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Todd D. Kleine

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DePaul University
College of Education

**INTERSECTING IDENTITIES: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GAY, MALE
CATHOLIC COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY ALUMNI**

A Dissertation
with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Todd D. Kleine

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the degree of

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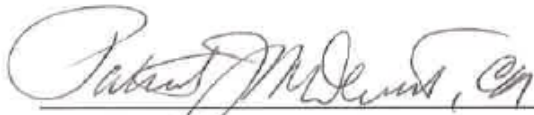
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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study describes emergent themes related to how gay, male alumni perceive their experiences of attending an American Catholic institution of higher education. Utilizing a modified version of Seidman's phenomenological interview protocol, six gay, male alumni of various American Catholic institution of higher education were interviewed in an attempt to arrive at the essence of attending a college or university where Church teachings intersected with the sexual orientation of certain community members. From the collected data, four clear themes emerged: all alumni experienced pre-college negative messages about their sexual orientation, visibility and support were positive contributors to alumni experiences and technology played a key role in connecting with other gay men. Further, Catholic Church teachings as interpreted by campus administrators had multiple impacts on the experiences of the alumni throughout their time on campus. The findings of this study can be used by educational leaders at American Catholic institutions of higher education to create awareness and better inform policy and support program creation for this vulnerable minority population of students.

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all the gay Catholics in the world...

*God made me for a reason and nothing is in vain
Redemption comes in many shapes with many kinds of pain
Oh sweet Jesus is you're listening, keep me ever close to you
As I'm stumblin', tumblin', woonderin', as I'm travelin' thru.*

-Dolly Parton

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Founded in 1789, Georgetown Academy (now Georgetown University) was the first American Catholic institution of higher education (Curran, 1997). In the beginning, Catholic religious congregations such as the Jesuits established Georgetown and other such institutions of higher education to prepare young male seminarians for religious life (Curran, 1997). However, initial student enrollments were inadequate to offset the enormous cost of operating these institutions (Gleason, 1995). As such, American Catholic institutions of higher education began admitting lay students along with seminarians in order to remain open. This revised admissions policy to enroll non-seminarians differed from the original design of American Catholic higher education, but was necessary for survival when competing amongst other secular colleges and universities (Power, 1972). Arguably, American Catholic higher education has grappled with change from the beginning, struggling to resist the forces of modernity and maintain its original mission (Clifford, 2008). This mission included remaining loyal to the teachings of Roman Catholicism, educating students to improve their overall social and economic conditions and minimizing non-Catholic influences (Devitt, 1909).

Similar to the late eighteenth century, multiple factors influence recruitment and retention practices at all colleges and universities in the current environment. Garcia and Serrata (2016) noted a sharp decline in the number of graduating high school seniors during the last decade. Further, the smaller prospective student pool includes an increasing number of minority, first generation and low income individuals not seen in previous generations. As such, colleges and universities face challenges to adopt recruitment and retention strategies to meet the needs of these student populations, or run the risk of lowered enrollments. In addition to altering

admission strategies, Seidman (2005) urged all colleges and universities to increase support services for populations such as students of color and sexual minorities to reverse the trend of such individuals leaving college at higher rates than non-minority peers.

Just like the early days of Georgetown Academy, American Catholic institutions of higher education in the twenty-first century struggle to maintain enrollment while remaining loyal to the Catholic Church. According to enrollment statistics from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (2017), nearly 900,000 students attend the 265 institutions of Catholic higher education in America. However, overall enrollment at all American Catholic colleges and universities decreased nearly 40% from 2004 to 2014, with some institutions noting more than 20% declines in their individual headcounts (Chen, 2016). To mitigate decreases, American Catholic institutions of higher education found some enrollment success by marketing less on traditional Roman Catholic teachings and more on mission-focused philosophies such as social justice and diversity (McMurtrie, 2014). These relatable philosophies are often the values and teachings of founding orders such as the Jesuits of Marquette University or the Vincentians of DePaul University. While emphasizing social justice and diversity may appeal to a broader segment of prospective students, Hendershott (2009) cautioned some institutions are acquiescing to outside forces, ignoring traditional Roman Catholic teachings altogether and straying from the original intent of American Catholic higher education.

A diversity of groups, such as gay men, participate in the life of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Although difficult to quantify, gay men are members of American Catholic college and university communities in numbers that could reach 10% of the overall population (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948). In addition to the many assets they possess, gay men face a multitude of risk factors and vulnerabilities as a community, including

increased levels of harassment, overt discrimination, and vulnerabilities to substance abuse and mental health issues (Fergusson, Horwood, Ridder & Beauvais, 2005; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson & Lee, 2007; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld & Frazer, 2010; Effrig et al, 2014).

Additionally, gay and bisexual youth accounted for 20% of new HIV infections in 2014 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017) and are prone to *internalized homophobia*, or negative feelings of self-worth due to absorbing deleterious feelings from community members about same-sex sexual attraction (Spencer & Brown, 2007). Clearly, gay men and their cohorts in the LGBTQ community present unique needs and risk factors that require visibility in college and university policy and support structures.

Although colleges and universities such as the University of Notre Dame, DePaul University and Georgetown University employ staff members dedicated to LGBTQ student service, have made public commitments to inclusion, and provide various resources for sexual minority students, they remain inextricably linked to the Catholic Church, an entity with unwavering opinions about same-sex sexual behavior (Zakrzewski, 2013). As noted by Pope Benedict XVI, homosexual¹ behavior is a grave sin, both intrinsically immoral and contrary to natural law (Pope Benedict XVI, 2005). Striking a softer tone, Pope Francis, his successor, called for a more welcoming attitude towards individuals with same-sex sexual attraction. In speaking of gay priests in 2013, Pope Francis noted, “If they accept the Lord and have good will, who am I to judge them?” (Lyman, 2013, para. 6). However, he stopped short of changing the Church’s stance on same-sex marriage, noting such unions are not equivalent to those between a man and

¹ Unless necessary in citation of related literature, the word “homosexual” will not be used throughout this study to describe same-sex sexual attractions. According to GLADD (2015), the use of “homosexual” is discouraged when describing same-sex sexual attraction due to historical inferences of psychological and/or emotional disordered notions made by anti-gay extremists. Instead “gay” and “lesbian” will be used to describe same-sex sexual attraction for men and women respectively. Additionally, “same-sex sexual attraction” will be used as a generic term where appropriate.

a woman (Lyman, 2013). Moreover, Pope Francis stated pastors and international bodies should not be denied financial assistance by entities outside the Church because of regulations “inspired by gender ideology,” a direct nod towards entities that penalize the Catholic Church for expressing beliefs regarding sexuality (Pope Francis, 2014). In addition, while Pope Francis’s tone is notably different from his predecessors, Wofford (2014) indicates the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church regarding same-sex sexual behavior remain unchanged throughout history. Clearly, the Catholic Church is drawing a difference between tendencies and behavior, but creating a scenario where LGBTQ individuals may perceive mixed messages when attempting to marry or obtain civil rights and services inherently available to their heterosexual peers.

In light of the current higher education landscape and the historic teachings of the Catholic Church regarding same-sex sexual behavior, a gap in scholarly research exists surrounding the experiences of gay men that attend American Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States. Of the available literature surrounding gay students at Catholic institutions, studies focused on the alumni experiences of LGBTQ members of the community (Fry, 2012), attitudes of campus constituency groups towards LGBTQ rights at a single institution (Hughes, 2015) or a single research site of current gay students (Willette, 2016). Notably missing in the literature and specifically mentioned as opportunities for future research was how *individual identities* within the LGBTQ community experience Catholic higher education across *multiple institutions* of higher education. This study attempts to fill a gap in literature by narrowing the focus to gay men, but drawing participants from multiple American institutions of Catholic higher education. Further, this study examines such experiences through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) *Ecological Systems Theory* to explain how

multiple influences such as immediate environments, campus cultures, and religious or governmental philosophies impact the development of gay men at American Catholic institutions of higher education.

Problem Statement

Each year, American Catholic institutions of higher education admit gay men into campus communities to earn academic degrees and develop into productive members of society. However, instances of Catholic teachings and other related Church publications have labeled the sexual behavior of LGBTQ individuals as “intrinsically disordered,” prescribing limits to acceptable expressions of human sexuality (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986). At the same time, the Church condemns discrimination and violence towards such individuals and calls for love and compassion (Catholic Church, 2000). This intersection created a unique space to explore how sexual minority students, particularly gay men, experienced attending an institution of higher education affiliated with a religious organization where such dichotomies exist. Additionally, this research study expanded upon the minimal existing studies related to how American Catholic institutions of higher education teach and care for minority populations of students whose identities and actions may conflict with Church teachings.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Grounded in Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological System Theory, this study describes how gay male alumni experienced a campus community sponsored by an institution with teachings and publications that provides mixed messages regarding their sexual identity and assigns moral judgements to related behaviors. Through interviewing six, gay, male alumni of various American Catholic

institutions of higher education, this study explored a central research question with multiple sub-questions:

1. How do gay, male alumni perceive their experiences of attending a Catholic institution of higher education?
 - a. What is the nature of their experiences within and outside the classroom setting?
 - b. How do these experiences intersect with the culture of the institution?
 - c. How do these experiences intersect with the Catholic identity of the institution?

Research Approach

With approval from the DePaul University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I recruited, selected and interviewed six, gay, male alumni of various American Catholic institutions of higher education. As outlined in the forthcoming methodology section of this study, I selected two alumni from the same institution for this study. The pairs of participants came from three different institutions, each with differing geographic locations, sizes and university missions. Utilizing a modified version of Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method, I interviewed each participant for 90 minutes in two separate sessions to collect data based on the provided interview guide (Appendices D & E). This method yielded over 18 hours of thick and rich qualitative data, which was subsequently coded and themed.

This study is methodologically rooted in the philosophy of phenomenology. As such, I utilized the data collected from interviews in an attempt to describe the essence of attending an American Catholic institution of higher education as a gay man. By using a multiple site approach, this study attempted to capture some variations of the experiences based on the

particular mission, size, location or philosophies/policies of the institution. The outcomes of this study are available to administrators of American Catholic institutions of higher education to leverage when considering and implementing institutional policies and support initiatives for LGBTQ students. Further, through the added layer of Catholic teachings regarding same-sex sexual behavior, this study provides administrators at these institutions with data directly related to campuses rooted in their specific religious tradition.

Role of the Researcher

My identities and professional work history afforded me a particular perspective for this study. First, I am an openly gay alumnus of two American Catholic institutions of higher education, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. During my time in undergraduate studies, I served as a Peer Minister in a first-year residence hall, or my alma mater's equivalent of an undergraduate Resident Assistant. Further, I was actively involved in campus ministry, serving as a retreat leader and lector at Sunday Mass. Like many of the participants in this study, there were times during my undergraduate and graduate collegiate experiences that messages and actions of various campus administrators, both lay and vowed religious, seemed to conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church. For example, I vividly remember one priest assuring me that the Catholic Church was wrong in its teachings regarding same sex, sexual relationships. Further, I also recall feeling uneasy about serving as an openly gay Peer Minister at the university, knowing the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding same sex sexual relationships

Professionally, I have worked in both administrative and adjunct faculty roles at two institutions of Catholic higher education. While at one institution, I was the on-campus faculty/staff advisor for the LGBTQ student organization. As the advisor of the group, I used

university funds to take groups of students to a Midwest LGBTQ student conference. At this conference, contraceptives were widely available, and many of the sessions either conflicted with or directly defied the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding birth control and human sexuality. I recalled feeling anxiety that my campus administrators would find out about the conference content and frequently consulted with professionals from other Catholic institutions of higher education for support in navigating my role as the student advisor. Usually, our advisor group expressed concern due to a lack of clarity around the role of advising LGBTQ students at an institution sponsored by a Church that assigns moral judgement against the natural actions of our students.

Personally, I was raised Roman Catholic, regularly attending Mass and religious studies classes from birth until approximately 25 years old. Like several of the participants in this study, my Catholic faith was significant in my upbringing, often providing a sense of connection and comfort. However, I distinctly recall conflicting feelings when I realized that my same sex, sexual attractions conflicted with the teachings and expectations of the Catholic Church. Further, I recalled a sense of sadness when it occurred to me that I was sinning in the eyes of the Church by simply being myself. Currently, I identify as a non-practicing Roman Catholic, attending Mass on certain Holy Days of Obligation. I anticipated that my unique background relating to both Roman Catholicism and the experience of attending a Catholic institution of higher education provided a degree of credibility and rapport in relating to my study participants.

