or ethnicity, with five belonging to the general category of Hispanic, two African American, one

Asian/Pacific Islander, and one Caucasian. This participant group was consistent with the entire CUNY community college population in age and racial/ethnic background, but the gender breakdown was skewed toward male participants when female students dominate the larger population (CUNY Office of Institutional Research, 2012, July 17). As discussed in Eyermann and Sanlo (2002), three of the participants eschewed the traditional sexual orientation terms of gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and opted for more descriptive and personal terms such as ‘same gender loving’ and ‘homoromantic bisexual.’

Aaron. Aaron is a 22-year-old gay man from The Bronx who described himself as “white, with a Spanish mom.” He reported having a good childhood, but that he was not into sports like many of the boys his age. Aaron stated that he connected easier with girls his age, so they comprised the majority of his friendship group. At the end of ninth grade, Aaron put a profile on a social network website and listed his sexual orientation as heterosexual. He noticed that he received a lot of interest from other young men, so he decided to change his orientation on the profile to bisexual as a means to explore his burgeoning sexual orientation. This is how Aaron met someone he now considers his first boyfriend. Aaron did not have a sexual relationship with another man until he was 16 or 17, but by then he knew he was gay. Aaron began telling close, high school friends he was gay, all of whom were supportive, and ultimately told his mother during his first year at community college.

Ashley. A 20-year-old woman who described herself as a “very Americanized Hispanic” who does not speak any Spanish, Ashley was born and lived most of her life in New York City. Ashley labeled her sexual orientation as homoromantic bisexual, which

she defined by saying “I am the homo part, the homoromantic means I can only be in a relationship with a woman. I can never date a guy, I will never fall in love with a guy but sexuality wise I do find men attractive. So I find both attractive.” Although she knew at an early age she was bisexual, Ashley reported that she is a very private person and only came out to her family at age 19; her family has been very supportive of her. Ashley mentioned that she only told a few close friends about her sexual orientation when she enrolled at her college, but by the third semester she was completely out. She described her community college campus as “the most open and safe place that I felt like any place could be.”

Carolyn. Born to Dominican parents and raised in New York City, 19-year-old Carolyn has identified as a lesbian since she was fifteen. However, she described herself as being out only to her close friends at her community college, and not out to her family at all. Although the researcher met her at a large, educational program presented by her college’s gay, lesbian, bisexual student group, Carolyn stated in her interview that she never “thought about joining the LGBT club or looking out for all the other lesbians...I don’t necessarily hang out with gay people.” Carolyn also described her campus climate toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people as neutral. Carolyn sometimes has trouble talking about her sexual orientation with others, “because sometimes still just saying I’m a lesbian kind of like hits me like five seconds later and I’m like whoa I just said that you know.”

David. David is a 19-year-old man of Filipino and Chinese ancestry, who described himself as “an artist, writer, and your typical American Asian person...I play the piano, I draw, I write, I sing, I dance, that’s about the basics.” He referred to himself

as homosexual and stated emphatically that he does not care in the least what opinions others have of him, as the only opinion of him that matters is his own. Of all the participants, David seemed to exhibit the highest level of identity synthesis, or the stage where a person's sexual orientation is fully integrated with all other parts of the self (Cass, 1979). He talked about the fact that being homosexual is just one part of him, stating, "I mean I like guys and that's okay it doesn't affect how I work, how I act around people." David is completely out to his friends and family, and will answer honestly about his sexual orientation when asked by classmates and coworkers.

Joseph. Joseph is a 25-year-old, same gender-loving man of Haitian ancestry, who was the first in his family to be born and raised in the United States. Joseph considered himself to be not very out on his campus, including feeling like "I didn't know what my role was." Joseph also mentioned that being a same gender-loving man on his campus made him "feel like a minority in many ways." His home life was very different, in that his parents kicked him out of his home when they discovered he was same gender-loving. In Joseph's experience, the atmosphere for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on his community college campus was "lackluster."

Lily. A bisexual, New York City native of Ghanaian descent who was the youngest participant in the study, Lily was in her first semester at her community college. The researcher met Lily at an educational program sponsored by the gay, lesbian, bisexual student group, but Lily noted that she was not aware the event was happening until she found it accidentally while looking for the choir club. She described her father as "liberal, like a major liberal but he came from Africa so he comes from like Ghana is a place where the LGBT is not really all that well known, and like he's very open minded

but like if I were to tell him he'd just probably consider it I'm going through a phase right now." Accordingly, Lily has not come out as bisexual to her father. Lily mentioned being pleasantly surprised at her community college's positive climate toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

Meredith. Meredith is 22-years-old, born in Mexico, and came to the United States approximately nine years ago. She labeled herself as lesbian when discussing her sexual orientation, and she told her parents of this identity about two-and-a-half years ago. She reported understanding her sexual orientation at a young age, but struggling with it due to her Catholic upbringing and attendance at religiously-based schools. Although Meredith is out to her parents, she noted that her mother confuses Meredith's sexual orientation with her gender identity, in her belief that Meredith wants to be a man because she dates women and does not wear traditionally feminine clothes. Meredith stated that people at her community college generally like her because she fully accepts who she is as a woman, a Latina, and a lesbian. However, in relating a series of visits to the counseling center at her community college, she indicated that this was a negative experience for her; "I don't want to say welcoming 'cause that's not the right word, it didn't feel as safe." Meredith reported that the therapist she saw at the community college counseling center seemed uncomfortable discussing Meredith's sexual orientation as a lesbian.

Michael. At 31 years-old, Michael was the oldest participant in the study. He is Peruvian and has been out as a gay man since he was 16. Michael never mentioned to the researcher his family of origin, but he indicated several times that he considered his gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends to be his family of choice; his "brothers and sisters."

Michael made it very clear to the researcher that he wanted to participate in this study because he felt that his community college was not a very safe place for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, and he wanted to help change that. Michael stated, “I know a lot of gay people from school and I know many of them don’t feel comfortable disclosing it.” He also stated his belief that the GLB students at his college were partly to blame for their own status as outsiders by “acting stereotypical” and promoting only social activities rather than a political agenda.

Xander. Xander was 20-years-old at the time of the interview, born in the Dominican Republic, and identified as gay. He had been at his community college for three semesters and found it to be a comfortable place. Xander noted that his sexual orientation is a very personal matter to him, and he does not readily share it with others. He does not actively participate in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group on campus, saying “I don’t come to college to say that oh I’m gay, I come to study.” According to Xander, being out on campus “would mean to me if you see a certain person walking you would know like oh that person is gay,” but he said this does not accurately describe him. Nonetheless, Xander felt his community college is an open and supportive place to the GLB students.

Cross analysis of participant interviews. At the conclusion of the participant interviews, all of the available data was cross-referenced and it was concluded that there were six major themes and 18 sub-themes that were developed from 158 original codes (Appendix F). These themes and sub-themes represented the best attempts to speak on behalf of the participants and to relate their personal stories and lived experiences. Following this section is a description of all themes and sub-themes, including

corroborating participant statements. Table 4.2 shows the frequencies of participants' responses regarding the various sub-themes.

Table 4.2

Frequencies of Sub-Themes in Participant Interviews

Themes	Sub-Themes	% of Participants Who Discussed Sub-Theme
Obstructive Factors to Coming Out	1. Home life	67
	2. Safety	56
Positive Campus Experiences – Coming Out	3. Trust in peer groups	78
	4. GLB student club	100
	5. Community acceptance	33
	6. Faculty support	44
Negative Campus Experiences – Coming Out	7. Feeling marginalized or alone	33
	8. Heterosexism and homophobia among college faculty	33
	9. Hostility	44
Positive Campus Experiences – Self-Actualization	10. Academic success	33
	11. GLB student club	88
Negative Campus Experiences – Self-Actualization	12. Blocked access	11
Best Practices	13. Training for faculty, staff, counselors	22
	14. GLB student club	67
	15. Syllabus language	22
	16. GLB curriculum	33
	17. Scholarship	11
	18. Community outreach	22

The six major themes the data uncovered included obstructive factors to coming out, positive campus experiences – coming out, negative campus experiences – coming out, positive campus experiences – self-actualization, negative campus experiences – self-actualization, and best practices. Eighteen sub-themes stemmed from the six major themes. The findings of the research are presented according to these six major themes and 18 sub-themes.

Finding I: There are two factors that are obstructive to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in coming out regarding their sexual orientation.

Obstructive factors to coming out. The results in this major theme were as varied and individual as the participants themselves. However, the data clearly indicated two sub-themes into which the participants' lived experiences fell. This research focused mostly on the experiences gay, lesbian, and bisexual students had on their community college campuses as factors that either inhibited or supported them in coming out and becoming self-actualized. However, the data collected to answer this first research question included some information about the participants' lives outside of the community college campus. In the major thematic area of obstructive factors to coming out, the data presented are related to the question of what general factors inhibit community college students from coming out publicly, by delving into the two sub-themes of home life, and safety.

Home life. The sub-theme the area in which participants described different factors of their living situations that affected their ability to come out fully. Some of these factors included not having a stable home, homelessness, religiosity of parents and family members, conservative ideology of parents and family members, parents and

family members not understanding homosexuality or bisexuality, and parents and family members confusing sexual orientation with gender identity.

As noted in Joseph's biographical sketch, he was living at home and attending college when his religious, Haitian parents discovered he was same gender-loving. Until that point, he had a close relationship with his parents, and they had no qualms about paying for his school-related expenses. This all changed when Joseph posted something alluding to his sexual orientation on his Facebook page, and someone showed that information to Joseph's parents. Without further discussion, Joseph's parents told him he had to leave their home immediately. As evidenced by his own words, Joseph's self-identity shifted significantly in that moment:

That's how I identify is like I'm disowned because of my sexual orientation and then I could say that by coming out I was very, it was no longer because my parents disowned me it's because okay this is part of who I am, this is part of who I've always been. But it was hard because you know, at the point in time I identified myself as a good little Catholic boy, I identified myself as my mother's son, my father's son, you know, this, that, so these identities were sort of clashing.

Interestingly, Joseph eventually took strength from his parents' action and was eventually more able to accept his sexual orientation. While at first glance this example may not fit into the sub-theme of 'home life' in the major thematic area of 'obstructive factors to coming out,' Joseph's later comments make it clear that finding himself homeless very much inhibited his ability to come out publicly. Although his parents forced him to come out to them, Joseph felt he needed to hide his sexual orientation even deeper in order to find temporary and then more stable housing situations. The fact that Joseph did not have

stable housing for quite a while meant his safety needs were not met and he therefore could not become self-actualized.

A discussion of Lily's home life also yielded some important information relating to the major thematic area of 'obstructive factors to coming out.' Lily explained to the researcher that she lived alone with her Ghanaian father in New York City. Lily described her father as a very liberal-minded person, but with the qualification that he was a liberal Ghanaian, not a liberal New Yorker. In Lily's estimation, this distinction was an important one to make. The discussion of Lily's father occurred when the researcher asked if she was out as bisexual to her father, and Lily answered as follows:

Well he's actually the weird thing, he's liberal, like a major liberal but he came from Africa so he comes from like Ghana is a place where the LGBT is not really all that well known, and like he's very open minded but like if I were to tell him he'd just probably consider it I'm going through a phase right now.

On the surface, Lily's description of her home life with her father does not necessarily seem like an obstructive factor. However, a person must consider the unintended consequences of Lily's reticence regarding a discussion of her sexual orientation with her father. Because Lily will not or cannot disclose her sexual orientation to her father, she is not able to own the courageous act of truly being herself at home, and therefore cannot be fully self-actualized.

Safety. Very few participants reported fearing for their physical safety, but many discussed situations when their emotional or psychological safety may have been in jeopardy. Some of the factors related to the participants' description of feeling unsafe, included professional counselors at the college's counseling center being unaware of how

to work with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; the safety of the GLB student club meeting space being questioned, the verbal harassment of a gay professor, and reports of campus security officers not being nice to GLB students. Students who question their safety, on or off campus, would not have their safety needs met, and would therefore be unable to become self-actualized.

Meredith related a story of when she went to her community college's counseling center for assistance in dealing with some personal issues. Meredith expected that this would be a safe space and that licensed mental health professionals would have the knowledge and experience necessary to assist all students, including gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Meredith's experience, however, belies this expectation:

There was this one time that I was going through a particular problem, I went to one of the counseling sessions, it didn't feel as, I don't want to say welcoming cause that's not the right word. It didn't feel as safe even though yes it's a counseling room, it's a professional counselor, but I didn't feel like the person was able to connect to what I was going through because I don't know if they had experience with any members of the LGBTQ or how was their acceptance of that. So yeah, I had a couple of sessions, about three or four, but then I stopped going.

While Meredith's story does not reflect a threat to her physical safety, she described a threat to her emotional and spiritual safety. Because Meredith's safety needs were not met in her counseling center experience, she was unable to achieve self-actualization.

Michael was another participant who lamented in his interview with the researcher a lack of safety as being an obstructive factor in his coming out and self-actualization. Michael was attending a meeting of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student

group meeting, when someone ripped down the rainbow flag and threw it in a garbage can. Michael noted that he did not feel comfortable reporting the incident to his campus' security office, as he considered the security officers to be "not nice" to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. In another example of safety being an important part of a GLB student's experience, Michael recounted a time when another student in his class called the openly gay professor a "faggot." Michael noted that he felt very unsafe when this happened, but again did not feel as if he could report the incident to the security office. Adding to Michael's feeling that his safety needs were not being met, was the fact that this openly gay professor also did not want to report the incident to the security office. When a gay, lesbian, or bisexual student witnesses an openly gay faculty member question his or her own safety, the student will likely experience these feelings as well.

While just a few of the participants stories were discussed in this section, a cross analysis of the major thematic area of 'obstructive factors to coming out' showed that two-thirds of the participants described some areas of their home life and safety concerns which inhibited them from publicly coming out regarding their sexual orientation. Three of the participants noted that they consider themselves to be out to their parents or other family members, but upon discussing this further with the researcher, it became clear that these participants experienced negative consequences in their homes as a result. Furthermore, five participants described feeling unsafe as a major factor in why they do not come out publicly. At least two participants embedded their lack of safety in ostensibly positive ways, noting that their sexual orientation was their own business and only their closest friends, and sometimes family members, needed to know. Selected results from this research question appear in Table 4.3

Table 4.3

Examples of Factors that Inhibit GLB Students from Coming Out

Sub-Theme	Participant	Quote
Home Life	Joseph	I'm disowned because of my sexual orientation and... this is part of who I've always been.
Home Life	Lily	If I were to tell him (father) he'd just probably consider it I'm going through a phase right now.
Safety	Meredith	It didn't feel as safe even though yes it's a counseling room, it's a professional counselor, but I didn't feel like the person was able to connect to what I was going through.
Safety	Michael	I remember one time someone just dropped the (rainbow) flag and threw it in the garbage.

Finding II: There are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's ability to come out.

Positive campus experiences – coming out. This major thematic area referred to the experiences that participants had while on campus, which supported them in coming out regarding their sexual orientation. All of the participants in this study reported themselves to be 'out' in one or more areas of their lives, and it quickly became evident that participants' lived experiences included such experiences. Even the most publicly

out participants in this study reported some aspect of their campus experience where there were factors that supported them in being fully out and self-actualized.

The data indicated a number of sub-themes within the area of positive campus experiences that supported gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in coming out publicly. Although many of the participants described isolated instances of, and sometimes pervasive negative experiences, most of them were also able to relate stories of positive experiences which supported them in coming out on campus. Some of the participants' stories of positive experiences, grouped by sub-themes, follow.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual student club. The GLB student club refers to a social and political organization designed to create community around a shared, non-heterosexual, sexual orientation. Such clubs are usually organized and directed by the student members of the club, and often have a faculty advisor for assistance. The GLB student club was described by all of the participants as a positive campus experience that supported them in coming out.

Aaron, for example, had little difficulty recalling and discussing with the researcher the positive things about his campus that have helped him to come out more publicly. Aaron described his experiences in negative ways, including how he would be negatively affected if his college decided to remove the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student organization:

I think it has to do with the school and it's support, like if they would completely get rid of the LGBT club. So I think for a college not to have that it shows a lot. It makes it uncomfortable, honestly if I were to go to a school and there wasn't really an LGBT club I would honestly feel uncomfortable now because it's like

what message are you sending to students. I mean you're not even celebrating LGBT month, like that's kind of disrespectful in a way. So I would feel like the school itself would be so closed minded and honestly I think that would change the environment that I would be around. It would be like there would be those situations where like someone is bashing someone and someone would see it but they would leave it alone. I feel like that would happen.

It should be noted, as confirmed by Aaron and his college administration, that the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club is fully recognized by the college and is in no danger of being disbanded. Aaron's negative forecasting of the potential ill-effects of the GLB student club's cancellation was interesting, as the presence of such clubs on community college campuses was discovered via this research to support the coming out and self-actualization of gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. Aaron's desire to maintain the GLB club as a means of supporting his coming out, clearly placed him in on the path toward self-actualization.

Community acceptance. This sub-theme refers to participants finding signs, symbols, and actions denoting acceptance and celebration of GLB people on campus. This included posters describing various GLB-themed events, notices banning discrimination based on sexual orientation, and community members acting positively towards the GLB student population.

In discussing what on-campus experiences supported her ability to come out publicly regarding her sexual orientation, Ashley began by focusing on her feeling that there was nothing to inhibit her in coming out. As she continued her monologue, she arrived at some important areas of support that she experienced at her college.

Interestingly, the positive campus experiences mentioned by Ashley were, in their absence, negative experiences for other participants:

I don't think there's anything inhibiting that would make me feel like that. I mean I walk into the school and we see our 'no hate' photos on the screens, we see our LGBT banner walking through the bridge, and the safe zone stickers, there's a constant reminder that you're safe here, that we don't care what kind of person you are, that you can talk to us. I think that for, I can't speak for every community college, but for my community college, community is a huge word in what this place is, community openness, acceptance, all the big words that just mean that we may not know you but we love anyways. Yeah no negative because it's just, it really is just you walk through any hallway and you'll see some form of acceptance.

The sub-themes that Ashley touched upon include the visible presence of other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, including signs and symbols of that community such as the GLB student club banner and safe zone stickers. These are important distinctions to make, as we have seen that the lack of these things on various community college campuses were listed as negative campus experiences and a hindrance to the coming out process for other participants. Similar to Aaron, Ashley's story about the positive nature of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community indicated that she may become self-actualized as a partial result of these experiences.

Trust in peer groups; faculty support. The two areas of trust in peer groups, and faculty support were interrelated, but distinct enough to warrant notation as their own sub-themes. Trust in peer groups referred to a participant's ability to find, maintain, and

place trust in groups of friends as a means to supporting the participants' coming out. Similarly, faculty support referred to participants finding allies among the colleges' faculty and staff.

When she was asked about what on-campus experiences supported her ability to be open and honest about her sexual orientation, Lily did not hesitate to inform the researcher of the positive experiences she had had in less than one semester on campus. While Lily only found the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group accidentally as she was searching for another student group, she immediately found friendships and formed bonds. Lily found that her professors and peers were the most important positive experiences:

Well in my case my professors, like I've been lucky enough for my professors to be very open minded. Well I don't really tell them who I am, well when you're introducing that's not the first thing you would say, but my teachers are very open minded if I feel like talking to them about anything, so I guess in terms of the support I receive from my professors that can be one positive aspects of my experience here. Also, the peers that I personally know, like my friends, like they're very supportive, you know. The new people I've met here are also very open minded to who I am.

Lily's positive campus experiences were shared by many of the participants in this study. It is very interesting that Lily's experiences corresponded with those of others, due to the fact that Lily was the youngest participant and had been at her community college for less than one full semester.

David appeared to be the participant with the most fully integrated sexual orientation identity. This was displayed in his general attitude about what on-campus experiences helped him to come out fully and publicly. David stated that he was going to be himself no matter what, and whatever happened at the community college would not necessarily have an outstanding effect on him. Still, David talked about his peer groups and trust as being the most positive influences on his openness regarding his sexual orientation:

I think it depends on the group of people I'm with, maybe because if I'm on a certain level, like a friendly group like oh they like the same stuff and I can easily just act myself. I don't want to say myself, because I act myself every day, but like they know I'm gay so I act like myself, but there's the other groups like and when I do like school work and all that stuff. I will still be myself but they don't know and they'll just stay not knowing because it's just school working in groups, it's not necessary information for them to know. I don't think there's anything that inhibits me from being out, but I think it's mainly my friends who are out that help me become out.