Rationale and Significance

At the intersection of the previously described factors, there exists a great need to explore the lived experiences of gay male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Existing research surrounding the topic generalizes lived experiences for the entire LGBTQ

community, using primarily public institutions as the research setting (D’Augelli, 2006; Brown & Alderson, 2010). Moreover, the minimal studies related directly to gay men at Catholic campuses explored current students or included other sexual identities, such as lesbian or bisexual (Levine & Love, 2000; Fry, 2012; Willette, 2016). This study built on stated opportunities for future research in the aforementioned studies by examining alumni across multiple Catholic institutions of higher education and shifting the focus to reflections on past rather than current experience.

Renn (2010) also speaks to the significance of researching LGBTQ members of campus communities from a historical point of view. Regarding such studies, Renn (2010) notes, “the temptation of edgy, new-millennium queer theorists to discount them [historical studies]...should be resisted” (p. 134). Renn (2010) further notes, historical studies, “remind readers of a time when even at progressive institutions being out was a risky political and personal act, which is still the case at many institutions” (Renn, 2010, p. 134). While not dismissing the important, disruptive work of queer theorists, this study fills the lack of research on this narrow, but important topic. Outcomes of this study are available to educational leaders at American Catholic institutions of higher education for improving support programs and formulating policies to meet the needs of sexual minority students.

Definition of Key Terminology

Various terms are defined to describe elements of the lived experiences of gay men at Catholic institutions of higher education:

- Alumni: a person who has graduated from a particular school, college or university (Rissmeyer, 2010).

- Cisgender: an individual whose gender identity aligns with those characteristics typically associated with the sex assigned at birth. If this is not the case, the term *transgender* applies (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).
- Gay: an individual who is emotionally, romantically, or physically attracted to people of the same gender (PFLAG, 2017).
- Gender: a set of traits, often influenced by society, that classify an individual as male, female, a mixture of both, or neither (PFLAG, 2017).
- LGBTQ: an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).
- Openly gay: a state in which gay men are comfortably out about their sexual orientation or gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).
- Queer: a term used to express fluid identities and orientations. Sometimes used interchangeably with LGBTQ (Human Rights Campaign, 2017).
- Same Gender Loving: An Afrocentric term used by many Blacks to describe both their sexual orientation and intimate relationships with people of the same gender. This term is a reaction to Eurocentric terms such as “homosexual” and “bisexual” (Harris & Battle, 2013).
- Sexual orientation: patterns of romantic and/or sexual attractions found in individuals (PFLAG, 2017).

Conclusion

This introductory chapter outlined a framework to investigate the lived experiences of gay male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Through clearly outlining the rationale for research and problem statement, the research questions were rooted in

empirical evidence noting the vulnerabilities of this minority population of students. Further, this chapter outlined my role as a researcher and the various assumptions made in this study. Since I am a gay male alumnus of an American Catholic institution of higher education, my unique positionality lends credibility to this study but also requires transparency in my assumptions working in this research space. With these known elements, this study shifts to a review of related literature to frame the subsequent methodology of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

This chapter examines in-depth relevant literature related to the intersection of sexual orientation, the Catholic Church and the lived experiences of LGBTQ college students. Pan and Baden-Campbell (2016) explained that literature reviews are essentially a research synthesis, constructed through examining supporting and conflicting findings on a concept to provide essential knowledge on a particular topic. The central research question for this study examined the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Further, three sub questions probed the nature of their campus experiences, in addition to the culture and identity of their alma maters. As such, gay, male college alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education possess many unique characteristics and must be examined in multiple contexts through a detailed review of related literature.

In the first section, this literature review examines research related to same-sex sexual attraction. Exploring the posited biological and psychosocial theories surrounding the etiology of sexual orientation is crucial for framing the multi-faceted treatment of this community throughout history. Since no single explanation for the origin of same-sex sexual attraction exists, struggles for acceptance and inclusion are noted in respect to this student population. Additionally, this chapter unpacks the various theories related to identity formation for individuals with same-sex sexual attraction. Much like theories related to etiology, the literature over time reveals an evolution of thought related to how gay men come out and integrate into the community. Finally, this section explores the various physical and mental health characteristics

unique to LGBTQ community. To understand the inherent health risks experienced by this group of individuals, various statistics and research findings are presented.

Next, the lived experiences of the LGBTQ community on college campuses is examined. By exploring topics such as campus climate, residence hall environments, in-classroom experiences, student organizations and mental/sexual health factors, evidence is provided to highlight the unique encounters of this community. Throughout this review, a blend of studies related to *secular*, or non-religious, and faith-based institutions are utilized due to the limited number of studies directly related to the experiences of gay, male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Because the quantity of empirical research relating to the experiences of gay men on Catholic campuses is limited, this section includes studies that broadly portrays the current state of research for those with same-sex sexual attraction in higher education environments. Where relevant, clear demarcations were made to highlight the influence of Catholic teachings and publications on the experiences of the LGBTQ community. In aggregate, the minimal research directly relating gay men on Catholic campuses clearly shows the need for more empirical studies of this community.

Since this group of students attends American institutions of higher education affiliated with the Catholic Church, it is then necessary to examine the influence of this organization through teachings, publications and the structure of higher education. This next section will examine two specific areas: teachings and publications related to same-sex sexual attraction and Catholic higher education from both a historical perspective and an operational reality. In Church teachings and publications, Catholic moral teachings on same-sex sexual attraction and behavior are different, with the latter denounced as a sin. However, various publications from members of the Catholic leadership provide guidelines for the treatment of this group, offering suggestions

for inclusion and acceptance. The literature presented reveals interesting juxtapositions that create conflicting messages of acceptance and moral judgement. Additionally, a longitudinal examination of Catholic higher education is presented in this review. Catholic institutions of higher education were founded and sustained by individual religious orders, all with unique approaches to the interpretation and implementation of policies and levels of support for students. As such, this section will explore how different Catholic institutions of higher education balance cultural realities with the teachings of the Church.

Finally, this literature review will conclude with an in-depth analysis of the theoretical framework for this study. Undoubtedly, this study explores many intertwined concepts such as sexual orientation, college experience, cultural influences and religion. In order to properly examine how these elements interplay in the lived experiences of gay male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education, a theoretical lens must be used that allows for these factors to be properly unpacked. Through the lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *Ecological Systems Theory*, factors related to the multiple influences encountered by the alumni will be examined to provide context for their unique lived experience in college. With these elements established, this literature review begins with an exploration of same-sex sexual attraction.

Same-Sex Sexual Attraction

Quantification. In practice, the quantification gay men has proven elusive to researchers. In the first real attempt to quantify same-sex sexual attraction, Kinsey et al. (1948) found 10% of males between the age of 16 and 55 identify as homosexual. However, in a study by Bogaert (2004), challenged the accepted frequency of same-sex sexual experiences proposed by Kinsey et al. (1948) and posited the actual number was much lower in recent history due to declines in birth rates for post-baby boomer generations. Binson et al. (1995) found amongst higher

educated white and minority males, 10.8% and 4.6% respectively experienced same-sex sexual activity in the last five years. In a recent study, Ward, Dahlhamer, Galinsky & Joestl (2014) analyzed data from the 2013 National Health Interview Survey and found 1.6% of adults identified as lesbian or gay, where 1.1% identified as “something else.” Clearly, each study indicates a slightly different percentage and factors indicating why variations may exist.

Further, numerous theories exist to explain the difficulty in reporting an accurate number of LGBTQ individuals in society. Gates (2011) noted various reasons could explain why estimating the size of the gay male population is so difficult. These reasons include: survey instrument inconsistencies, participants’ unwillingness to report stigmatizing identities and differences in the definitions of LGBT populations. Additionally, Pathela et al. (2006) noted some of the statistics that identify the number of gay men in the United States originate from convenience samples often collected at places frequented by the participants for sexual encounters, skewing the actual data size. The Pew Social Research Center (2013) further noted the difficulty in estimating the size of this population in recent surveys as twofold: whether to use a definition based only on self-identification or whether to include measures of sexual attraction and sexual behavior.

Regarding gay men on American Catholic college and university campuses, quantification challenges are even more prevalent and no known studies exist to reveal the actual percentage. Although the quantification of the LGBTQ community proves elusive, D’Augelli (1991) noted nearly all gay college men in a study of 61 were aware of their sexual orientation as a teenager, with a first romantic relationship and disclosure of sexual orientation soon to follow in college. With possibly hundreds of gay men on Catholic college and university campuses, this

and other studies are necessary to elaborate the needs of these students to alleviate feelings of invisibility (Lopez & Chism, 1993).

Etiological history. Throughout history, numerous attempts were made to explain the etiology of same-sex sexual attraction in human beings. As described by Karpman (1951), homosexuals were labeled as sexual deviants throughout history, frequently referred to as perverts or paraphilics. As such, Karpman (1951) argued psychiatrists must discuss homosexuality in the context of other sexual deviations because the acts of the population do not result in reproduction as seen in heterosexuality. Hutchinson (1959) explained homosexuality can be described through classical psychoanalytic theory. As children, boys attempt to solve a classic Oedipus conflict by identifying more with their mother than father. Furthermore, this situation is exacerbated by increased maternal influence during pre-genital and early genital stages of development. Describing individuals with same-sex sexual attractions as deviant and an atypical demonstration of traditional sexual expression continued until the late twentieth century when a shift in perceptions caused a reexamination of norms within the medical community.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from its publication, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, signifying the end to its official classification as a mental disorder or disease (Weill, 2009). Prior to 1973, homosexuality was viewed by the medical and mental health communities as a sexual deviation. However, the APA, by a vote of 13-0, permanently removed the designation from the official document (Weill, 2009). The removal effort was led by psychologist Alfred Freedman and viewed as a great victory for sexual minorities, rejecting the prejudice and discrimination against homosexuals found in the psychiatric community prior to 1973 (Stafford, 2011). At the time of the removal, the APA made a paradigm shift in the way it analyzed research on homosexuality. Downey and

Friedman (2008) noted the APA insisted on making decisions based on evidence from research studies, not simply case reports from and opinions of practicing clinicians. Since the removal, homosexuality has only been mentioned as an illness in context of being an exacerbating factor associated with anxiety disorders (Goldstein & Abstracts of the 19th European Congress of Psychiatry, 2011).

By ascribing etiology to a genetic origin, same-sex sexual attraction would be viewed as immutable and uncontrollable. A genetic origin would therefore remove the notion that individuals with same-sex sexual attractions made a “lifestyle choice” by identifying as a sexual minority. However, no singular cause for same-sex sexual attraction in humans has been found through empirical research. As a result, two major categories of explanation for same-sex sexual attraction have evolved from research: biological and psychosocial (Sheldon, Pfeffer, Epstein, Feldbaum & Petty, 2006). While both explanations provide findings that argue various scientific or social causes, Weill (2009) underscored that same-sex sexual attraction is not a disease. Though found in a minority of humans, same-sex sexual attraction is a normal variant of human sexuality.

Biological etiology. Of the numerous empirical research studies available relating to a biological explanation for same-sex sexual attraction, most findings cluster around general themes: brain differences, hormonal availability, genetics, and body markers. These studies examined various elements of the human development process, and found plausible explanations to cite a natural justification for same-sex sexual attraction, rather than one influenced by environmental interaction. Moreover, while these themes attempt to isolate a single cause of same sex attraction in humans, several of the studies indicate the need for continued research on sexual minorities.

Citing differences in the anterior hypothalamus of individuals with same-sex sexual attraction, LeVay (1991) focused on the brain as the etiology of same-sex sexual attraction. In a sample of 41 subjects who died of complications relating to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), 19 of which had same-sex sexual attractions, the study found one volume of the four cell groups located in the hypothalamus was twice as large as those found in heterosexual men, the INAH 3. In the other three cell groups, no differences were noted between the heterosexual and homosexual tissue samples. While this study indicates an increased volume of INAH 3 cells might be an explanation of same-sex sexual activity in humans, the study contained several limitations including using post-mortem tissue from patients with an AIDS diagnosis, which might have negatively influenced study results.

Savic, Bergulnd & Lindstrom (2005) also studied the human hypothalamus in relation to same-sex sexual attraction, focusing instead on reactions to common pheromones found in sexual behavior. In three like cohorts of 12 individuals, homosexual men, heterosexual men and heterosexual women's brain reaction to testosterone and estrogen derivatives were studied. When presented the testosterone derivative, homosexual men and heterosexual women showed activation in identical areas of the anterior hypothalamus. Particularly, the medial preoptic area/anterior hypothalamus was activated, an area known to be highly involved in sexual behavior. Thus, the researchers posited a possible link between sexual orientation and pheromones might explain same-sex sexual attraction in men. However, the study sample size of 12 individuals in each cohort limits the generalizability of the research, necessitating analysis on larger samples.