David touched on the issue of trust, another important positive campus experience sub-theme that was present in the stories of many other participants. Whether it is with faculty and staff or student peer groups, David and others noted that the level of trust they had with others on their campuses made it possible for them to be open and honest in divulging their sexual orientation.

The participants' stories, told in their own voices, clearly spoke to the fact that there were many sub-themes within the area of campus experiences on their community

college campuses, which impeded or supported them in coming out regarding their sexual orientation. These were experienced in various ways, but most notably in the major areas discussed in this section.

Negative campus experiences – coming out. This major thematic area referred to the experiences that participants had while on campus, which inhibited them in coming out regarding their sexual orientation. Although participants reported varying levels of being out on campus, there were three areas of experiences which negatively affected the participants' ability to come out while on campus. These sub-themes included feeling marginalized or alone, heterosexism and homophobia among faculty, and hostility.

Feeling marginalized or alone. This sub-theme referred to participants feeling as if they were the only gay, lesbian, or bisexual person on campus, and having difficulty finding friendship groups as a result. Participants also noted that they sometimes felt ostracized as a result of their sexual orientation.

Joseph, for example, discussed his feelings of being marginalized on his campus due to his sexual orientation. He indicated that he knew only one gay person on campus, and that was a friend of his from high school who was not out at all. He noted the following about his friend, Charlie:

I don't think he thought he was gay, I think he had the mentality, like, well if I let another guy, you know, *suck me off* then and I'm not doing anything to the guy then I'm not really gay, that sort of mentality. It's like 'I'm not gay, I just like having sex with other men.'

Joseph felt alone and unable to connect with others on his campus because there did not seem to be any out gay, lesbian, and bisexual people with whom he could create a

relationship. For Joseph, this lack of community was the biggest negative campus experience hindering his ability to come out at his community college.

Similar to Joseph, Carolyn also experienced a community college where she did not know many other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, and felt somewhat disconnected and marginalized. Carolyn reported seeing other women who she thought might be lesbian, but she was not comfortable approaching or talking to these women. In these types of situations, Joseph and Carolyn would have been unable to authenticate their identities as gay, lesbian, or bisexual people, which is normally achieved by creating relationships and building community with other GLB people.

Heterosexism and homophobia among faculty. This sub-theme referred to participants having experiences with faculty which negatively affected their ability to come out regarding their sexual orientation. These experiences of heterosexism and homophobia were sometimes outright fear of and disdain for the GLB population, but more often were exhibited in subtle ways.

The negative campus experience that seemed to be most prevalent for Carolyn was the issue of faculty and staff at the college being heterosexist and homophobic. Carolyn related this story about a friend who took a health class with an unhelpful faculty member:

Some health professor that one of my friends is taking, he's like really ignorant. I think he made a comment about the only way to get pregnant is through intercourse with a male or something, I don't know, he said something. He doesn't sound like the best professor.

Carolyn's lived experiences may initially have seemed less important or not directly related to the campus climate, but the main issue for her was the negative campus experience of feeling as if she could not talk about her sexual orientation on campus. In short, Carolyn was scared into silence and was therefore unable to connect with other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people on campus. Again, this lack of an available GLB community has left Carolyn unable to move toward self-actualization.

Xander also experienced problems related to faculty, and those problems left him feeling as if he could not come out on campus. Baker (1991) noted that some of the biggest problems on community college campuses included heterosexism and homophobia in course and textbook content, student services, peer support, library resources, and academic advisement. Baker, however, did not discuss these campus experiences as active problems in the classroom, as explained by Xander:

Okay, it surprises me that sometimes the topic of homosexuality comes up in some classes and while the professor is talking about this topic some students want to give their opinions and of course some of the times a student has like, you know, like the student tries to like take an approach of like just judgment, like oh it's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong. But you know, like the core of what they're saying is that but they want to not try to sound judgmental but they are. So I've seen that and it's like wish I could understand their opinion, but I don't know.

Xander found such homophobia and heterosexism in the classroom to be a very negative campus experience and a major impediment to his ability to come out on his campus. Xander's negative campus experience of heterosexism and homophobia has undoubtedly kept him from becoming fully self-actualized.

Hostility. Where heterosexism and homophobia were somewhat indirect negative experiences described by the participants, outright hostility toward them due to their sexual orientation was much more direct and impactful on participants. It should be noted that 44% of participants reported they had experienced some form of harassment or discrimination on campus, which is consistent with the findings of previous research (Eyermann & Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010).

Michael was the first person to express his interest in participating in the study. This may have been due to a number of factors, including Michael being significantly older and more mature than the average CUNY community college student. In his interview, Michael was very eager to relate his own story due to his desire to make his college more welcoming to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Where other participants talked more about a lack of understanding among college faculty and staff, or the inability to build a community with other gay, lesbian, and bisexual people on campus, Michael's experience was far more antagonistic.

Michael related the story of when he and other students on his campus were attending a meeting of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club, which occurred in a centrally located classroom space. To identify the classroom as a temporary meeting space and safe place for GLB and ally students to meet, they hung a rainbow flag outside the closed classroom door. Michael described how he and the other students at the meeting were victims of outright hostility toward them as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people:

I had an experience, I mean one of the things like when you're in a group you have to identify with the members, you identify with the cause you know, usually

I see people making fun of the [GLB] group that I go because one reason or another like most of the time, I mean we have the meetings during class schedules, you know, so it's in the classroom, it's not a private room, it's just a classroom and during other classes, and usually put a big [rainbow] flag on the door so everyone recognize the flag. And like I remember one time someone just dropped the flag and threw it in the garbage because we usually close the door over the flag and we totally felt scared. I mean the garbage can was just like a few steps from there in the hallway and they just put it in the garbage.

Michael's pain and fear were evident as he described someone taking down the GLB group's rainbow flag, an internationally known symbol of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights movement, and throwing it into the garbage. Michael first thought the flag might have fallen off the door, but he soon realized it could not have ended up in the trashcan down the hallway unless someone purposely took it down and threw it away. This incident is clearly a major reason why Michael considered his campus to be unsafe for GLB students. Michael would not have had his safety needs met, and would therefore not be able to move toward self-actualization.

A cross analysis of the participant interviews showed that the sub-theme of negative campus experiences which hindered the participants from coming out on campus, focused on a few main areas. First, one-third of the participants reported that feeling as if they were alone, or that they did not have a community of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students to which they could belong, was a strong deterrent to their ability to come out on campus. A negative campus experience also described by one-third of the participants was the presence of heterosexism and homophobia among the community

college faculty and staff. In this case, the participants described ambivalence toward, and a general lack of knowledge about, the GLB student population. Finally, 44% of participants experienced some form of outright hostility from others, a theme that is supported by research showing gay, lesbian, and bisexual students being twice as likely as heterosexual students to experience harassment and discrimination on campus.

Conversely, all of the participants reported that there were positive campus experiences that supported them in coming out publicly as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. These included all of the participants having personal connections with supportive campus faculty and staff and a community of other gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Trust and acceptance were two major points pervasive throughout the sub-theme of positive campus experiences, with 78% of participants noting their ability to come out being supported when they felt trust and acceptance from others. Additionally, 100% of the participants reported the existence of and participation in the campus' gay, lesbian, and bisexual student organization as a very positive campus experience. Some of the results from this research question appear in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Examples of Positive and Negative Campus Experiences that Affect Coming Out

Theme	Sub-Theme	Participant	Quote
Positive	Community Acceptance	Ashley	I mean I walk into the school and we see our ‘no hate’ photos on the screens, we see our LGBT banner walking through the bridge, and the safe zone stickers, there’s a constant reminder that you’re safe here.
Positive	Faculty Support	Lily	I’ve been lucky enough for my professors to be very open minded, if I feel like talking to them about anything. So I guess in terms of the support I receive from my professors that can be one positive aspect of my experience here.
Negative	Feeling Marginalized or Alone	Joseph	I didn’t know any other gay people; I always felt alone so I couldn’t be out.
Negative	Hostility	Michael	I see people making fun of the [GLB] group that I go because one reason or another. I mean we have the meetings during class schedules, you know, so it’s in the classroom, it’s not a private room.

Finding III: There are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student’s self-actualization.

Positive campus experiences – self-actualization. This major thematic area referred to the experiences that participants had while on campus, which supported their ability to become self-actualized. Each participant described very differently what

campus experiences reinforced or hindered their self-actualization. The sub-themes that arose in this major thematic area included academic success and the gay, lesbian, bisexual student club.

Academic success. This sub-theme referred to participants taking strength and pride in their overall academic achievement at their community college.

Meredith's description of educational opportunities as the on-campus experiences that mattered most in bolstering her level of self-actualization was intriguing, as this issue was in no way related to her sexual orientation or the basis of this study. Meredith noted that the time when she felt the most self-actualized was when she was in honor societies and working at internships:

I had internships, I did an internship at (an Ivy League) University and I got that through the community college Biology Department, it was an amazing experience, I was doing conference, I was in the biology honors program, French honors and everything.

This was fascinating information, as Meredith did not discuss any social or behavioral factors relating to her openness regarding her sexual orientation. According to Meredith, her self-actualizations seemed to be related only to her academic achievements on campus. Similarly, Xander described feeling self-actualized only in terms of his academic success and achievement of milestones; "at the end of semesters and when I got my grades and all that is when I feel accomplished and then I get excited to start the next semester," said Xander.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual student club. In his interview with the researcher, Aaron seemed jubilant when describing the on-campus experiences that affected his level of

self-actualization. Aaron was very excited to inform the researcher of his work with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club on his campus, and how being involved with the club forced him to step outside his comfort zone and grow as a gay man:

I'm going back to the LGBT club because it's been testing my skills since I'm like in this new position...when (the club president) had to step out and do something else so I had to teach the club, not teach, but I had to facilitate it. So I was a nervous wreck because I didn't really know what to do, so I planned out a lesson plan and I came in that day and... I was so nervous that it was going to be terrible, like I was going to mess this up, and (the club president) was going to be so pissed with me, but at the end of the day it was wonderful. Like everyone had a great time, everyone was still comfortable with talking about whatever the topic was about, or their questions that they wanted to ask and even they told (the club president like Aaron was pretty good the other day and I felt so proud of myself. I was like wow this is really amazing that I can stand here and talk to everyone and facilitate a club and still be able to have people like it and enjoy it. I guess some people had more respect for me, so that was my pride and joy moment.

Evidently, the gay, lesbian, bisexual student club at Aaron's community college created a powerful moment for him, which allowed him to grow as a person. Self-actualization includes making life choices that are not always safe or easy, but ones that lead to personal growth. This is clearly the case for Aaron in this situation.

Michael's description of the positive on-campus experiences that affected his level of self-actualization was very similar to Aaron's, and somewhat connected to Meredith's. Michael had previously attended another community college almost 10 years

ago, but left because he felt he was not ready to be in school. When he enrolled in his current community college two years ago, he found that his involvement in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group and specifically his ability to come out fully to his professors and classmates profoundly and positively affected his self-actualization:

I joined (the GLB student) group and found like the professors has inspired me to be like them, like sometimes I just practice like in class, I mean how would I come out to them, you know. So like to do things that would actually benefit both the gay and the straight community. I mean educate one, and another help them to overcome certain issues that they have internalized but it really is inspiring. I mean hopefully I'm going to graduate in the winter and I want to keep going to complete in a new school.

As Michael described the on-campus experiences that helped to increase his level of self-actualization, he had a wide grin on his face. It was evident that for Michael, his ability to be completely out on campus regarding his sexual orientation was the strongest determining factor of his high level of self-actualization.

Ashley was another participant who described her membership in the gay, lesbian, bisexual student club on her campus as an experience that supported her ability to be fully self-actualized. Much like Michael's experience, Ashley indicated that the self-actualization she experienced as a member of the club also had a positive effect on her self-actualization in other areas of her life:

I've been in that club for two semesters before this semester, this is my third semester in this club and the feeling between being a member of the club and being part of the leading board of the club has been such a huge feeling. I'm in

charge of getting people organized and getting people to sign in, starting discussions, e-mailing these people to tell them what's happening next week, helping to plan what's happening. I feel like it's a very big step in the direction that I want to be as far as helping my community, I think I kind of needed this to kind of push me to bring it out farther to help further out of my comfort zone.

As evidenced by her statements, Ashley was able to connect the positive campus experience of her membership and leadership role in the student club with her ability to become more self-actualized by pushing her out of her comfort zone to do helpful work in her community. It is a self-actualized person who makes choices leading to personal growth, and this is clearly what Ashley has experienced.

Three of the nine participants (34%) reported positive campus experiences related to their academic success, which increased their levels of self-actualization. Not surprisingly, 88% of participants reported that their experiences with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group on their campus had positive effects on their levels of self-actualization. Additionally all three of the participants who reported academic success as a factor in their self-actualization, also reported participation in the GLB student club adding to their self-actualization.

Negative campus experiences – self-actualization. Although most of the participants were readily able to describe campus experiences that positively affected their level of self-actualization, only one could verbalize campus experiences that had a negative impact on his self-actualization. Only one sub-theme, blocked access, arose from this major thematic area.

Blocked access. Michael described some undesirable encounters with his college's Student Life Office, in which he noted that his access to important information was blocked by gate-keepers. The Student Life Office is the administrative center of student clubs, organizations, programming, and diversity initiatives on most college campuses:

Most of the time I mean you go to another office it's like what are you doing here or what do you want, even the Student Life Office, because I used to go there you know. I remember the first time I went there like I went to ask about the club, didn't know the number, the phone number and they didn't know, they didn't have any information to give me even though they are the ones that manage the club. What I ended up doing was they gave me a piece of paper and say write there what you want to tell them and they put it in the mailbox.

Michael felt as if his growth as a gay person on his community college campus was blocked due to the staff members in the Student Life Office not being able or not wanting to connect him with the gay, lesbian, bisexual student club. During his interview, Michael repeated the details of this story, indicating that it was a significant event which negatively impacted his ability to self-actualize. Although Michael was the only participant who related information coded by the researcher as 'negative campus experiences – self-actualization,' the impact felt by Michael meant this was an important sub-theme in the area of negative campus experiences – self-actualization.

While there were no other specific participant stories about negative campus experiences asked about whether their level of openness and honesty regarding their sexual orientation on campus, seven of nine (78%) participants reported feeling lower

levels of self-actualization when they were less out about their sexual orientation on campus. Furthermore, these seven participants indicated that if they had to be in a situation where they could not be as out as they currently are, their self-actualization would suffer significantly.

Finding IV: There are six items that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students feel are missing from their community college campuses.

Campus policies, procedures and items GLB students want. A central theme of an advocacy/participatory research study should include a plan of action to better the lives of the members of the marginalized group who participated in the study. This plan of action resulted from the major thematic area of best practices for higher education practitioners at community colleges in order to best meet the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. The data used to answer this research question were separated into six areas that GLB students want on their community college campuses. The areas included training for faculty, staff, and counselors, GLB club, syllabus language, GLB curriculum, scholarships, and community outreach. The participants offered very pointed suggestions regarding this research questions, but did not elaborate extensively on their answers.

Training for faculty, staff, and counselors. Meredith and Michael both indicated that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campus would be best served by the college providing training on working with this population to faculty and staff. Meredith's comments focused largely on the college's mental health counselors, and suggested that counseling centers train their staff to be better equipped to counsel and appropriately assist gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Michael, on the other hand, discussed his belief that teaching faculty needed training on how to assist GLB students

in the classroom. Michael's belief was that, with specific training on this topic, teaching faculty would be better equipped to serve as mentors for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.

Scholarships. Ashley mentioned that an issue of great importance to her and other GLB students was the availability of scholarships specifically for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. While such local and national scholarships currently exist (Point Foundation, n.d.), training financial aid personnel would make them more accessible to GLB students.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual student club. As mentioned several times in this chapter, the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group played a significant role for the participants in best practices for their community colleges. Participants previously described the GLB student club as a positive influence in their ability to come out, as well as their levels of self-actualization. A cross analysis of the data for the purposes of this research question showed that 67% of the participants (Xander, David, Aaron, Michael, Ashley, and Lily) expressed their belief that all community college campuses should have a gay, lesbian, and bisexual student group for the benefit of these students. One-half of these participants mentioned that their level of self-actualization would be negatively impacted if the GLB student group was not available on their campus.

Syllabus language. The sub-theme regarding syllabus language was mentioned by two of the participants. Xander, a large part of whose interview focused on academics and what happens inside the classroom, suggested that all faculty be required to include on their syllabi language that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It should be noted that the City University of New York prohibits discrimination based on

sexual orientation at all of its colleges, schools, and programs. However, the fact that this was Xander's focus seemed accurate, in that during his interview he rarely discussed any issues not related to his academic achievement.

Community outreach. Ashley and Michael noted that they would be happier and more self-actualized if their community colleges offered opportunities to connect with local community-based organizations. Both Ashley and Michael noted that they would like to volunteer with gay, lesbian, and bisexual service organizations in order to have more of a connection between the GLB and community college populations.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual curriculum. GLB curriculum development was the final sub-theme in the area of best practices. Carolyn, Joseph, and Michael all indicated that the best thing their community college could do for them as GLB students would be to create and institute an academic curriculum about the history, lives, and experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. None of the three participants were willing or able to articulate specific examples of what such a curriculum would look like, but they all agreed that a Queer Studies major or minor program at their community colleges would be beneficial to them and other GLB students. Some examples of best practices for practitioners as discussed by the participants appear in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Examples of Items GLB Students Want on Their Campuses

Sub-Theme	Participant	Quote
Training for Faculty, Staff, Counselors	Michael	Also communicate, meaning if they help when they're able to communicate with LGBT Club I mean training among professors so they identify us LGBT because probably they can advocate more or serve as mentors.
GLB Student Club	Aaron	Just meeting people who are openly gay who I'm able to talk to, socialize, the whole shebang and it made me just feel so comfortable and it's what made me what I am today. I mean I wouldn't think that I was going to be the vice president of the LGBT club.
Syllabus Language	Xander	I had a professor once, in his syllabus he said that any student would not be discriminated on sex, gender, all of that. So I think that's also good. Like a student knows the professor's policy the first day of class through his syllabus knowing that his/her opinion will not affect her/his grade because the professor announced that no one will be discriminated.
GLB Curriculum	Joseph	It would have been great to encourage visibility with LGBT classes. You could have books only by queer authors and that's the focus of the class.
Scholarships and Community Outreach	Ashley	I think that they could use a little bit more information on scholarships that LGBT students could get, or ways that they could help in the community more, community outreach opportunities that the school could team up with the community centers to offer volunteer work or something like that. I know that as a scholarship recipient I have to do a certain amount of community service hours.

Summary of Results

The results of this study were discovered through in-depth interviews with nine self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students within the City University of New York. Although the researcher intended to triangulate the interview data with the use of focus groups, this was not possible due to the tremendous difficulty in getting students to participate. The research questions guided the coding of the data into six major themes and 18 sub-themes, and four major findings were discovered.

The four research questions included: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students.

The results of the study were discussed according to the four findings, as well as six major themes uncovered by the data. The six major themes included obstructive factors to coming out, positive campus experiences – coming out, negative campus experiences – coming out, positive campus experiences – self-actualization, negative campus experiences – self-actualization, and best practices. These results offer to higher education professionals a level of awareness and understanding about the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college student, and how their ability to be open and honest about their sexual orientation directly affected their self-actualization.

Furthermore, four major findings were uncovered as a result of the data analysis. The findings were as follows: *Finding I* – there are two factors that are obstructive to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in coming out regarding their sexual orientation. *Finding II* – there are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student’s ability to come out. *Finding III* – there are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student’s self-actualization. *Finding IV* – there are six items that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students feel are missing from their community college campuses.