While examining the influence of prenatal and perinatal hormones on the postnatal behavior of children, Maccoby, Doering, Jacklin and Kraemer (1979) found birth order may

influence the availability of body chemicals in utero for infants. In a study of 256 infants, umbilical cord blood was drawn immediately following birth. In male infants, researchers found firstborns had higher concentrations of testosterone availability in cord blood. However, later born male infants showed a diminished amount of testosterone in cord blood. This study posits subsequent male births decreases the availability of testosterone to male infants during gestation, therefore possibly impacting the psychological development of the child later in life. Furthermore, the decrease in hormones for subsequent births was not found in the female subset of the study. While important to the biological origin argument of same-sex sexual attraction, more recent day examination of cord blood availability is necessary to exclude limitations found in the study.

A series of studies posited genetics as a factor in increasing the likelihood of same sex, sexual attraction in humans. Hamer, Magnuson and Pattatucci (1993) examined blood samples of 76 gay male subjects and found a significant correlation between genetic markers on the chromosomal region Xq28 and a homosexual orientation. However, Mustanski et al., (2005), examined 456 individuals from 146 families with two or more gay brothers but did not identify linkage in the Xq28 genetic area. Rather, a linkage was found in the 7q36 genetic area. Recently, Sanders et al. (2015) expanded upon the Hamer, Magnuson and Pattatucci study, examining 409 pairs of homosexual brothers. The study concluded two pairs of genetic linkages indicated same-sex sexual attraction may be genetically inherited: the pericentromeric region on chromosome 8 and the Xq28 genetic area. While the sample size of the Sanders et al., study was larger than Hamer, Magnuson and Pattatucci, further research is necessary to explore the role of the Xq28 genetic area in same-sex sexual attraction as the results did not clear the statistical significance threshold (Servick, 2014).

Additional research on body markers, or elements of the human body, indicates other possible indications of same-sex, sexual attraction in humans. Lalumiere, Blanchard and Zucker (2000) examined 6,987 homosexual and 16,432 heterosexual participants, finding the homosexual participants were 39% more likely to be left handed. The study posits same-sex sexual attraction, like handedness, might have an early neurodevelopmental basis. Klar (2004) found another body marker which might indicate same-sex sexual attraction. In a study of gay men, 29% of the participants had a counterclockwise hair-whorl rotation. Also, Rahman and Wilson (2003) discovered males and females with same-sex sexual attractions had a significantly lower second to fourth digit finger size ratio than heterosexual counterparts. The study theorized since prenatal androgens influence finger asymmetry, womb hormones factors could produce same-sex sexual attraction in the same manner.

Psychosocial etiology. While several empirical studies focused on the biological etiology on same-sex sexual attraction, a different subset of research attempted to explain a psychosocial origin for these feelings. *Psychosocial influences*, or those which relate to the role of psychological and social factors, examine whether factors such as family relations, childhood sexual abuse, or childhood gender behavior cause an individual to experience same sex attraction (Sheldon, et al., 2006). As with the presented biological theories, a definitive psychosocial cause of same-sex sexual attraction has not been identified in research to date. However, as noted in Sprigg and Dailey (2004), the lack of definitive biological evidence for the cause of same-sex sexual attraction suggests instead that these feelings may originate from a complex mix of psychosocial factors.

In an early study of 100 gay male participants in the British military, O'Connor (1964) found the individuals portrayed similar characteristics in psychiatry sessions: pleasant speaking

demeanors with a favor for occupations such as nursing, photography, ballet dancing and clerical work. His participants were divided evenly between men with same-sex sexual attractions and heterosexual men with anxiety disorders (neuroses), the later chosen purposely due to the volume of anxiety disorders found in men with same sex, sexual attraction. The study results also indicated the men with same-sex sexual attractions were overly attached to their mothers and possessed a negative relationship with their fathers. Siegelman (1981), who compared the parental relationships of heterosexual and gay men, conducted a similar investigation. While both sample groups showed little differences in connection with their parents, the results did indicate gay men were less close to their fathers when compared to heterosexual men. Additionally, gay men were more likely to have a mother with a demanding personality.

Other childhood psychosocial influences, such as childhood sexual abuse, are found in literature related to same-sex sexual attraction. Bramblett and Darling (1997) examined two groups of adult men enrolled in psychotherapy: child abuse survivors and those without such experiences. Of the child abuse survivors, 46% of the men identified as gay or bisexual, compared to only 12% in the non-abused group. While the results indicate an obvious difference, the researchers were clear the child abuse survivors might have possessed same-sex sexual attractions prior to the abuse. Additionally, Tomeo, Templer, Anderson and Kotler (2001) examined 942 men and found gay men had a higher rate of sexual molestation as a child when compared to heterosexual peers. As with the Bramblett and Darling study, Tomeo et al., acknowledge some of the gay men reported feelings of same-sex sexual attractions prior to the sexual abuse.

LGBTQ Community Considerations

Identity formation. After examining the potential origins of same-sex sexual behavior, it is also necessary to examine how individuals with such inclinations form an LGBTQ identity. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) note student affairs professionals on college and university campuses find it necessary to understand how community members with such inclinations form their identities, partially in an effort to provide the necessary support structures and services. As such, this section examines the many posited theories of LGBTQ development over time. There are several posited theories related to LGBTQ identity development, ranging from stage theories to *intersectionality*, or how multiple identities such as sexual orientation and race intersect.

Bilodeau and Renn (2005) note the 1970's ushered in a new era of examining sexual orientation development, utilizing stage models to describe such identities. Cass (1979) and her "Homosexual Identity Formation" model was a pioneering theory that described how an individual progresses through homosexual identity formation. In six steps, the individual moves from being aware of such inclinations, through tolerance, acceptance, pride and synthesis. Of note, Cass (1979) points out the model is a linear path in which progress can be stopped at any time, with some individuals not progressing through all six stages. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) further note the Cass (1979) model was based on a small sample size of men and assumes that non-heterosexual individuals move along a set path in their early teenage years or early twenties.

In yet another model of identity formation, Anthony D'Augelli (1994) posits that becoming LBGT requires a two-part process: becoming an "ex-heterosexual" and creating a new identity based on homosexual dimensions. D'Augelli (1994) rejected the notion that an LGBTQ person's identity development was linear and instead noted, "individuals develop and change over the entire course of their life spans" (p. 319). In his "Homosexual Lifespan Development

Model,” D’Augelli (1994) offers six processes that a LGBTQ individual might encounter over the course of their identity development: exiting a heterosexual identity, developing a personal LGB identity status, developing a LGB social identity, becoming an LGB offspring, developing an LGB intimacy status and entering an LGB community. Of note, D’Augelli’s model offers a degree of flexibility not seen in the Cass (1979) model, as an individual might experience these six stages in tandem with each other, or at multiple times during their life (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005).

Moving past linear and stage based models that explore same-sex sexual attraction and identity as individual elements, recent research on LGBTQ identity development focuses on the notion of intersectionality. Parent, DeBlaere and Moradi (2013) note the concept of intersectionality is based in recognizing “multiple interlocking identities, defined by relative sociocultural power and privilege” (p. 639). In her seminal work on examining the intersection of race and gender in violence toward women, Crenshaw (1991) underscored how elements of one’s identity cannot be examined in isolation. In regards to LGBTQ individuals, the concept of intersectionality requires student affairs professionals and other campus administrators to first acknowledge and then support a student’s multiple dimensions of self, ranging from sexual orientation to other elements such as race, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status.

Created as a response to a lack of models addressing how college students navigate multiple dimensions and intersections of identity, Jones and McEwen (2000) proposed a framework, the “Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity,” for situating three key characteristics of self: core identities, socially constructed identities and the context in which these factors exist. This model depicts identity construction during distinctive periods, such as college or stages of adulthood. In Jones and McEwen’s (2000) model, individuals define core

characteristics with descriptors such as, “intelligent, kind, a good friend, compassionate and independent” (p. 409). Jones and McEwen (2000) noted core characteristics are typically protected from view, comprising the true concept of inner identity or inner self (p. 408).

With core characteristics identified, Jones and McEwen’s (2000) model depicts socially constructed identities as intersecting orbits surrounding the participant’s core. These orbits describe labels imposed by society such as sexual orientation, race, gender, religion, and ethnicity. Each orbit contains a dot, describing the degree of salience for each socially constructed identity. For example, if sexual orientation were particularly salient to the individual, the dot would be closer to the core on that particular orbit. Surrounding core and socially constructed identities, the context in which the individual experiences these characteristics is included in the “Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.” Jones and McEwen (2000) indicate the “context” may include current life experiences, family background, socio-cultural conditions or other such situations. The model places great emphasis on the context, as the situations and environments encountered by college students can have great influence on how core and socially constructed identities interact with each other. The context may also make the salience of certain socially constructed identities have greater or lesser influence on the individual.

Mental health. Although the exact etiology of same-sex sexual attraction is still unknown and identity formation varies by individual, existing literature indicates that gay men face mental illness vulnerabilities at a higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts (King, et al., 2008). As explained by Reeves, et al., (2011), mental illness encompasses a wide variety of diagnosable conditions, including alterations in mood, thinking and other distressed behavior. Cochran, Mays, and Sullivan (2003) noted men who are gay or bisexual are at an increased risk for clinical depression, panic attacks, and psychological distress at a greater rate than

heterosexual peers. Specifically related to college students, Przedworski et al. (2015) noted one fifth of gay male students reported suffering from a diagnosed mental illness in the last year in a sample size of 361. The study also noted these mental illnesses were amplified or perhaps caused by issues such as greater exposure to negative life events, discrimination, parental conflict or loss of employment due to their sexual orientation. Compared to heterosexual students, the study noted those with same-sex sexual attraction were more likely to experience negative life events.

Another mental health phenomenon found in the gay male population is an increased rate of *internalized homophobia*. Spencer and Brown (2007) define *internalized homophobia* as the internalization of negative family and community attitudes towards same-sex sexual attraction, with a resulting creation of negative self-worth. Allen and Oleson (1999) found a clear relationship between internalized homophobia and shame. Their study suggests shame as the principal factor in feeling internalized homophobia and an increased likelihood of low self-esteem. Within the LGBT community, internalized homophobia can translate into self-destructive behavior. As described by McDermott, Roen and Scourfield (2008), participants in a research study cited internalized homophobia as the cause for behaviors such as suicide attempts, self-harming behaviors and substance abuse issues in some instances. The findings also indicated internalized homophobia felt like a punishment for the transgression of heterosexual norms in the community, leading to a feeling abnormal or dirty. Furthermore, Ross (1985) argued internalized homophobia is an undeniable cause of mental pathology within the gay male community, mostly due to the internalization of negative attitudes towards same-sex sexual attraction within the environment.

As a result of increased levels of mental illness amongst gay men, the risk of suicidal ideations or behavior is amplified on college campuses. Hill and Pettit (2012) examined the

experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual college students and found the participants felt increased levels of burdensomeness amongst members of the community. As a result, some of these students expressed the feelings led to suicidal ideations. Hill and Pettit (2012) echoed Russell and Joiner (2001) and found adolescents with same-sex sexual attraction were more than two times more likely than heterosexual peers to attempt suicide as a result of their sexual orientation. Kerr, Ding and Chaya (2014) also discovered gay male college students were twice as likely to consider suicide when compared to heterosexual counterparts.

Substance Abuse. In addition to mental health concerns, gay men face an array of vulnerabilities relating to substance abuse. According to Blackwell (2012), a serious health concern for the LGBT community exists surrounding *substance abuse*, or the misuse of alcohol, tobacco and non-prescription drugs, as research indicates gay men have a higher rate of abuse when compared to heterosexual counterparts. In a study of 41 gay men, Cochran, Ackerman, Mays and Ross (2004) found gay men reported higher rates of marijuana, cocaine and heroin use than heterosexual men did. Furthermore, gay men were more likely than heterosexuals to meet the criteria for marijuana dependence syndrome. Additionally, Kerr, Ding and Chaya (2014) noted gay men had greater odds of using amphetamines and club drugs over the course of their lives when compared to heterosexuals. The study posited that men with same-sex sexual attraction were more likely to have an exposure to drugs and alcohol due to socializing in gay bars, environments known for alcohol and drug overuse. Furthermore, DeBord, Wood, Sher and Good (1998) found gay and bisexual college students use amyl and butyl nitrate, inhalants known as “poppers,” at a greater rate than heterosexual counterparts.

With alcohol use, research indicates college students with same-sex sexual attractions are consuming alcohol at a higher rate than other groups. Woodford, Krentzman and Gattis (2012)

also found sexual minority college students had nearly 1.5 times higher odds for problematic drinking than heterosexual peers. Ebersole, Moorer, Noble and Madison (2015) surveyed 139 lesbian, gay and bisexual college students about their use of alcohol and found participants reported an average of 12.52 drinks a week. Of the sample, 84.2% were considered moderate or high volume drinkers (40.3% and 43.9% respectively). Additionally, the study found that 74% of the gay male participants of the study were considered *binge drinkers*, or individuals who consume five or more drinks in a single session. Additionally, Schaffer, Jeglic and Stanley (2008) noted binge drinkers were significantly more likely to experience suicidal thoughts or have made a past suicide attempt. Furthermore, binge drinkers tended to be more likely to believe they would make a future suicide attempt when compared to non-binge drinking peers. While this study examined 388 students without control for sexual orientation, the results indicate binge drinking can lead to suicidal tendencies, a major risk factor already identified for the gay male community.

Regarding tobacco use, gay men on college campuses were more likely to be addicted to the substance than heterosexuals. In a study of LGB college students, Kerr, Ding and Chaya (2014), gay men were found to smoke cigarettes more than heterosexual men. However, a lower prevalence of cigar and smokeless tobacco use were found in the respondents with same-sex sexual attractions. Ridner, Frost, and LaJoie (2006) also noted LGB college students were more likely to be smokers than heterosexual peers. However, the study also indicated gay men were less likely to receive education regarding the health impacts of smoking than lesbians or heterosexual peers. According to the study, this finding is troublesome due to the prevalence of tobacco use in the gay community and the overall health ramifications of long-term use.

Sexual Activity. An additional risk factor for gay men is sexual activity. Oswalt and Wyatt (2013) surveyed a sample of college students and found the mean number of sexual partners reported in the last year was 1.36. Of note, non-heterosexual male students reported the highest number of sexual partners in the study. During sexual activity, gay men reported more unsafe behaviors when compared to heterosexual peers. Brittain and Dinger (2015) examined 39,767 National College Health Assessment II survey results and found gay men had 1.56 greater odds of not using a condom or other forms of protective barriers during intercourse in the last 30 days. Additionally, gay men were more likely to experience sexual penetration without consent in the last twelve months when compared to heterosexual peers. While the literature around unsafe sexual practices in gay male college students is inconclusive as to a cause, several theories are presented around this phenomenon. Rosario, Schrimshaw and Hunter (2010) found internalized negative attitudes towards same-sex sexual attraction were related to more unprotected anal sex and increased sexual partners amongst gay men. Furthermore, Kashubeck-West and Szymanski (2008) found internalized homophobia was a risk factor which led to more unprotected anal sex amongst gay men in research findings in a sample of 209 gay and bisexual men.

Use of Technology. An additional phenomenon in examining the unique characteristics of the LGBTQ community is the use of technology for social and sexual relationships with other individuals. Dew and Chaney (2004) explained the internet has altered interactions and interpersonal relationships, providing broad accessibility and significant expansion when it comes to interacting with other individuals. Further, Liao, Millett and Marks (2006) noted the use of technology via the internet has become increasingly prevalent for meeting sexual partners through forums such as personal advertisements, chat rooms, discussion boards, and instant

messaging systems. In addition, Leiblum (1997) explained that men who have sex with men might find using the internet for meeting sexual partners as advantageous to stay anonymous, increase privacy and safety, and because of the relative amount of ease the forum provides. Moreover, new technology in the form of geosocial-networking applications (GNA's), or devices that use global positioning system technologies to facilitate connections based on location, are widely used in the LGBTQ community, adding to the opportunities and convenience for meeting other individuals (Goedel & Duncan, 2015). These GNA's include such offerings as Tindr™, Grindr™, Scruff™ and Hornet™. Clearly, the use of technology is a key community consideration for LGBTQ individuals, but not without inherent risks or the risk of problematic behaviors due to usage.

One of the major factors facing the LGBTQ community in utilizing technology to meet other individuals for social and sexual encounters are increased risks related to sexual health. According to Grov et al. (2014), individuals who sought partners outside of technology tended to have fewer sexual partners than those who met individuals online. Further, Benostch, Kalichman and Cage (2002) indicated that men who have sex with other men (MSM) and meet via technology report higher usages of methamphetamines, increased quantities of sexual partners and greater instances of unprotected sexual activity than those who did not. Further, Holloway et al. (2015) noted MSM met through GNA's were nearly twice as likely to have engaged in unprotected anal sexual intercourse with their last sexual partner and four times as likely to have engaged in unprotected anal sexual intercourse with their last partner met on the GNA. Moreover, Landovitz et al. (2013) indicated that male youth who use Grindr™, a popular GNA, were at a higher risk for HIV acquisition and transmission based on risky behaviors conducted because of using the application to meet other men.

Clearly, members of the LGBTQ+ community that utilize technology, including the internet or the various GNA's available on smart devices, gain the benefit of convenience and a degree of control over the visibility related to meeting other persons. However, empirical evidence clearly shows there are risks associated with using such technology including risky sexual behavior, drug use and the potential for acquiring sexually transmitted infections. In light of other community considerations such as sexual and mental health issues, it is important to closely monitor the evolution of technology and understand how it intersects with the unique characteristics of the LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ Students and Higher Education

With the unique characteristics of individuals with same-sex sexual attraction framed, the focus now turns to the lived experiences of LGBTQ populations on college campuses. Multiple contexts are examined in this section, including classroom and extra-curricular experiences, to present a holistic account of the unique factors facing this population of students. As noted earlier, the minimal studies related directly to gay men at American Catholic institutions of higher education included other sexual orientation identities, such as lesbian or bisexual (Love, 1997; Levine & Love, 2000; Fry, 2012). As such, this section will explore existing literature related to the entire LGBTQ community, making clear demarcations when the study deals directly with gay men, or uses an American Catholic institution of higher education as the research setting.

Campus Culture. At religiously affiliated institutions, gay men face cultural obstacles not seen by their heterosexual counterparts. Love (1997) noted that LGBTQ students felt their Catholic campus aspired to be an inclusive, service driven institution but instead created an environment where sexual minority students felt rejected, isolated and lonely. Further, Love

(1997) explained many sexual minority students felt their sexuality was taboo, and not addressed by key leaders on campus, including faculty and staff. Levine and Love (2000) note gay men face barriers such as invisibility, negative messages from the sponsoring religious community and institutionally accepted homophobia. Additionally, Yoakam (2006) surveyed gay and bisexual students on a Catholic college campus and found they would recommend a prospective attend a different college if they identified as LGBTQ. These recommendations were rooted in indifferent responses from administration to overt bigotry, which were perceived by observant sexual minority students as tolerance of the hatred displays. While gay men on Catholic college and university campuses face additional difficulties influenced by church doctrine, the campus climate environment for this community is similar across the nation regardless of institutional mission or foundation (Levine & Love, 2000; Reed, Prado, Matsumoto & Amaro, 2010).

Regarding harassment, gay men face a barrage of bigoted verbal and physical provocations at the hands of fellow students. D'Augelli (1992) interviewed 65 gay men at a Pennsylvania State University and found 77% had been verbally assaulted, 99% heard derogatory comments and six experienced severe violence, including being punched, beaten, spat upon or assaulted with a weapon. However, the study found only 12% of the interviewed students had ever reported any of the harassment. Furthermore, Malaney, Williams and Geller (1997) studied over 900 students between two public institutions and found 10% of students observed anti-gay graffiti "often" or "very often," with 40% of male students stating they would do nothing if they witnessed individuals harassing a student for being a sexual minority. More recently, Brown and Alderson (2010) found verbal harassment of gay men is prevalent on college campuses. In a study of 111 male undergraduate students, 77% of the participants

admitted to calling other men “faggots,” a commonly used anti-gay slur, even if they knew the other person was heterosexual.

Even on college campuses known for liberal environments, instances of anti-gay culture can be found. Norris (1992) conducted a study at Oberlin College in Ohio, a secular institution known nationally as a welcoming campus for students with same-sex sexual attraction. However, the study showed two “Oberlins” emerged in surveys: an institution where gay men were warmly welcomed and accepted into the community and another where verbal abuse, physical violence, and a sense of “nowhere to turn” to report instances of harassment was felt by this particular community. In the study, 93% of individuals who indicated being harassed never reported the incident to campus authorities. Additionally, 60% of study participants reported hearing stereotypical or derogatory comments about sexual minority students, with 51% visually noticing graffiti and hate speech related to these students.

With overt displays of harassment and violence present on college and universities, it comes as no surprise that many gay men note feeling a sense of invisibility on campus. Anderson-Martinez and Vianden (2014) found gay men changed elements of their personality, specifically gender expressions, to fit in with the culture of the university community. These personality changes were adapted as an attempt to assimilate with social environments and as a safety and defense mechanism. Furthermore, Levine and Love (2000) found instances of complete sexual minority community invisibility on Catholic college and university campuses. Mostly, this lack of community presence was due to religious doctrine influences and institutional unwillingness to create an environment in conflict with Church teachings.

Student organizations. On college and university campuses, the presence of LGBTQ student organizations can provide a sense of community and support for sexual minority

students. Tracing roots back to 1967, students at Columbia University created the “Student Homophile League (SHL),” the first of many student activist groups demanding LGBTQ visibility on college campuses shortly after the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City (Beemyn, 2003). In the beginning, the SHL faced resistance from Columbia University’s administration who demanded the group submit a list of membership (Beemyn, 2003). In a compromise, the SHL ultimately submitted a list of those students willing to openly identify with the group, but still allowing anonymous members to participate on the periphery and not register (Beemyn, 2003). This concession paved the way for such groups to exist on college campuses, bring visibility to sexual minority students on campus.

Once established on campuses, LGBTQ groups contribute positively to the culture of the institution in many ways. According to Kane (2013) an indicator for a positive campus climate towards LGBTQ students is the existence of a recognized student organization supported by the institution. Further, Renn (2007) found a pattern that indicated students who were involved with LGBTQ student groups went on to take leadership positions within the group and subsequently increased the degree to which they were out on campus. This trajectory added to the visibility of such students on campus and simultaneously provided leadership and growth opportunities for the individuals involved. The importance of having supportive institutional administration was also recommended by Ivory (2005) who noted such individuals are paramount when it comes to assisting LGBT students in their development as individuals in college. Finally, Kezar, Avilez, Drivalas and Wheaton (2017) stated that campus administrators should provide activist students and groups with opportunities to appropriately challenge institutional policies and procedures and promote dialogue. By focusing less on discipline and more on constructive dialogue, campus administrators can provide activist groups appropriate outlets for expressing feelings and

possibly creating change. As seen in the minimal empirical research on LGBTQ student groups, the presence of such organizations in conjunction with supportive campus administration can positively promote the healthy development sexual minority students on college and university campuses.

Classroom environment. On campus, gay men experience many distinctive experiences in college and university classrooms. While little empirical research has been conducted on the experiences of gay men in Catholic college and university classrooms, several studies revealed the challenges faced by this group of students at secular institutions. Mostly, themes of invisibility, implied pressure to “speak on behalf of all gays,” and the homophobic attitudes of faculty members were noted by LGBTQ students in college and university classrooms. Clearly, the actions of faculty member’s attitudes of fellow students had great impact on LGBTQ students in the classroom.

Connolly (2000) found while most LGB students felt free of physical violence threats, pervasive feelings of homophobia and/or heterosexism were found in the classroom environment. Furthermore, LGB students felt they were subjected to psychological violence as a result of systematic silencing or misrepresentation as a community by curriculum and faculty classroom management. Moreover, Furrow (2012) discovered several individuals in a study of 48 LGBT college students at various universities felt an extra burden for having same-sex sexual attraction. One student in particular felt he was singled out as the “queer voice in the classroom,” and treated as the token representative of the gay community. Additionally, Lopez and Chism (1993) noted LGBT students felt heterosexual classmates were naïve and stereotypical about same-sex sexual attraction. Furthermore, several students noted unwelcoming glances from classmates when speaking about same-sex sexual attraction within class. However, students in

the study also indicated some classmates were welcoming and expressed positive support during the same situation.

Regarding instruction, Furrow (2012) noted LGBT students found their connection with faculty members as crucial for their overall success in college. These students found the faculty were perceived as important in managing the classroom environment of the college community, and were seen as an extended part of the overall institutional mission and philosophy. However, not all research found faculty members were welcoming of LGBT students within the classroom. In one study, Hogan and Rentz (1996) interviewed 310 faculty members at various institutions and found professors were more homophobic than student affairs professionals. Additionally, male faculty members displayed a higher rate of homophobia than their female counterparts.

Lopez and Chism (1993) added gay and lesbian students felt faculty members avoided discussing or addressing same-sex sexual attraction in class in an effort to avoid awkward or messy conversations. As a result, the lack of discussion led to a feeling of *heterosexism*, or the assumption all the classroom students were heterosexual. Furthermore, Matheney (1998) noted some faculty members lack a basic background in LGBT issues, forcing students to explain necessary vocabulary on the subject before making main theoretical arguments. This “double work” of explaining basic cultural concepts was noted by LGBT students as unnecessary and not expected of heterosexual peers in the classroom. Also, Renn (2000) noted faculty members must be cognizant of introducing sexual orientation topics into curriculum and discussion. The introduction not only can create a welcoming environment for all students, but can contribute to a positive self-identity for sexual minority individuals in the classroom.