Finding I: There are two factors that are obstructive to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in coming out regarding their sexual orientation. The results in this finding were as varied and individual as the participants themselves. However, the data clearly indicated two factors that were obstructive to the participants’ ability to come out. The first factor, home life was the area in which participants described different ways in that their living situations affected their ability to come out fully. Some of these items included not having a stable home, homelessness, religiosity of parents and family members, conservative ideology of parents and family members, parents and family members not understanding homosexuality or bisexuality, and parents and family members confusing sexual orientation with gender identity.

The second factor within the major theme of obstructive factors to coming out, was the issue of safety. Very few participants reported fearing for their physical safety, but many discussed situations when their emotional or psychological safety may have been in jeopardy. Some of the factors related to the participants’ description of feeling unsafe, included professional counselors at the college’s counseling center being unaware of how to work with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; the safety of the GLB student

club meeting space being questioned, the verbal harassment of a gay professor, and reports of campus security officers not being nice to GLB students. Students who question their safety on campus would not have their safety needs met, and would therefore be unable to become self-actualized.

Finding II: There are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's ability to come out. Within this finding, there were seven positive and negative experiences common among the participants. First was involvement in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club on their campus. Some participants held leadership roles in the GLB student club, others regularly attended meetings and programs, and still others only found the clubs accidentally. Regardless of the means by which the participants got involved with the GLB student club, the involvement clearly had a positive impact on their ability to come out. A second experience that emerged in this area was the ability of participants to trust their peers on campus. Many participants noted that they were able to come out when their peer groups were supportive of them.

Additional positive experiences in this finding were community acceptance, and faculty support. Similar to involvement in the GLB student club, the experience of community acceptance means that the participants have an overall feeling of being acknowledged and appreciated as gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on the community college campus, which extended to all facets of the campus. Faculty support, an experience expressed by many of the participants, encompassed the participants experiencing a general feeling of advocacy for the GLB student population among the campus faculty members.

Negative campus experiences described by participants included feeling marginalized or alone, heterosexism and homophobia among faculty, and hostility. Participants who felt marginalized or alone described experiences when they felt as if they were the only gay, lesbian, or bisexual student on campus. This meant that the participants could not find a connection with others, and did not have a community to which they could belong. Heterosexism and homophobia among faculty was described by participants as instances when faculty members in the classroom would either assume everyone in the class was heterosexual, or say things that indicated a fear or misunderstanding of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Open hostility experienced by the participants was not a normal occurrence. Nonetheless, participants did describe instances of GLB signs and symbols being destroyed, or hearing words like “faggot” used to insult others.

Finding III: There are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student’s self-actualization. Within this finding, participants described two experiences that served to increase their levels of self-actualization. The first, academic success, was self-explanatory and was characterized by participants achieving good grades, working to the best of their ability, and having broad success in the classroom. The second positive experience was the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club. This item has appeared several times in the results of this study, and is clearly a very important outcome. In short, almost all of the participants described the presence of and their participation in these clubs as positive factors in their self-actualization.

Participants had a very difficult time describing negative campus experiences that affected their self-actualization, perhaps due to an inability to connect negative

experiences with their ability to self-actualize. Accordingly, only one experience, blocked access, emerged in this area. Blocked access referred to a participants' inability to achieve their goals due to the action or inaction of others. This might not have been discovered as an experience worth exploring, but the effect of the blocked access on the participant was too compelling to ignore.

Finding IV: There are six items that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students feel are missing from their community college campuses. This finding refers to six policies, practices, and items that participants felt could be improved on their campuses. Once more, the issue of gay, lesbian, and bisexual student clubs arose as something that the vast majority of the participants want and need on their campuses. Training for faculty, staff, and mental health counselors was another item that emerged, in which participants discussed the need for their community college personnel to be trained on issues relating to GLB students, so that the personnel would be better equipped to work with these students.

Other items that emerged from this finding included a curriculum focused on the gay, lesbian, and bisexual person. This type of curriculum is also known as Queer Studies, and already exists at many colleges and universities in the United States. The mandatory inclusion of language prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation on all syllabi was another needed practice described by participants. Finally, the connected items of scholarships and community outreach surfaced in the analysis of the data. Participants mentioned wanting to be informed of scholarships available to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students as a way for community college personnel to best serve them. Participants also wanted their community colleges to provide outreach

opportunities so GLB students could create partnerships with community based organizations serving the local gay, lesbian, and bisexual population.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation, what factors help or hinder them in doing so, and how their self-actualization is affected by their ability or inability to come out. This study uses Maslow's theories of human motivation (1943) and self-actualization (1965) as a primary theoretical lens, and includes two stage theories of identity development in order to understand how community college students may come to understand their identities as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. These two theories are Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994). This study is intended to provide best practices in serving these students to community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and is thus meant to benefit gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students locally and nationally. Primary information for this study was gathered by performing in-depth interviews with nine self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who attended one of the community colleges in the City University of New York system.

While gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at four-year colleges and universities have been the subject of many scholarly works (Evans & Broido, 1999; Eyermann & Rankin, 2003; Rankin, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo, 2002), very few studies about this population at community colleges have been published (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005;

Leider, 2000). The startling lack of research dealing with gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students clearly points to the need for studies such as this. The completion of this study addresses the lack of published research about this population, and the findings provide best practice suggestion to ensure that practitioners are meeting the needs of these students. Furthermore, this study addresses the concerns about how a negative campus climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students (Reason & Rankin, 2006) keeps them from reaching their full potential. This is achieved by presenting the best practices that higher education professionals can employ in order to serve this student population.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine in greater detail the findings from this study presented in Chapter 4 as they relate to the work of higher education practitioners with gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. The findings point to some very clear examples of how community colleges can meet the needs of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student population. Implications of these findings are discussed as a vehicle to help practitioners provide more inclusive community college settings where GLB students can self-actualize and realize their full potentials.

Meeting the needs of these students will lead to a population that can feel safe and comfortable coming out on campus, which will in turn lead to a population that is well adjusted and happy. As a practitioner with over 25 years of experience, the researcher would argue that higher education professionals have an unqualified duty to ensure that all students are able to achieve their highest potential, and the findings of this research will help practitioners to fulfill this duty. Limitations of this study which may have

affected the data or outcomes will be discussed later in this chapter, as will recommendations for future research based on these findings.

Implications of Findings

Five major implications of the findings are presented below in terms of the literature surrounding gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students, as well as professional practice opportunities for community college administrators, faculty, and staff.

Implication 1: The findings from this study provide a necessary addition to the body of empirical research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. As noted throughout this study, very few studies about the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population at community colleges have been published (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000). This study will begin the process of meeting the need for literature on this population and their experiences at community colleges. As discussed later in the section regarding recommendations for future research, more empirical evidence is required to ensure that practitioners are doing everything possible to ensure the campus climate for GLB community college students is a positive one. This would include research reviewing the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of heterosexual community college students, faculty, and staff. Such research would provide additional information necessary in ensuring the GLB population is well served by the community colleges they attend. Finally, quantitative research studies, in addition to qualitative ones, should be conducted to ensure that the research base surrounding this population is as broad and comprehensive as possible.

Implication 2: Higher education practitioners should examine the extent to which the campus environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students is welcoming. The majority of the participants in this study indicated that their community college's campus climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students was positive, or marginal at the very least. Additionally, 44% of participants reported they had experienced some form of harassment or discrimination on campus, which is consistent with the findings of previous research (Eyermann & Sanlo, 2002; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). Important to note is that the previous studies mentioned here did not specifically look at community college students as this study does.

Examining the documents, practices, and language used by community colleges is an important part of this implication. Creating an environment of acceptance and safety is an issue that spans the life of the student. It starts before potential students apply for admission, with a clear mission statement and antidiscrimination policy printed on all admission documents and electronic media. Including in the college's mission statement and antidiscrimination policy that the campus is a welcoming environment where diversity is celebrated and intolerance rejected would help all applicants to feel welcome before they even step onto campus.

However, general language promoting diversity and prohibiting discrimination does not go far enough. Practitioners need to examine whether these documents and other media should include language specifically welcoming gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, and prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Windmeyer (2006) found that only 15% of college and universities in the United States currently employ

such specific language in their antidiscrimination policies, so there is clearly room for improvement in this area if practitioners find it to be necessary.

Implication 3: Higher education practitioners should examine whether mandatory training programs for community college faculty, staff, and administrators are appropriate. The community college campus cannot truly be safe and welcoming if the faculty, staff, and administrators are not aware of the concerns and experiences of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student population, or if these employees are not comfortable working with this segment of the student body. Accordingly, the second implication of this study's findings is that practitioners should examine whether training designed to familiarize faculty, staff, and administrators with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student population and their on-campus needs is appropriate.

While deciding whether mandatory training programs such as this are appropriate, it is important to note that such training programs are currently done on college and university campuses nationwide. In such cases, all employees are required to complete in-person or online training on topics including sexual assault and harassment, workplace violence, and Title IX. Accordingly, if practitioners deem this a worthy venture, it would be very easy to include training materials relating to the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student experience. Providing such training to college faculty, staff, and administrators is supported in research done by Horne et al. (2004).

Implication 4: Higher education practitioners should review the existence of and need for programs and services geared toward the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population at community colleges. Two-thirds of the participants in this study expressed their belief that access to and involvement with a gay, lesbian, and bisexual

student club is necessary to these students being able to find a community of their own on campus. Teman and Lahman (2010) noted that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who were involved with their student club were better leaders and were happier with their college experience. Furthermore, Leck (1998) described the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club on the community college campus as an oasis for students who likely live at home and have no other connection to a community of other students like them. Thus, an implication of this study is that all community college practitioners should assess the current status of such a club on their campuses, and determine what, if anything can be done to change or improve it. Additional programs and services for GLB students that can be assessed include counseling services, scholarship and financial aid services, and internship availability.

Implication 5: Higher education practitioners should examine the appropriateness of a community college curriculum focusing on the history, lives, and experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. An implication that arose from this study includes the formation and implementation of an academic program that concentrates on the overall gay, lesbian, and bisexual experience. These programs, also known as Queer Theory or Queer Studies (Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004), provide students with an academic major or minor and already exist in many four-year colleges and universities across the United States. However, such programs are scarce at the community college level, with most of them being in California. One-third of the participants in this study agreed that a Queer Studies major or minor at their community college would be very popular. Furthermore, such programs would likely benefit the gay,

lesbian, and bisexual students in that they would provide a rare educational opportunity for them as community college students.