Residence Life Experiences. Within college and university residence halls, gay men face several unique challenges. While residence halls are occupied with a range of different age

residents, traditional first-year students are typically the most common occupants of these spaces. And, regardless of sexual orientation, these students are thrust into a new situation: sharing a space with “strangers,” removing a level of comfort and control known to the individual while simultaneously adapting to a diverse environment on an unknown campus (Robison, 1998). D’Augelli (2006) noted university housing arrangements were not safe and inviting environments, both physically and mentally, for many LBGT students. Unfortunately, for several reasons such as finances or lack of other viable living arrangements, the students had no choice but to live in these on-campus spaces. Furthermore, Bourassa and Shipton (1991) found the culture fostered in most residence hall environments is one of pervasive *heterosexism*, or the systemic assumption that all students in the community are attracted to individuals of the opposite sex. This assumption, while clearly false, creates an atmosphere where residence hall programs, for example, include opposite-sex dating programs, bulletin boards lacking same-sex examples, or such means to show a heterosexually dominated society (Baker, 1991). With a campus culture already lending to a feeling of invisibility amongst gay men, heterosexist residence hall environments compound the troubles for this community.

Often times, living in a university residence hall environment requires students to live with one or more roommates. For gay men, this concept can create an atmosphere of discomfort, possible harassment or even violence. Evans (2001) interviewed 20 gay and lesbian students in a residence hall environment and learned of several troubling experiences for the individuals. In one instance, a gay man’s roommate threatened to kill him when his sexual orientation was discovered. For another gay man, his roommate engaged in a series of passive aggressive acts, including: playing sexually explicit videos, placing anti-gay signs around the room and playing

recorded anti-gay religious programs in the room. Additionally, gay and lesbian students noted anti-LGBT defacement of signs on door and graffiti in the building (p. 188).

At some colleges and universities, policies exist requiring students to live with roommates, in some cases randomly assigned. In a study of gay men in residence hall environments, Anderson-Martinez and Vianden (2014) noted one student felt he never bonded with the residents of his assigned floor, mostly because of anti-gay attitudes of his all-male floor mates. As a result, he spent most of his time visiting other female residents of the building, avoiding his floor (p. 293). Bourassa & Shipton (1991) found most students who have gone through the coming out process are comfortable with themselves, and are more likely to live alone or with roommates who do not display homophobic attitudes when allowed by university policy to choose housing arrangements. Regardless of living arrangements in the hall, many studies cite the residence life staff as instrumental in shaping culture within the building.

Residence Hall staff members, typically full-time professionals or part-time student workers, live within the building and are responsible for a host of operations including: programming, crisis management, facilities operations and student counseling (Robison, 1998). Evans (2001) found lesbian and gay students within residence halls frequently cited the residence life staff as important in directing the climate of building regarding LGBT issues. Additionally, Gutierrez (1987) posited residence life staff intervention was key to managing building culture regarding LGBT issues on Catholic college and university campuses. Particularly, student resident assistant staff should be properly trained in conflict resolution should problems arise between heterosexual and LGBT members of floor communities.

Knowing residence hall staff members play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive floor community, the selection and training of student staff within the residence halls must be

conducted in a careful and concerted manner with regard to LGBT issues. D'Augelli (1989) conducted a study of 103 prospective Resident Assistants (RA), or student staff members, during the job interview process. Though most of the candidates believed sexual minority students should be protected from verbal and physical harassment in the residence halls, some candidates had a history of hate speech and negative attitudes towards these individuals. Overall, male RA candidates were significantly more homophobic, with 71% having made an anti-gay remark at some point in their college career. Knowing that a majority of young gay men explore and ultimately share their feelings of sexuality during college, selecting and developing a welcoming and accepting residence hall staff is vital to promoting a safe living environment (D'Augelli, 1992).

Clearly, students with same-sex sexual attraction face many unique challenges and barriers in college. Through feelings of invisibility, cold and sometimes hostile campus environments, challenges in the residence halls, and unique factors in the classroom, these students are vulnerable in many ways. This collection of research spanning different campus pockets indicates that educational leaders must focus on ways to assist and protect this population of students through policy and support structures. With the characteristics of this community framed and their experiences explored, this literature review now turns to the Catholic Church and its influences through doctrine and the establishment of the campuses that will serve as the research settings of this study.

The Catholic Church

Undeniably, the Catholic Church has global influence on multiple areas of society, including higher education. According to Burke (2014), the Catholic Church has over 1.2 billion members across hundreds of countries across the globe. Further, due to combination of deeply-

rooted traditions, biblical influences and a history of conservative leadership, the Catholic Church has been slow to change even under the progressive influence of Pope Francis (Burke, 2014). Bluntly stated, “If Jesus said it, the logic goes, the church can’t change it” (Burke, 2014). Under this philosophy, the focus of this literature review shifts to examining the teachings of the Catholic Church, specifically as it relates to same-sex sexual attraction. With those expectations in place, an exploration of Catholic higher education is then necessary to frame elements of this study. By unpacking the history of Catholic higher education and investigating the multiple missions and identities that exist under its global reach, subtle nuances emerge that begin to explain how institutions like Gonzaga University can establish an LGBTQ resource center (Hughes, 2008), but the Catholic University of America can deny the formal recognition of an LGBTQ student group (Riley, 2017). To begin, it is necessary to examine the Catholic Church’s teachings regarding same-sex sexual attraction.

Homosexuality. While secular society still struggles to ascribe an exact explanation for same-sex sexual attraction, the teachings of the Catholic Church are unwavering towards the appropriate display of human sexuality. Prior to studying the lived experiences of gay men at Catholic colleges and universities, it is necessary to explore the official teachings of the church as a grounding for this study. While the church is clear to separate the moral nature of same-sex sexual attraction from subsequent activity, the ambiguity of teachings in practice has caused many problems for gay men. In addition, as Catholic colleges and universities continue to compete with other institutions for student enrollment, the church’s teachings become increasingly magnified as a point of differentiation between schools.

Regarding human sexuality, the Catholic Church indicates sexual intercourse is only to occur within marriage, between a man and a woman (Catholic Church, 1997). Additionally,

sexual intercourse within marriage must be open to the possibility of human life creation. Because same-sex sexual activity cannot fulfill either of these requirements, faithful of the church must not perform such behaviors. Furthermore, the Catholic Church does not believe engaging in homosexual behavior is morally acceptable. Additionally, while the Church acknowledges the etiology of same-sex sexual attraction could be biological in nature, Catholic teachings labeled the behavior as intrinsically disordered (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986; Catholic Church, 2000).

Individuals with same-sex sexual attraction are encouraged to participate within the Catholic community, but the Church notes several important caveats. Homosexuals, like all unmarried members of the Church, are called to a life of chastity (Catholic Church, 1976). *Chastity*, or the act of self-mastery over sexual temptation, requires the individual to govern passions and find inner peace. Chastity is the successful integration of sexuality within the person, the only morally acceptable sexuality option for non-married Catholics (Catholic Church, 2000). The church acknowledges living as a chaste homosexual is not easy, especially if the individual feels drawn of a life of commitment with another person (United States Catholic Conference, 1991).

Since individuals with same-sex sexual attractions cannot fulfill the only acceptable purpose of human sexuality as defined by the Church, the virtue of chastity and *celibacy*, or abstinence from sexual activity, are the only moral, viable alternatives (Catholic Church & United States Catholic Conference, 1996). The Catholic Church encourages individuals with same-sex sexual attractions to be actively involved in a life of faith and community. However, should an individual with same-sex sexual attractions actively defy teachings related to the purpose of human sexuality, the Catholic Church is justified in denying leadership opportunities

within the parish community to avoid scandal or perceptions of condoning such behavior (US Bishops, 2006).

Though the Catholic Church labels same-sex sexual behavior as intrinsically disordered, other areas of teachings call for compassion and understanding for the LGBTQ community. The Church imparts that the community must treat individuals with same-sex sexual attractions with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Furthermore, every effort to avoid unjust discrimination towards members with same-sex sexual attractions must occur (Catholic Church, 2000). Church leadership is also called upon by to condemn violent malice or speech against members with same-sex sexual attractions. However, Catholic Church teachings further explain the community should not be surprised when irrational or violent reactions occur within society if civil rights advancement attempts to condone same sex activity (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986).

In a clear juxtaposition, Catholic doctrine creates a scenario where compassion and understanding for gay men are required, but attempts towards equality with the heterosexual community are not condoned. This dualistic position sets a scenario on campuses where students begin to question the doctrinal expectations of Catholic colleges and universities. Gray & Cidade (2010) noted “millennial Catholics,” or those born after 1982, generally hold attitudes in opposition of Catholic social teachings, especially in areas such as abortion and same-sex unions. Additionally, only 32% of Catholic college students in their study disagreed somewhat or strongly that same-sex couples should have the right to marry. Because of these progressive feelings, many Catholic institutions of higher education are attempting to meet the human rights needs of their sexual minority students while remaining rooted in doctrine.

According to the Cardinal Newman Society (2016), universities such as Georgetown, Marquette, Fordham and the University of San Diego proudly hold “coming out day” celebrations for their campus communities. Some of the celebrations angered members of the clergy and university community, as they were perceived as ignoring the true teachings of the Church regarding same-sex sexual behavior. Hughes (2008) noted that many Catholic campuses are struggling to balance their need to provide support networks and services for sexual minority students while attempting to maintain policies grounded in the teachings of the Church. This noted culture shift found on Catholic college and universities in light of stated teachings on human sexuality shifts this discussion towards the evolution of American Catholic higher education. In order to contextualize the environment encountered by LGBTQ students on these campuses, the mission, history and philosophy of these institutions must be considered.

The History of American Catholic Higher Education. It was not until John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop of the United States, established Georgetown Academy in 1789 that Catholic higher education truly began in America. Even at this seminal moment in history, Catholic higher education sprouted from humble roots. In the beginning, American Catholic institutions of higher education were established to prepare young seminarians for religious life. However, the expense of this aim became overwhelming and had to be offset in some manner to ensure institutional viability. As a result, American Catholic institutions of higher education such as Georgetown began admitting young, lay students to study alongside seminarians (Gleason, 1995). In order to attract enough male students to attend, Catholic colleges such as Georgetown needed to provide immigrant parents reassurance that the curriculum would be shielded from non-Catholic powers and was worth the time and capital investment (Power, 1972). From the

beginning, Catholic colleges and universities were forced to deviate from their original aims to survive.

As Catholic higher education in the United States began to slowly expand and provide more opportunities for young men, the concept of schooling for women began to gain leverage. Catholic higher education for women evolved over the century that followed Georgetown's opening with quick, incremental gains. Power (1972) noted Catholic schools for women principally gained acceptance through the context of teacher preparation. Whether the administration of these institutions agreed or not, tolerance for Catholic women's education was typically only accepted within this context. A further source of confusion for Catholic women was the balance between the needs of home and education. Dolan (2002) explained the Church provided mixed signals for women in this context, further confusing their role in the overall functioning of the Catholic Church. The extension of education to women is another salient example of Catholic colleges and universities meeting the needs of a distinct population, but doing so in a way that was arguably ambiguous and counter to their original mission and aims.

After a period of relative stability and insulation, Catholic higher education arguably faced its most turbulent period – the 1960's. Between the ramifications of the second Vatican Council (Vatican II) initiated by Pope John XXIII, changes to institutional governance structures, national social and political revolutions, and the rapid decline of vowed leadership at these colleges and universities, the concept of evolution permeated American Catholic higher education in ways never seen before in history (Denig & Dosen, 2009). Throughout the 1960's, American Catholic higher education saw several institutions such as Webster College institute a completely secularized leadership structure. However, other institutions such as the University of Notre Dame took steps to develop other leadership models that ensured a blend of Catholic

influence and secular influences (Dosen, 2009). At the conclusion of this turbulent period, it was again clear that Catholic colleges and universities were faced with the need to restructure and modernize in light of societal influences and the need for long term survival.

After the upheaval of the 1960's, the balance of the twenty first century brought more social and political threats to America, in addition to a new Pope. At yet another seminal moment in the history, and in attempt to clarify the role of the Church in Catholic higher education, Pope John Paul II issued an Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, on August 15th, 1990. This work, according to Dosen (2012) was meant as a call upon all Catholic colleges and universities to revisit the philosophies and actions that undergirded their day-to-day operations. After decades of evolution and adaption within society, Pope John Paul II clearly outlined expectations relating to various matters such as the requisite number of Catholic faculty members, expectations upon the local bishops regarding the monitoring of Catholic colleges and universities actions and the specific requirements bestowed upon professors of theology at such institutions. While specific in nature regarding the importance of the Catholic Church in these colleges and universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* proved as an unwelcome intrusion and imposition on some campuses raising again the role of Rome in the functioning of institutions in the United States. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was clearly an attempt to refocus American Catholic higher education on traditional Catholic teachings.