Consistency of findings with the theoretical framework of the study. The results and findings from this study are consistent with the theoretical frameworks upon which this study is based. Participants noted throughout the study that their highest levels of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1965) occurred at times when they made choices that were difficult and caused personal growth, rather than choices that were safe, as well as timed when all of their other needs in Maslow's hierarchy had been met. Furthermore, analysis of the participants' responses indicated that those who described themselves at their highest levels of self-actualization, also described themselves in the more advanced stages of Cass's (1979) model and D'Augelli's (1994) processes. Thus, participants whose sexual orientation identity was most integrated and synthesized with their lives described themselves to be more self-actualized than their counterparts whose sexual orientation identity was less integrated into the whole self.

Limitations

Lack of generalizability. Although a small sample size is not unusual for qualitative studies such as this (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), such a small sample size means the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. Thus, the findings from this study are unique to the community colleges within the City University of New York. With a community college population of over 98,000 students, the researcher expected to be able to recruit 15 participants with relative ease. The researcher also thought the odds of recruiting participants would be greatly increased due to the \$50 gift card potential participants were offered to participate. In reality, it took four months,

several emails and telephone calls to campus administrators, and trips to several of the community college just to recruit the nine students who ultimately participated in the study.

Possible biases of community college administrators. Additional problems arose with administrators on some of the campuses being unwilling or unable to forward the introduction letter to their students. As a result of this lack of involvement by some campus administrators, the nine participants came from only four of the seven community colleges in the CUNY system.

Outsider positionality of researcher. The researcher suspects that his outsider positionality affected the ability of participants to be completely truthful in sharing their lived experiences at GLB community college students. Participants may have felt that they could not fully trust a high-level administrator in the CUNY system, and therefore may have been less than forthcoming with criticisms regarding their experiences as CUNY students.

Lack of diversity of thought among participants. While the participants were representative of the larger CUNY community college population in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity, a major weakness of this study is the fact that all of the participants had some connection to the gay, lesbian, bisexual student group on campus, so all were at least partially out on campus regarding their sexual orientation. The data would have been richer and might have uncovered additional information if some of the participants were not out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or had no prior relationship with the larger gay, lesbian, and bisexual community on campus.

Absence of triangulation of data. A major issue that likely affected the results of the study was the fact that there was only one source of data. The original research proposal included focus groups as a second means of data collection, which would have allowed for triangulation of the data. As explained above, the researcher had significant difficulty recruiting nine participants for the in-depth interviews. As a result, it was not possible to recruit additional students to participate in one or more focus groups. As a secondary means to triangulate the data, the researcher planned to observe the participants on their campuses. This, too, was unsuccessful, as the majority of the participants requested that the researcher not meet them on their campuses, but in other locations.

Researcher bias. Due to the facts that the researcher is an out, gay man whose sexual orientation has been fully synthesized with his identity for 30 years, and that he is a college administrator with more than 25 years of experience on college campuses, there is the possibility of research bias affecting the results. In conducting all of the interviews, analyzing the data, and presenting the findings, it is possible the researcher may have unintentionally inserted his own prejudices and biases into the study and the results. Additionally, because the researcher was unable to triangulate multiple sources of data, trustworthiness of participant responses must be viewed with caution. This is particularly relevant to questions of negative campus climate.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research. Recommendations for future research that would add to the literature surrounding gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges include replicating this qualitative study at community colleges in

large, metropolitan areas so that the results can be compared for similarities and differences based on locations. Furthermore, the literature could benefit from a replication of this study at suburban and rural community colleges where the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are likely to be far more isolated and marginalized, and therefore less out on campus and less self-actualized.

Another recommendation for future research would be a large-scale, national study of community college students, faculty, and staff, regardless of sexual orientation. Rankin et al. (2010) conducted a mixed-methods study of over 5,000 gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at colleges and universities across the country. The focus of Rankin et al. was to understand the campus climate for these students, and is considered the most comprehensive study of its kind. However, a new mixed-methods study could adapt Rankin et al.'s survey instrument to gather data related to the attitudes and beliefs heterosexual students, faculty, and staff at community colleges have regarding the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population. Such a study could lead to better recommendations on how practitioners can improve the campus climate.

Recommendations for practitioners. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual students must experience a safe and welcoming environment throughout the student lifecycle, from application through graduation and beyond. Community college advertisements and application materials should include antidiscrimination policies and language that is specifically inclusive of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. Most colleges require new students to attend an on-campus orientation designed to acclimate them to the campus, as well as lay out academic and behavioral expectations. During this orientation, all new students should be instructed on the fact that the campus is a welcoming

community where discrimination based on sexual orientation is not permitted. This is also a good time for current students, faculty, and staff who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual to be introduced to the new students. Making this positive connection with other gay, lesbian, and bisexual campus community members would certainly make the experience more welcoming to new gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.

Finally, when the students begin their classes and start to become acquainted with the campus community, another opportunity arises to remind all community members that it is a safe and welcoming environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. At this time, all college publications and electronic media should include statements that specifically welcome, and prohibit discrimination against, all forms of diversity, including those based on sexual orientation. Such statements should also include reporting instructions for students to follow if they experience any discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Another means by which this can happen is for the college to ensure that such welcoming, antidiscrimination, and reporting statements appear on all class syllabi. Doing so would have the effect of gay, lesbian and bisexual students having faith that their classroom experience will be welcoming and safe, and that they know what to do if they experience any form of discrimination.

Other recommendations for practitioners include ensuring that community college faculty, staff, administrators, and counselors are trained on the unique history, experiences, and needs of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual population on campus. This study showed that there may be individuals or institutional policies and procedures that, whether intentionally or not, may block students' access to needed programs and services. Training such as this would assuredly help to control for and alleviate these

blocking behaviors. A third recommendation is that community colleges guarantee the existence of and proper support for programs and services for the GLB community on campus. This would include providing funding, manpower, and administrative support for the GLB student club and associated programs and services. Additionally, community colleges must consider expanding their curricula to include Queer Studies majors and minors, as such programs of study would help the campus to become a more open environment and may lead others to conduct research with the GLB population at community colleges.

Conclusion

While gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at four-year colleges and universities have been the subject of many scholarly works (Evans & Broido, 1999; Eyermann & Rankin, 2003; Rankin, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo, 2002), very few studies about this population at community colleges have been published (Baker, 1991; Ivory, 2005; Leider, 2000). This startling lack of research dealing with gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students clearly points to the need for studies such as this. The research base with gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students is wide, but no prior studies described the experiences of these students at the community college level. This dearth of necessary information creates a situation where gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges are not fully understood, appreciated, or served.

The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on community college campuses come out regarding their sexual orientation and how their self-actualization is affected, using Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943, 1965) as the main theoretical lens. The intent of this study is to

provide best practices in serving these students to community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and is therefore meant to benefit gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students.

To gain insight into the impact of the on-campus experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, this study examines the lives of students attending community colleges through the critical lens of Maslow's theory of human motivation and self-actualization, Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation, and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. The primary theory for this study is Maslow's theory of human motivation (1943), which offers insight into the extent to which gay students exist in environments where they can engage in the process of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1965). Next, the stage theories of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development; Cass's theory of homosexual identity formation (1979), and D'Augelli's model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development (1994), are reviewed in order to make the connection between self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1965) and coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. While Bilodeau and Renn (2005) reported that such stage theories of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development are flawed due to small sample size and samples usually consisting mostly of men, they nonetheless provide a valuable theoretical base to this study.

A topical analysis of important research surrounding the issues and experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on college and university campuses is discussed. The topic of life on college campuses for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students includes works by Rankin (2003; 2008), and Rankin and Reason (2008). Reviews of Renn (2007), Teman and Lahman (2010), and Horne et al. (2004) provide a background for the topic of

student leadership and its impact on self-actualization, while Eyermann and Sanlo (2002) and Renn (2010) are reviewed to demonstrate gaps in the literature. The topic regarding the role of faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education includes works by D'Augelli and Grossman (2006), Diamond (2003), Rankin (2006), and Roper (2005). Leck (1992) and Ottenritter (1998) provide context in the topic of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people at commuter and community colleges, while reviews of Baker (1991), Leider (2000), and Ivory (2005) comprise the topic of seminal works about gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students.

Reviews of the relevant literature provide evidence that there is an urgent need for empirical research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges. Researchers such as Ivory (2005), Leck (1998), Leider (2000), Ottenritter (1998), Rankin (2006), Rankin et al. (2010), and Renn (2010) have expressed the need for additional scholarly research on the status and experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college students. While the literature surrounding this population on four-year college and university campuses is becoming more abundant each year, gay, lesbian, and bisexual students at community colleges have been the main subject of no more than ten scholarly publications in the past twenty years.

The context of this study is six of the seven community colleges in the City University of New York System. The research participants are a purposeful sample of nine gay, lesbian, and bisexual students from these colleges. The data collection instruments consist of an introduction letter asking college administrators to help identify potential participants, a letter of introduction from the researcher to the potential participants, an informed consent document, and a list of semi-structured interview

questions. Interviews with participants are recorded and transcribed, and then the researcher performed three cycles of coding which ultimately grouped the data into six major themes and 18 sub-themes from an original set of 158 codes.

The study's research questions guide the coding of the data into six major themes and 18 sub-themes. The four research questions include: (a) What factors inhibit GLB community college students from coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (b) What on-campus experiences impede or support GLB community college students in coming out publicly regarding their sexual orientation; (c) What on-campus experiences reinforce or hinder the potential self-actualization of GLB community college students; and (d) What best practices can higher education practitioners use to address the needs of GLB community college students.

The results of the study are discussed according to the four findings that arose from the data: there are two factors that are obstructive to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in coming out regarding their sexual orientation; there are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's ability to come out; there are positive and negative campus experiences that affect a student's self-actualization; and, there are six items that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students feel are missing from their community college campuses. The results are further evaluated according to six major themes uncovered by the data: obstructive factors to coming out, positive campus experiences – coming out, negative campus experiences – coming out, positive campus experiences – self-actualization, negative campus experiences – self-actualization, and best practices. These results offer to higher education professionals a level of awareness and understanding about the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community college student, and how

their ability to be open and honest about their sexual orientation directly affects their self-actualization.