Hellwig (2004) notes that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* established four essential characteristics for Catholic colleges and universities. First, Christian inspiration must permeate the entire university community. Secondly, institutions must reflect upon human knowledge, contributing where necessary through campus research and work. Next, institutions are to services God's people through actions. Finally, and most applicable to this study, Catholic institutions of higher

education are to remain faithful to the Christian message as it is provided through the Catholic Church. Clearly outlined and stated by Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* reaffirms the expectations of Catholic institutions of higher education. In theory, these four essential characteristics provide a mooring for administrators at Catholic institutions of higher education to anchor against and help manage the influences of modernity.

In the specific details of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Maguire (2002) noted Pope John Paul II outlined several edicts that appeared treacherous in application to higher education in the late twentieth century. The document clearly outlined the role of local Bishops as having, “a responsibility to promote the welfare of Catholic universities in his diocese” (John Paul II, 1992, p. 431). Further enhancing the role of local Bishops, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* extends the authority to resolve any issues within their purview, working with Rome as necessary. As noted by Monan and Malloy (1999), several United States Bishops expressed concern regarding this directive, citing fears of alienation between the Bishops and the Catholic colleges and universities in their jurisdiction. Furthermore, numerous Bishops acknowledged controlling or punitive actions against such institutions could provide harm against the unique missions and formed communities on these campuses.

However, American Catholic higher education has once again seen a change in how institutions portray their missions and identities to potential students in the 21st century. Hendershott (2009) described how Catholic colleges and universities have begun to pull away from their religious undergirding, using creative mission language to either more delicately describe their affiliation with the Church, or completely pull away from it. In order to remain competitive with secular institutions and remain on important lists such as the Princeton Review,

the marketing instruments of Catholic colleges and universities are now placing emphasis on the works and philosophies of their founding orders, rather than the greater Church.

Hendershott (2009) posited many Catholic institutions prefer to use the word “rooted” when referring to Catholic tradition or heritage as a way of distancing the institution from Catholicism, which clouds the cultural significance of Catholicism on these campuses. Furthermore, the mission statements of several Jesuit institutions are increasingly focused on the concept of social justice. Hendershott (2009) notes the concept of social justice can take precedence in mission statements, completely ignoring the religious roots of the phrase in favor of secular interpretations. While usually subtle, the language of Catholic college and university mission statements have profound impacts on the perception of these institutions, in some case transitioning the campus population in unintended ways. While not explicit, this shift in mission language opens the door for more inclusive treatment of sexual minority students. However, unless Church doctrine is directly ignored, gay men are once again left to reconcile mixed signals between inclusion and church teaching.

Institutional missions and identities. With clear expectations regarding same-sex sexual attraction established and a historical perspective provided, one would assume Catholic colleges and universities in the United States operate with similar approaches to establishing support programs and policies for the queer community on their campuses. However, Hellwig (2004) reminds us that of the Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States, few were founded by bishops, or members of the Church hierarchy. Instead, a large majority of institutions were founded and are still maintained today by religious congregations of women and men. Further, each of these institutions take unique approaches to educating and developing students based on the philosophies and missions of their religious orders (Hellwig, 2004).

For example, at institutions such as DePaul, St. John's and Niagara University, Vincentian priests boldly established colleges to educate immigrants, the poor, and individuals without readily access to education (Harrington, 1996). Guided by the words of St. Vincent, Vincentian universities firmly believe, "prayer and study should resolve themselves into action; the light in the mind should become a fire in the heart and on the lips of the apostle" (Murphy, 1991, p. 140). Further, DePaul University emphasizes its inclusive community by deliberately seeking, "diversity in students' special talents, qualities, interests and socio-economic backgrounds" (DePaul University, 2017). At the core of St. Vincent's teachings, Murphy (1991) emphasized Vincentian institutions must ensure providing a liberal education while still maintaining loyalty to the Catholic Church and operating universities in an urban environment. As such, even the largest Catholic institution of higher education in the United States is faced with competing forces: remaining loyal to Roman Catholicism yet fostering a welcoming community for a wide range of students.

For LGBTQ students, DePaul University offers a wide array of support services, from the "queer peers" program, "trans, non-binary, asexual and bisexual resources," to safe zone workshops (DePaul University, 2017). Further, DePaul, the largest Catholic university in the United States, was a pioneer in 2006, introducing the "queer studies minor," the first of its kind amongst Catholic institutions of higher education (DeRose, 2006). Debuting at a conservative time in the Church under the leadership of Pope Benedict, the queer studies minor resulted in mixed reviews from students and alumni (DeRose, 2006). Regarding the decision to offer the minor, Fr. James Halstead, the Department of Religious Studies chair, stated, "homosexual human beings are created by God, loved by God and redeemed by God, have a place in the Christian community, should be welcomed, valued and treasured, and in civil society, normal

human rights and civil rights respected” (DeRose, 2006). Through this curricular offering, Vincentian institutions are allowing for dialogue in spaces where the Church’s official position on subjects like same-sex sexual attraction may have been absent in previous generations.

Morey and Holtschneider (2004) point out that religious sponsors such as the Vincentians of DePaul University play multiple roles in the life of an institution. First, these sponsors are the interpreters of the overall university mission. Additionally, they serve as the institution’s memory and conscience, constantly reminding the community of the expectations and philosophies of the founders. Further, Catholic colleges and universities often emphasize their sponsorship, such as Vincentian or Jesuit, in the public arena to lessen the anxiety sometimes associated with the Catholic Church (Morey and Holtschneider, 2004). While not always viewed as necessary or justified, this approach helps bridge the gap between Catholic and non-Catholic members of the community, in hopes of creating a more welcoming, diverse community (Morey and Holtschneider, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

Examining the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education requires a theoretical framework which allows elements of self and the surrounding environment to be explored in tandem. Fry (2012) noted gay and lesbian alumni of a Catholic encountered instances where they felt unwelcomed in college, stemming from a handful of unsupportive faculty and staff. Additionally, participants in the study noted feeling a lack of acceptance from Church leadership, and mixed reaction from vowed religious community members on campus. Willette (2016) found that although gay men at an urban Catholic university experienced mostly positive feelings about their time in college, certain elements of the environment contributed to feelings of marginality. These elements included a lack of queer

visibility when discussing sexual violence at orientation sessions and a hyper-masculine aura in the university fitness center. As evident in these most recent studies, micro and macro level influences and environmental components impact queer students in different ways, making it necessary to examine Catholic campus environments through a framework that considers these factors. As such, the theoretical framework that guides this study is Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory*.

In his seminal work, *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979), psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner introduced the Ecological Systems Theory (or EST), a framework that focuses on human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines development as, "a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment" (p. 3). Renn and Arnold (2003) detailed Bronfenbrenner's theory incorporated the work of psychologists such as Kurt Lewin, Lev Vygotsky and Gordon Allport, in an attempt to explain the influence a person's environment has on their individual development. The theory examined the relationship between a, "human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21). Bronfenbrenner (1979) is clear to point out that human beings are in constant reciprocity with their environment, as both players exert influence on the other. Further, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained a human's immediate setting is not the only environment relevant to development. Rather, both immediate and distant settings and influences impact the development of a human and are intertwined.

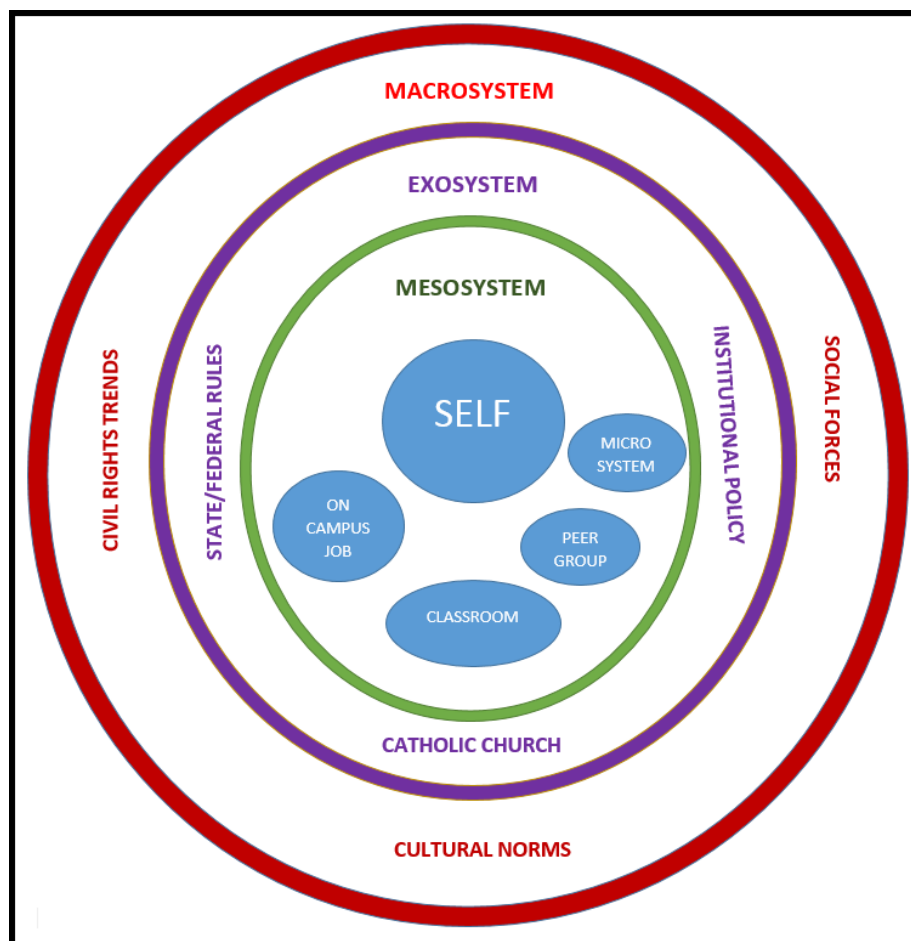


Figure 1. *Applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory to a Campus Environment. Adapted from "Reconceptualizing research on a college student peer culture," by K. A. Renn & K. D. Arnold, 2003, Journal of Higher Education, 74(3), p. 268.*

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the EST is, “conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). The individual exists at the center of the structure, surrounded by the *microsystem*, or, “the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with a particular physical and material characteristics” (p. 22). Bronfenbrenner emphasized the word “experienced” in his definition of microsystem because, “the scientifically relevant features of any environment include not only its objective properties but also the way in which these properties are perceived

by the persons in that environment” (p. 22). Further, Bronfenbrenner noted the word “experienced” equates to a phenomenological view of the environment as experienced by the individual. In application to higher education, Renn and Arnold (2003) explained a traditional college student’s microsystem might include the residence hall, classroom, a student organization, fraternity/sorority or an on-campus job. As previously mentioned in this literature review, these microsystem elements play a large role in the way an LGBTQ student develops and experiences college, necessitating examination through this study.

In the next layer of the nested system of the EST, Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the mesosystem, or, “the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates” (p. 25). Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted that mesosystems are essentially a system of microsystems, and are formed when the developing person moves into a new setting. Renn and Arnold (2013) elaborated that a college student’s mesosystems may include interactions between academic, social, family and work life. Bronfenbrenner (1979) again emphasized the developing individual experiences mesosystems in different manners, underscoring the phenomenological nature of such encounters. For LGBTQ students, the examination of mesosystems is important to understand how various experiences on campus interact with each other and impact overall development.

With micro- and mesosystem definitions established, the next layer described in the EST model is the exosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the exosystem as, “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (p. 25). Renn and Arnold (2013) noted a developing college student’s exosystem may include elements such as family economics, federal government regulations and other outside influences that may

impact the individual. For LGBTQ students at Catholic institutions of higher education, the exosystem included the Catholic Church and decisions imposed by the leadership. As such, exosystem decisions made by the Church eventually trickle down and impact the experience and development of this community on Catholic Campuses.

Beyond the exosystem, the EST model then describes the next setting, the macrosystem. By definition, Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted the macrosystem, “refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (p. 26). At the macrosystem level, Renn and Arnold (2013) described the United States and the various cultural understandings that exist regarding gender, race and ethnicity. These influences provide structural influences on the inner rings of the EST, and cannot be ignored when examining the development of the individual. For LGBTQ students, macrosystem level influences include the state of civil rights and acceptance in the cultural fabric of the United States.

In sum, the EST model is the most relevant theory for this research study for several reasons. First, the theory allows for multiple layers of examination as they directly related to the development of gay men at Catholic institutions of higher education. By examining the microsystem elements of the alumni’s experience, narratives emerged describing the most immediate contexts in which the student interacted during their time on campus. Through examining the mesosystem level, this study revealed how microsystem elements interact and are interrelated with each other on campus. Finally, exosystem factors such as policies and beliefs held by the Catholic Church are unpacked along with macrosystem elements related to societal and cultural views of those with same-sex sexual attraction. Without doubt, this study attempted

examine multiple factors that influenced the experience of gay, male alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education. However, without the flexibility and multiple layer approach offered by Bronfenbrenner and the EST model, such an investigation would lack the depth provided by this approach.

Conclusion

As seen throughout the literature in this review, LGBTQ students face an array of challenges not seen by heterosexual counterparts due to several, unique factors. Within documents published by the Catholic Church, messages requiring compassion towards the LGBTQ community coexist with labels such as “intrinsically disordered” in describing the same group. Although each institution either is sponsored by a unique religious order or operates with a distinctive ethos, these colleges and universities still identify as Catholic and are thereby connected to the Church’s perceived mixed messages regarding same sex, sexual attraction. Throughout history, Catholic colleges and universities have tried to resist secular influences, but ultimately tolerated modernity and welcomed diverse students to campus. As Catholic colleges and universities knowingly continue to admit gay male students, this study is necessary to examine the influence Catholic Church teachings and affiliation has on the experiences of this community. As seen through quantification efforts, gay men could represent upwards of 10% or more of the student body further underscoring the need for additional research.

Additionally, research indicates LGBTQ students face increased levels of mental, substance and sexual behavior risks, in addition to higher risks of harassment and invisibility both in the classroom and out. While some studies show these risk factors exist across all subsets the LGBTQ community, specific studies show gay men have increased levels of vulnerability in certain areas such as alcohol and substance abuse. On Catholic campuses, faculty and

administration must be aware of the susceptibilities of this community. This proposed study can help provide data and direction for pointed programming, curricular changes and increased levels of support on campus.

Finally, existing literature often broadly reports on the LGBTQ community, necessitating further research on individual subgroup experiences. While some would argue society should exist without the need for labels based on sexual identity, research on the individual subgroups of the LGBTQ community is still helpful in providing empirical data for administrators and faculty. Also, available studies of gay college men are predominantly sampled from secular college populations, void of the influences provided by the Catholic Church. To assume the lived experiences gay men are the same across every type of college and university would be naïve, thus creating a strong case for future studies relating to the realities found on Catholic college and university campuses. Combining all these stated intersections, the stage is set to expand the body of research on this unique community, helping to decrease the invisibility often felt by many gay men on Catholic campuses.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

This chapter outlines pertinent components related to examining the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Through a phenomenological methodology, this study explored a central research question: how do gay, male alumni perceive their experiences of attending a Catholic institution of higher education. Nested in this central question, multiple sub-questions explored alumni experiences inside and outside of the classroom and how both the culture and Catholic identity of the institution influenced their lived experiences. This study provides additional research, adding to the minimal existing studies available on the subject. Moreover, this study focused on one identity within the LGBTQ spectrum, gay men, in an attempt to avoid generalizing findings for the entire community. The use of qualitative research methods for this study was appropriate, as it attempted to understand the meaning of people's experiences and how sense is made through such events (Merriam, 2002).

Utilizing a phenomenological framework, rooted in the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and grounded in research technique described by Clark Moustakas (1994), six alumni of various American Catholic institutions of higher education served as research participants in a two-part, 90-minute interview format. From those interviews, this study describes how the sexual orientation of the various alumni intersected with the culture of their Catholic institution of higher education. This section also describes data analysis methods pertinent to phenomenology, addresses issues of trustworthiness, and identifies the salient limitations and delimitation of this study. Before specific elements related to this study are discussed, an introduction to the qualitative research methodology of phenomenology is necessary to understand the rationale for

its use in studying the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education.

Phenomenology

This research study was rooted in the qualitative research methodology of phenomenology. According to Willis, Jost and Nilakanta (2007), phenomenology is defined as, “the study of people’s perception of the world” (p. 107). Further, Sokolowski (2000) noted, “Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (p. 2). Vagle (2014) elaborated that phenomenology is a philosophical approach, attempting to study the essence of being in relation with “others or other things” (p. 20). Further, Schram (2006) added that phenomenological research depends on comprehensive descriptions from research participants to describe the meaning of a lived experience. Also, phenomenology focuses on elements of shared experiences, with an analysis that remains as close to the collected data as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Further, Moustakas (1994) noted an empirical approach to phenomenology, “involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience” (p. 13).

The word phenomenology, a compound of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*, is based in providing an account, or *logos* of a *phainomenon*, or remembered events (Sokolowski, 2000). From a historical perspective, phenomenology emerged as a philosophy in the early twentieth century, owing its genesis to the work of German mathematician, Edmund Husserl. Also, Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, added subsequent contributions to the philosophy through the concept of interpretative phenomenology in later years (Sokolowski, 2000). Husserl noted each lived experience exhibits a “pure phenomenon” that can be examined through in-

depth analysis and reduction. This reduction allows researchers to reveal the essence of the experience in its purest form. Husserl also introduced the concept of bracketing, sometimes used as a synonym for the Greek term *epochè* (Husserl & Gibson, 1931). Van Manen (2014) noted the term *epochè* was used by historians to indicate researchers must suspend belief. Applied as an analogy to mathematics, Husserl explained bracketing is the suspension of all prejudgments about an experience by the researcher, and is a key component of phenomenological research. Papp, Markkanen and von Bonsdorff (2003) further explained Husserl's approach to phenomenology is presupposition-less, or proceeded without biases and judgements.

Research studies utilizing a phenomenological methodology also incorporate the concept of reduction to arrive at the essence of a particular phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) explained of phenomenological reduction, "the task is that of describing in textual language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self" (p. 90). Giorgi (2009) further detailed regarding reduction, "what is presented in the description is taken to be a phenomenon, that is something that was experienced by the describer" (p. 118). Van Manen (1990) noted reduction allows the researcher to arrive at the essence of a phenomena, or the universal meaning that goes beyond the lived experiences of the individual.

Further, Phenomenology is undergirded by the concept of intentionality. According to Vagle (2014), intentionality is used, "to signify how we are meaningfully connected to the world" (p. 27). Further, Vagle (2014) explained that phenomenological studies focus on examining a phenomenon and unpacking the intentional relations that appear through research methods. Sokolowski (2000) further noted, "The core doctrine in phenomenology is the teaching that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional" (p. 8).

Vagle (2014) was clear to delineate the difference between the American English meaning of “intention,” as the purpose for doing something, and the phenomenological meaning of connectedness. In the end, phenomenological research hopes to arrive the idea of imaginative variation. Moustakas (1994) detailed, “Imaginative Variation enables the researcher to derive structural themes from the textural descriptions that have been obtained through Phenomenological Reduction” (p. 99).

Studies involving a phenomenological framework utilize common methods of data collections and are undergirded by several common characteristics. Englander (2012) noted participant selection for a phenomenological study is rooted in the initial research questions, not other traditions or norms. This notion is advanced by the researcher acknowledging a lack of understanding exists in a specific area and analysis is required to uncover meaning. In a phenomenological study, the number of participants can vary widely depending on the research topic. However, Creswell (1998) noted up to ten carefully chosen participants are typically included in a study. Once the appropriate participants are selected, researchers usually conduct multiple, in-depth interviews with participants. These interviews can be up to one or two hours in length (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Further, Moustakas (1994) indicated participant interviews are interactive, utilizing open-ended questions and allow for dialogue between researcher and participant.

Based on these definitions and parameters, phenomenology was the most appropriate research methodology to examine the essence of attending a Catholic institution of higher education as a gay man. Since each study participant presented with differing reflections on their time at in college, it was appropriate to utilize a methodology that incorporated multiple, in-depth interviews and document analysis to arrive at themes related to attending an institution of

higher education where religious doctrine assigns moral judgments against the sexual identity of community members.

Prior to beginning this study, a small-scale pilot study was conducted to assist in formulating appropriate research questions and methodology for this study. Under the supervision of my qualitative research methods professor, I utilized a phenomenological methodology to examine the lived experiences of three alumni of a single American Catholic institution of higher education. Similar to the method of this study, all participants graduated between 2000 and 2015, and identified as cisgender, gay men. The pilot study examined the same research questions as this study and found two emergent themes: participants felt supported and visible on campus and divergent messages were encountered from the vowed religious members on campus when compared to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Having successfully completed the pilot study, this study was launched to further refine my interview protocols and expand out the research setting from a single to multiple American Catholic institutions of higher education.

Method

With a firm philosophical understanding of phenomenology in place, an explanation of the specific approach to this study is required to provide a framework for this study. The seven step approach described by Clark Moustakas (1994, pp. 103-104) for scientific phenomenological studies was most appropriate for this study, and expanded upon later in this chapter. Moustakas' approach includes:

1. *Selecting a topic that has autobiographical meanings and social significance.* The lived experiences of gay men who attended American Catholic institutions of higher education is an impactful, timely topic that could be investigated through

- phenomenology. The choice of this topic was further supported by a lack of timely, empirical research on the lived experiences of gay male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education.
2. *Conducting an in-depth literature review of relative research.* This study accomplished this requirement through a review of various themes related to research topic and questions. The literature review, found in chapter two of this study, examined topics such as: same sex, sexual attraction, special considerations of the LGBTQ community, the Catholic Church, and also identified an appropriate theoretical framework on which to ground the study.
 3. *Constructing a set of selection criteria to locate participants.* With the permission of the DePaul University Institutional Review Board (IRB), a study advertisement and accompanying information sheet was distributed to various student affairs professionals with connections to Catholic institutions of higher education. This advertisement criteria was purposeful, to best communicate the study to potential research participants that fit the selection criteria.
 4. *Ensuring participants are aware of ethical concerns, confidentiality and other related study elements.* In both written and verbal form, participants were notified of the various measures in place to ensure their confidentiality and the safeguarding of information in this study. This process was reviewed and approved by the DePaul University Institutional Review Board (IRB).
 5. *Developing a set of appropriate interview questions.* As indicated in the interview guides (see Appendix C & D), appropriate interview questions were rooted in the topic and research questions. These questions were divided between two, 90 minute

- interviews. The first interview focused on elements of the participant's life prior to college and the second interview concentrated on the actual phenomenon, attending a Catholic institution of higher education as a gay man.
6. *Conducting in-depth, bracketed interviews with participants.* As described in the data collections and researcher positions sections, interviews were conducted using a method that ensures proper length and depth. Further, by bracketing my own experience prior to each interview, participants were ensured phenomenological principles are followed in this study. My bracketing occurred by arriving at each interview 15 minutes early to meditate, clearing my head of most thoughts leading into the sessions.
 7. *Organizing and analyzing data to reveal structural meanings and essences.* All data collected in this study through interviews were coded and themed to describe the essence of attending a Catholic institution of higher education as a sexual minority. The four major themes are described in chapter four of this study. Further, interview data was explained in the context of the study's theoretical framework.

With established philosophical and methodological approach to this study framed, a description of the research sample is provided to discuss how participants were selected for this study.

Research Sample

This study focused on the lived experiences of gay male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. As previously noted, existing research surrounding the topic generalized lived experiences for the entire LGBTQ community, using primarily public institutions as the research setting (D'Augelli, 2006; Brown & Alderson, 2010). Moreover, the minimal studies related directly to gay men at Catholic campuses explored current students or

included other sexual identities, such as lesbian or bisexual (Levine & Love, 2000; Fry, 2012; Willette, 2016). This study builds on stated opportunities for future research by examining former students, or shifting the focus to reflections on past rather than current experience.

As such, this phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of six gay male alumni of various American Catholic institutions of higher education. Englander (2012) noted researchers should seek out participants that have the lived experience to fit the study research questions. With this in mind, research participants were selected by means of purposive sampling, or selecting individuals that meet specific criteria for this particular study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To meet the criteria for this study, participants must:

- 1. Be an undergraduate alumnus of an American Catholic institution of higher education, graduating between the years 2000 and 2015.** The first criterion was utilized to narrow the participant sample to students that attended American Catholic institutions of higher education during a key period in LGBTQ American history. According to Freeman and Rupp (2014), various advances and challenges to the civil rights of gay individuals were present in American culture during this period.
- 2. Identify as cisgender, male.** The second selection criteria was utilized to ensure consistency in the sample's gender identity and sex for the study. Adams (2017) noted gender identity and sexual orientation not synonymous and must be separated in research. By restricting the study to only cisgender, male participants, factors relating to gender identity that may emerge from a transgender participant were not comingled with issues related to sexual orientation. The choice to only include cisgender, male participants was purposeful, so that the outcomes of this study do not inadvertently become generalized for the entire LGBTQ community.