Obstructive factors to coming out. The results in this major theme are as varied and individual as the participants themselves. However, the data clearly indicates two sub-themes into which the participants' lived experiences fall. The sub-theme of home life was the area in which participants describe different factors of their living situations that affect their ability to come out fully. Some of these factors include not having a stable home, homelessness, religiosity of parents and family members, conservative ideology of parents and family members, parents and family members not understanding homosexuality or bisexuality, and parents and family members confusing sexual orientation with gender identity.

Another sub-theme within the major theme of obstructive factors to coming out, is the issue of safety. Very few participants report fearing for their physical safety, but many discuss situations when their emotional or psychological safety may be in jeopardy. Some of the factors related to the participants' description of feeling unsafe, include professional counselors at the college's counseling center being unaware of how to work with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; the safety of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club meeting space being questioned, the verbal harassment of a gay professor, and reports of campus security officers not being nice to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.

Positive campus experiences – coming out. Within this major theme, four sub-themes are prevalent among the participants. The sub-theme that appears most often during the participant interviews is involvement in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student

club on campus. Some participants hold leadership roles in this club, others regularly attend meetings and programs, and still others report that they only found the club accidentally. Regardless of the means by which the participants got involved with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club, the involvement clearly has a positive impact on their ability to come out. A second sub-theme that emerges in this area is the ability of participants to trust their peers on campus. Many participants note that they are able to come out when their peer groups are supportive of them.

Two additional sub-themes discovered in the major theme of positive campus experiences – coming out, are identified as community acceptance and faculty support. Similar to involvement in the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club, the sub-theme of community acceptance means that the participants have an overall feeling of being acknowledged and appreciated as gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on the community college campus, which extends to all facets of the campus. Faculty support, a sub-theme expressed by many of the participants, encompasses the participants experiencing a general feeling of advocacy for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student population among the campus faculty members.

Negative campus experiences – coming out. Within this major theme, the participants describe three sub-themes that inhibit their ability to come out on campus. These sub-themes include feeling marginalized or alone, heterosexism and homophobia among faculty, and hostility. Participants who feel marginalized or alone describe experiences when they feel as if they were the only gay, lesbian, or bisexual student on campus. This means that the participants could not find a connection with others, and do not have a community to which they could belong. Participants describe heterosexism

and homophobia among faculty as instances when faculty members in the classroom would either assume everyone in the class was heterosexual, or say things that indicated a fear or misunderstanding of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Open hostility experienced by the participants is not a normal occurrence. Nonetheless, participants describe instances of gay, lesbian, and bisexual signs and symbols being destroyed, or hearing words like ‘faggot’ used to insult others.

Positive campus experiences – self-actualization. Within this major theme, participants describe two sub-themes that serve to increase their levels of self-actualization. The first sub-theme, academic success, is self-explanatory and is characterized by participants achieving good grades, working to the best of their ability, and having broad success in the classroom. The second sub-theme within the major theme of ‘positive campus experiences – self-actualization, is the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student club. This sub-theme appears several times in the results of this study, and is clearly a very important outcome. In short, almost all of the participants describe the presence of and their participation in these clubs as positive influences on their ability to become self-actualized.

Negative campus experiences – self-actualization. This theme is by far the most difficult for participants to describe, perhaps due to their inability to connect negative experiences on campus with their ability to self-actualize. Accordingly, only one sub-theme, blocked access, emerges in this area. Blocked access refers to a participant’s inability to achieve his or her goals due to the action or inaction of others. This may not be a sub-theme worth exploring in-depth, but the effect of the blocked access on the participant describing it is too compelling to ignore.

Best practices. This major theme refers to the policies and practices that higher education administrators can employ in order to meet the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Under this theme emerge six sub-themes, the largest set of sub-themes in this study. Once more, the sub-theme of gay, lesbian, and bisexual student clubs arises as something that the vast majority of the participants want and need on their campuses. Training for faculty, staff, and mental health counselors is another sub-theme that emerges. In this sub-theme, participants discuss the need for their community college personnel to be trained on issues relating to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, so that the personnel are better equipped to work with these students.

Other sub-themes under the major theme of best practices include a curriculum focused on the gay, lesbian, and bisexual person. This type of curriculum is also known as Queer Theory or Queer Studies (Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004), and already exists at many colleges and universities in the United States. Such a curriculum, however, is very scarce at the community college level. The mandatory inclusion of language prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation on all syllabi is another sub-theme participants describe. Finally, sub-themes of scholarship and community outreach surface in the analysis of the data. Participants mention wanting to be informed of scholarships available to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students as a way for community college personnel to best serve them. Participants also want their community colleges to provide outreach opportunities so that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students can create partnerships with community based organizations serving the local gay, lesbian, and bisexual population.

Rachel Maddow, openly gay American political commentator, television show host, and doctor of philosophy, noted that “the single best thing about coming out of the

closet is that nobody can insult you by telling you what you've just told them” (Michaels, 2008). It is the sincere hope of this researcher that this study will lead to a world where all community college students can come out as a means to self-actualization and not worry about being insulted for living up to their true potential.

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Appendix A

Sample Introduction Letter to College Administrators

Dear Vice President (or Director of Student Life):

As you may know, I am not only the Vice President for Student Affairs at Queens College, but I am also a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership program in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College, working under the direction of my dissertation chair Dr. Claudia L. Edwards ([email address withheld]). I am also an out, gay man, which is important information for you to know as I request your assistance.

The purpose of my dissertation research is to ascertain and understand the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) students at the community college level. As you are likely to be familiar with such students due to your position on campus, I am asking for your assistance in identifying a few students who may be interested in participating in such a study.

The research will consist of voice-recorded interviews with the students, and every possible measure will be taken to protect their confidentiality. For example, participants' real names will be substituted for a pseudonym, and they will have the option of a telephone interview rather than a face-to-face interview. The recordings and collected data will be maintained in locked and password protected computer files. Of course, this study is fully approved by the St. John Fisher College and CUNY IRB boards (proof of approval is available upon request).

If you are able to assist me in identifying students to be potential participants in this study, I ask that you forward the attached introduction letter to any GLB student groups. If you have any questions or concerns regarding my request, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. Thank you very much for your assistance with this request; I look forward to hearing from you and your students soon.

Sincerely,
Adam L. Rockman
Doctoral Candidate
Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education, St. John Fisher College

[telephone number and email address withheld]

Appendix B

Sample Introduction Letter to Potential Participants

Dear Student:

My name is Adam Rockman, I am a senior administrator in the CUNY system, and I have been an out, gay man for nearly 30 years. I am also a candidate for a doctoral degree in the St. John Fisher College Ed.D. program in Executive Leadership. My dissertation research explores the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) community college students, what on-campus factors may impede or support their ability to come out publicly regarding their sexual orientation, as well as aims to discover best practices that community college administrators can use to address the needs of GLB students. Your input as a GLB community college student is highly valued and needed, and I very much appreciate your potential participation. I will ask for approximately two hours of your time, during which I will interview you regarding your experiences on campus. Your participation and the information you share with me will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and your name will never be associated with the information we discuss. In order to thank you for your participation, upon completion of the interview you will receive a \$50 gift card.

If you freely choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign an Informed Consent document. Your participation in the study will consist of an interview that should take no more than two hours to complete. We will schedule the interview at a date, time, and location that are convenient for you. If you are interested in participating and you so desire, I can send you some of the initial questions in advance of the interview.

As I fully understand the sensitivity surrounding sexual attraction and orientation, as well as personal privacy, your participation in this study will remain completely confidential. I am the only person who will know your identity, and your name and personally identifying information will never be associated with the information you share during your interview. Furthermore, you will have the option of conducting a telephone interview rather than face-to-face if you desire. Participation in this study is voluntary and not obligatory in any way, and you may choose to end your participation at any time. Your decision to participate or not participate will have no direct effect on you as a CUNY student. Of course, this study is fully approved by the CUNY IRB and the St. John Fisher College IRB.

If you have questions or wish to express your interest in participating in this study, please contact me at [email] or [telephone]. When we first speak, I will ask you some demographic questions to determine if your participation in the study is appropriate.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Adam L. Rockman

Appendix C

Sample Informed Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Project Title: Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students on Community College Campuses: Coming-Out and Self-Actualization

Principal Investigator:

Adam L. Rockman



Site where study is to be conducted:



Introduction/Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is conducted under the direction of Adam Rockman, doctoral candidate in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College, and Queens College Vice President for Student Affairs. The purpose of this research study is to assess and understand the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) students at community colleges. This investigation seeks to determine what on-campus experiences of GLB students may impede or support their ability to come out publicly. Furthermore, this study aims to discover best practices that community college administrators can use to address the needs of GLB students. The results of this study may help to discover best practices that community college administrators can use to address the needs of GLB students. An audio recording of your participation will be made so the information can be analyzed.

Procedures: Approximately 10 - 15 individuals are expected to participate in this study. Each subject will participate in one interview. The interviews will be guided, open-ended conversations, not formal question and answer sessions. During the interview, you will be asked to discuss what on-campus factors may have impeded or supported your ability to come out or not come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and

what administrators can do to meet the needs of GLB students. The time commitment of each participant is expected to be two hours or less. Each interview will take place in a private room at the community college where the subject is enrolled, in the office of the Principal Investigator, or at another private location as requested by the subject.

Possible Discomforts and Risks: Your participation in this study may involve feeling uncomfortable or experiencing emotional distress or discomfort when answering some of the interview questions, but this risk is believed to be minimal. To minimize this risk, you may choose to not answer any question, and you may end the interview at any time. If you experience emotional distress or discomfort as a result of this study, a list of free and confidential services will be made available by the Principle Investigator at your request.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits. However, participating in the study may help college administrators to better understand and assist future GLB students at community colleges.

Alternatives: There are no alternatives to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to leave the study, please contact the principal investigator, Adam Rockman, to inform him of your decision.

Financial Considerations: Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. For your participation in this study you will receive a \$50.00 gift card at the conclusion of the study.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality is of utmost importance. This research involves making digital recordings of the interviews to provide a complete record of our interviews. To help protect confidentiality, your interview recordings, transcripts, and related documents will be coded with a pseudonym. These documents will be kept separately from the personal information collected on this informed consent form. Only the Principal Investigator will be able to link the research materials to a specific person. The consent forms will be kept in an unmarked file in a locked file cabinet that only the Principal Investigator has access to. All digital recordings and the related transcripts will be kept on a locked and password protected computer accessible only to the Principal Investigator, and will not include any identifying personal information. Only the Principal Investigator and others contracted by the Principal Investigator and who have signed a confidentiality agreement will have access to the digital recordings, and the recordings will be destroyed in December of 2015. Your real name and identity will never be used in any published work based on this research. Your information may be shared with appropriate representatives of your college or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger, or if we are required to do so by law.

Contact Questions/Persons: If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Adam L. Rockman, [REDACTED]. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact [REDACTED], Office of Regulatory Compliance, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board Office, [REDACTED].

Statement of Consent:

“I have read the above description of this research and I understand it. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions that I may have will also be answered by the principal investigator of the research study. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

By signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights to which I would otherwise be entitled. I will be given a copy of this statement.”

Printed Name of Signed Subject	Signature of Subject	Date
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Printed Name of Signed Person Explaining Consent Form	Signature of Person Explaining Consent Form	Date
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Printed Name of Signed Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date
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Appendix D

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself (age, sexual orientation/attraction/identity, gender identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, living situation, marital status, children, religion, employment status, etc.).
2. What interested you about this study?
 - a. What made you want to participate in this study?
3. What does it mean to you to be a GLB student at a community college?
 - a. Do you anticipate this might differ from being a GLB student at a four-year college?
 - i. If so, how?
4. Has your identity as a GLB student affected your role as a community college student?
 - a. If so, how?
5. Has your identity as a GLB student not affected your role as a community college student?
 - a. If so, how?
6. Describe your college's campus climate, or overall attitude toward GLB students.
 - a. What have been your experiences on campus that lead you to feeling this way about the climate on your campus?

- b. What have you heard others say and feel about your college's campus climate toward GLB students?
 - i. From whom did you hear this?
 - c. Have you ever considered leaving your college due to the climate for GLB students?
 - i. If so, why did you stay?
7. 'Outness' refers to one's disclosure and visible comfort with their identification as GLB to others. How would you describe your level of 'outness' on campus?
- a. Why do you describe your level of 'outness' in this way?
8. What does being "out" on campus mean to you?
- a. What factors influence when you come out to others or not?
9. Studies show that GLB students experience harassment and discrimination at higher rates than non-GLB students. Please describe any harassment or discrimination you experienced on your college campus.
- a. What were the circumstances surrounding this harassment or discrimination?
 - b. Where did this happen?
 - c. In that moment, did anyone speak up to challenge the harassment or discrimination?
 - d. Did you formally or informally report the harassment or discrimination to anyone? If so, to whom?
 - e. What was the outcome of the report?
10. How many GLB people do you know on campus, and how many are out?

- a. Why do you think they choose to be out or not out?
 - b. How do you think are they treated on campus? By students? By faculty?
By staff?
11. How safe do you feel as a GLB student on campus?
12. How respected do you feel as a GLB student on campus?
13. Do you know of any GLB faculty or administrators on campus?
- a. If so, are you out to them?
 - b. Have you used them for support and/or guidance?
14. What specific factors or characteristics of your college affect how out you are on campus?
- a. Describe any on-campus factors or characteristics that support you in being out.
 - b. Describe any on-campus factors or characteristics that inhibit you from being more out.
15. Self-actualization is often described as a person's ability to achieve his or her full potential (Gleitman, Fridlund, & Reisberg, 2004). With this in mind, how does your current level of 'outness' on your campus relate to your level of self-actualization?
- a. If your level of 'outness' on campus were to change (if you decide to be more or less out), how do you think this would affect your level of self-actualization?
16. Describe a time when you felt fully who you are, valued and respected in your life, and you were able to reach your full potential.

- a. How often do you feel this way on campus?
 - b. When do you feel this way on campus?
 - c. What factors contribute to you feeling this way on campus?
17. Are there campus offices or programs that positively affect you as GLB student?
- a. How do they contribute to your self-actualization as a GLB student?
18. Are there campus offices or programs that negatively affect you as GLB student?
- a. How do they contribute to your self-actualization as a GLB student?
19. What can faculty, staff, and administrators at your college do to better meet your needs and expectations as a GLB student?
20. If you could change anything on campus to improve your experiences as a GLB student, what, if anything, would you change?
21. What else may be going on in your life as a GLB student on your campus?
22. Is there any additional information you would like to share that might be useful to this study?
23. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E

Permission from Author to Use the Campus Pride 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People Report



Approval to use 2010 State of Higher Education Survey Instrument

Susan Rankin <sxr2@psu.edu>
To: "Rookman, Adam" <ar02030@sjfc.edu>

Mon, Jan 14, 2013 at 11:32 AM

Good morning Adam,

Thank you for the clarifications regarding the use of the survey questions. As long as you agree to providing appropriate citations, provide the following statement, and provide me with both a copy of your proposal and final dissertation, I grant you permission to use the survey questions.

Survey questions were adapted from the *Campus Pride 2012 State of Higher Education for LGBT People Report* and used with permission of the author.

The survey is attached here for you. Best of luck with your work.

Kind regards,

Dr. Rankin

Susan (Sue) Rankin, Ph.D.

Principal, Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Associate Professor, Education, Penn State University (Retired)

814-625-2780 (office)

814-360-3454 (cell)

sxr2@psu.edu

From: Rockman, Adam [mailto:alr02030@sjfc.edu]
Sent: Monday, January 14, 2013 8:20 AM
To: Susan Rankin
Subject: Campus Pride 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People survey

Dr. Rankin:

As you are aware, I am a doctoral student in the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership program in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College, working under the direction of my dissertation chair Dr. Claudia L. Edwards, and advisor Dr. Ronald D. Valenti.

As we have previously discussed, I am formally requesting permission to use the Campus Pride 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People survey for my doctoral research. Furthermore, I agree that I will appropriately cite my use of the survey with the following statement "Survey questions were adapted from the Campus Pride 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People Report and used with permission of the author," and I will provide you with a copy of the completed proposal and final dissertation.

Should you agree to this, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience officially stating so. Thank you, and please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns about this.

Sincerely,
Adam L. Rockman

Student, St. John Fisher College
Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership

Appendix F

Initial Codes

Academic programs
Academic success
Access to GLB information is blocked by others
Accidental involvement in GLB activities
Activism for GLB individuals
AIDS/HIV activism
African father does not understand sexual orientation
Antidiscrimination language in course syllabus
Artistic
Avoid acting gay
Being gay is a non-issue
Being gay is part of identity
Bisexual label not entirely accurate
Born in Dominican Republic
Born in Mexico
Born in NY
Born in US
Came out in college
Came out in high school
Came to US as a child
Catholic
Comes out depending on support of family
Comes out depending on support of friends
Comfortable being out
Coming out was easy
Coming out was difficult
Coming out makes you more comfortable with yourself
Communication is a strength
Community acceptance
Complicated life at home
Conservative parents/family
Criticism from family
Criticism from others
Dated opposite gender to pass
Dated same gender
Developed integrated identity
Does not talk about sexual orientation identity

Does not want to be seen as gay first
Doesn't trust others
Duty to be out
Duty to help other GLB students
Encouraged to be involved in GLB group
Enjoys new role as a leader
Experienced discrimination
Experienced harassment
Experienced heterosexism
Experienced homophobia
Extroverted
Family confuses sexual orientation with gender identity
Family disowned him
Family not supportive
Family supportive
Family worries about safety
Feeling accepted
Feeling alone
Feeling marginalized
Feeling safe
Feeling unsafe
Found GLB club accidentally
Frustrated by others who remain in the closet
Frustrated by others who try to pass
GLB curriculum needed
GLB identity is integral to whole identity
GLB identity is separate from self
GLB identity is synthesized with self
GLB student group – available
GLB student group – found accidentally
GLB student group – involved
GLB student group – leadership role
GLB student group – not involved
GLB student group not activist enough
GLB student group not political enough
GLB student group too social
Grew up in very religious household
Grew up in a Black community
Grew up in a Caribbean community
Gypsy lifestyle
Hard worker
Home life negative
Home life positive
Homeless
Identifies as bisexual
Identifies as gay

Identifies as homoromantic bisexual
Identifies as homosexual
Identifies as lesbian
Identifies as same gender-loving
Identity affects relationships with others
Important to be proud of sexual orientation
Increased involvement in GLB club
Increased involvement on campus
Introverted
Invested in institution
Involved in GLB issues in high school
Involved in GLB issues more than other issues
Involved in other issues more than GLB
Leadership in GLB group was not sought out
Lives with cousin
Lives with father only
Lives with mother only
Lives with non-related others
Looking for identity communities
More comfortable around GLB people
Multiple identities – GLB and woman
Multiple identities – GLB and minority
Musical
Navigates multiple identities
Negative impact of discrimination
Not active in GLB group but attends programs
Not experienced discrimination
Not involved in GLB group
Not out in high school
Not out to family
Not out to parents
Others assume GLB identity
Out in every area of life
Out only selectively
Out to everyone
Out to everyone but does not announce it
Passing as straight
Peer groups
Peer Leadership Council
Personally empowering to control degree of outness
Pride in identity
Promoting sexual agenda not wanted
Raised Catholic
Relationship with family members
Relationship with parents
Role model for other GLB

Safe zone involvement
Safe zone needed
Safety off campus
Safety on campus
Scholarship opportunities
Seeks support and guidance from counselors
Seeks support and guidance from faculty/staff
Seeks support and guidance from peers
Self-actualization affected by others
Self-actualization high
Self-actualization low
Self-actualization tied to academic achievement
Self-actualization tied to level of outness
Self-confidence
Sexual orientation fully integrated
Sexual orientation not fully integrated
Sexual orientation is just part of who you are
Social responsibility to being out
Spiritual but not religious
Subtle GLB
Supportive faculty
Supportive family
Supportive peers
Training for college faculty/staff
Trust in family members
Trust in others
Trust in peers
Welcomed into GLB group
Would like to be more involved in GLB issues