3. Identify as either gay or same gender loving. The third and final criteria was established to ensure consistency to the extent possible amongst sexual orientation identities in the study. Both “gay” and “same gender loving” participants will be included in the study. Further, the individuals must have identified as “gay” or “same gender loving” both in college and currently. The choice to include “same gender loving” as a study inclusive identity acknowledged cultural differences in the use of terminology to describe sexual orientation. ‘Same Gender Loving’ is an Afrocentric term, used by some individuals to describe both their sexual orientation and intimate relationships with people of the same gender. The creation of this term was a reaction to Eurocentric terms such as “homosexual” and “bisexual” (Harris & Battle, 2013). By definition, the use of “same gender loving” allows for reasonable comparisons to be made between alumni while simultaneously respecting the culture of prospective participants.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Since sexual orientation is a private matter for many, the use of gatekeepers were heavily utilized in the sample selection. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that gatekeepers are individuals who can grant or deny access to researcher sites and participants during various stages of the study. For this study, various professional networks were used to provide referrals for this study. As a former LGBTQ student organization advisor and current higher education administration professional, I amassed professional contacts at multiple Catholic institutions of higher education throughout the United States by means of networking and collaboration. These professional contacts serve as current and former practitioners in student affairs positions or various other university roles with access to or knowledge of individuals that might meet the criteria for this study. Additionally, many Catholic institutions of higher education have LGBTQ

student organizations with public websites and contact information. As such, I utilized my professional networks and the various publically available contacts at Catholic institutions of higher education to recruit for this study.

With the approval of the DePaul University Institutional Review Board (IRB), and over the timeframe of sixty days, various gatekeepers were contacted via email and asked to forward an advertisement and study information to participant groups they felt would fit the study selection criteria. These materials were distributed by the gatekeepers by means of forwarding the information to prospective participants in their networks, posting the documents in a public area where prospective participants may frequent, or by placing the approved items on appropriate social media networks, such as Facebook™, Twitter™, or LinkedIn™. The study information included a confidential email address for interested individuals to inquire about and ultimately commit to participation in the study. Additionally, the study information included the various risks and benefits applicable to the study as required by the DePaul University IRB. In sum, these safeguards are congruent with Moustakas's (1994) approach to phenomenological studies and provided additional credibility to this study.

To ensure participants met the exact criteria for this study, an IRB approved intake survey (Appendix B) was deployed after initial contact was made by a prospective participant to the confidential email address. The intake survey asked several questions relating to the individual's gender identity, sexual orientation, graduation year, university attended and other such requirements for the study. The intake survey also contained a clear explanation of the risks involved in the study, as required by the DePaul University IRB. This survey was hosted on the DePaul University's survey management software and the results were only available via my

individual username and password. This practice maintained data confidentiality and ensured the anonymity of the research participants.

Through the use of maximum variation sampling as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016), the recruitment for this study purposely sought to elicit data from the greatest variety of individuals considering elements of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, college major, college/university attended, age, and religion. By approaching recruitment from this perspective, data collected from interviews attempted to reflect recent trends in examining sexual orientation from a multiple identity perspective as detailed in the literature review of this study. Decisions on which participants to include or exclude in the study were based on analyzing the results of the intake survey in conjunction with the aforementioned maximum variation sampling technique. In total, eight individuals responded to the study advertisement and took the intake survey over the course of sixty days. Ultimately, six individuals were selected based on the previously described criteria. Of note, the remaining two prospective candidates were excluded from the study because their intake survey results did not fit the selection criteria due to out of range graduation years or sexual orientation. These individuals were excluded from the study and notified via email of their status. Chosen participants were contacted via email and asked to provide interview times and locations that best fit his schedule.

Research Settings

Based on stated opportunities for future research found in Willette's (2016) study of current gay students at a Jesuit university, this study shifted the research focus to alumni of various Catholic institutions of higher education. According to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (2017), there are 265 institutions of Catholic higher education in the United States. As such, this study utilized maximum variation sampling to select individuals

from Catholic institutions of higher education with differing missions, geographical locations and sizes.

As described previously in the participant recruitment section of this study, each prospective participant was required to complete a brief intake survey (see Appendix B). One survey question asked prospective participants to disclose the name of their alma mater. From the eligible candidates in the pool at the close of recruitment, six participants were selected in pairs representing three different Catholic institutions of higher education. The selection of three different Catholic institutions of higher education as research settings was purposeful as a majority of Catholic institutions of higher education take unique approaches to educating and developing students based on the philosophies and missions of their religious orders (Hellwig, 2004). Further, by selecting two participants per research setting, this study was enhanced by providing multiple voices in the discussion of campus cultures. Also, the three institutions represent distinct locations (city, suburban and rural) and sizes (small, medium and large enrollments). Identified by pseudonyms, the following three Catholic institutions of higher education served as research sites for this study:

Carman College. Located outside of a major city in a moderate sized suburb, Carman College was founded in the early 1900's as a teachers college for women. Carman College has a full-time undergraduate enrollment of approximately 5,000 students and is known for programs in education, nursing and engineering. Approximately 1,500 students live in one of a dozen residence halls on campus, lending Carman College to have a reputation of being a "commuter campus." Carman College is primarily known for academics, but does have several athletic teams, including basketball, soccer and baseball.

Carman College was founded by the Carman Sisters of the Midwest. This group of vowed religious women established the institution to provide college educations to underprivileged and minority students. There are approximately 20 Carman Sisters still working and living on campus, although these numbers have dwindled over the years. Carman College has a strong faith presence on campus, as evident through the visible Campus Ministry program. Carman College is known for its annual student-led retreat, and employs undergraduate “Peer Mentors” to provide pastoral counseling in its residence halls. Further, Carman College is active in the surrounding community, providing outreach to various food banks and homeless shelters.

In this study, two participants attended Carman College at various times in the research timeframe. Adam, a business administration major, attended Carman College from 1996 to 2004. Adam was heavily involved on campus, both as a Peer Mentor and member of the officially recognized LGBTQ group. Mateo, an international studies major, attended the college from 2003 until 2007. Mateo lived on campus for one year and subsequently commuted for his remaining time at Carman College. Mateo was minimally involved in campus activities, mostly due to an inability to connect with the environment and administrative roadblocks that will be thoroughly discussed in the findings section of this study.

University of Santa Monica. Located in rural community, approximately 100 miles from a major city, the University of Santa Monica was founded in the 1800’s with aspirations to become the premier Catholic institution of higher education in the United States. Under the direction of the Gregorian Priests of the Midwest, the University of Santa Monica is nationally known as an academically rigorous institution with a strong athletics program. Popular majors at the University of Santa Monica include business, architecture, and biology. The student body of the university is approximately 9,000 students, with a vast majority residing on the main campus.

In contrast to Carman College, the University of Santa Monica is primarily known as a “residential college.”

On campus, residence halls at University of Santa Monica are single-gender by building. As later described by one of the study participants, this intentional arrangement of students creates an atmosphere similar to that of a fraternity house, with a strong emphasis on community. Further, each residence hall has a live-in “Chaplain,” a priest assigned to live in the community with the students. The presence of a Chaplain provides a dual purpose: to have an *en loco parentis* adult enforcing policy and a vowed religious figure to provide pastoral counseling and guidance as needed. This live-in professional also served as the traditional residence hall director typically employed at other colleges and universities.

In this study, two participants graduated from University of Santa Monica: Jackson and Travis. Jackson attended the university from 2000 until 2004, majoring in management information systems. Travis attended University of Santa Monica from 2005 until 2009, majoring in finance and political science. Jackson was heavily involved in the LGBTQ community, both on and off campus, citing his participation as very important to his time in college. Travis was involved in athletics on campus, playing for the intramural hockey team. He was also involved in other on-campus activities such as student government and theatre.

Canon University. Located in the heart of a major city, Canon University is a large institution of over 15,000 students. Established in the 1800’s by a group of priests, Canon University’s central mission is to provide educational opportunities to underprivileged communities. Canon University is among the largest Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States and is nationally known for academically rigorous programs that integrate resources from the city into its curriculum. This unique approach has established Canon

University as one of the most well-known urban institutions in the United States. Academically, Canon University is known for its business and science programs. Canon University is a primarily commuter campus, with only approximately 2,000 of its total student population living on campus. Canon University is geographically split between multiple campuses. Students at Canon University can choose from a wide array of on campus activities and sports. Canon University has multiple recognized LGBTQ student groups and several support structures within the Division of Student Affairs, such as a health and wellness office and robust counseling and health services.

In this study, two participants attended Canon University: Phil and Jeff. Phil, who attended Canon University as an out-of-state student, majored in sociology and was on campus from 2002 until 2006. Phil was minimally involved with campus activities, but did participate in the LGBTQ student group, serving as an officer. Jeff attended Canon University from 2010 until 2014 and majored in international relations. Jeff was a commuter at Canon University but found his involvement through playing rugby for the university and also worked on campus in the President's office.

Data Collection Methods

For this study, in-depth interviews were utilized to collect thick and rich data. According to Bailey (2007) semi-structured interviews are utilized to allow for specific questions to be asked, but not necessarily in a particular order. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow for dialogue with an interviewee, rather than rigid questions and answer sessions. Further, each interview were guided by a set of main interview questions and applicable probes to assist in data collection. Rubin and Rubin (2012) encourage researchers to structure interviews in such a way that the questions are sequenced correctly and do not restrict the participant answers. As seen in

the interview guides (see appendices) each interview was designed with questions that begin at the furthest applicable chronological point and includes statements that discourage single word answers. This approach was purposeful, to solicit thick and rich data in the interview process, lending credibility to the study.

Since this study utilizes a phenomenological methodology, a sample size of six research participants were interviewed in two, 90 minute increments. The number of participants is appropriate based on Seidman (2013) who emphasized picking a “sufficient” sample size to provide data saturation (p. 48). Seidman (2013) also recommended a three-interview approach to phenomenological studies: one interview focused on the life history of the participant, one for the details of the experience, and one to reflect on the meaning of the experience. In a slight modification to the Seidman approach, this study utilized two interviews: one to collect the life history of the participant and another to capture the details and reflections related to the experience. Seidman (2013) noted modifications to the three-interview protocol are allowable assuming, “a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives” (p. 15).

At the permission of the participant, all interviews were digitally recorded and the output file was saved on a password-protected, encrypted data storage server. All participants agreed to allow the interview to be digitally recorded. Approximately one week after the interview, participants were provided via email with a Word document of the verbatim transcript of each interview and were allowed one week to review the documents, suggesting edits, requesting redactions and providing feedback as necessary. Ultimately, two of the participants followed up after the review, indicating the transcripts accurately reflected their interview and recommended no changes. Per the DePaul University IRB, all Word document transcripts and digital interview

output files will be retained for one year from the conclusion of this study and then destroyed. The aforementioned method aimed to ensure the participant's words were translated correctly onto paper and properly secured, adding an extra layer of credibility to the interview process.

Data Analysis Methods

According to Patton (1990), the challenge of data analysis in qualitative research is to decipher enormous amounts of data, reduce it into a usable format and delineate the essence of what was experienced by participants. After the interviews were conducted, all recorded participant data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Then, the interview transcripts were provided to the applicable participant for analysis and to ensure accuracy. Participants were given one week to add, change or remove elements of the interview transcripts. Of the six study participants, two elected to review the transcripts. However, neither participants offered corrections, noting the documents accurately reflected their experiences.

Once verified, the transcripts were analyzed and coded to formulate themes. Specifically, data was coded through an inductive process. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted, "Generally, an inductive approach to coding stays as close to the data as possible" (p. 249). This method is appropriate for a phenomenological study, as the essence of an experience must emerge from the data and not be coded using preconceived notions. Further, Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) noted that coding fragments interviews into categories for examination and synthesis involves reconstructing the items into a meaningful explanation. Finally, all formulated themes are presented in chapter four of this study, revealing the essence of attending a Catholic institution of higher education as a gay man based on the available data of this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness, Reliability and Credibility

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), qualitative research is evaluated based on criteria that examine how well the investigator provided evidence that collected data and its subsequent analysis accurately depicted the situations and persons studied. As such, three criteria were utilized to evaluate the trustworthiness of this study: credibility, dependability, and transferability. These elements worked in tandem to ensure the data collected from the participants of this study accurately depicted their lived experiences as a gay man on the campus of a Catholic institution of higher education. As such, these three study elements are described in depth below:

Credibility. Credibility within this study is established through multiple means. By carefully explaining my own lived experience as a gay alumnus of a Catholic university in the introduction of this proposal, I am thoroughly providing readers with my unique perspective as a researcher. This process will ensure my assumptions and own experiences as a gay alumnus of a Catholic university do not negatively impact the research. Additionally, credibility is established by providing a detailed methodology section (Bailey, 2007). Finally, I utilized a critical partner to “peer debrief” my field notes and experiences after each round of interviews. This critical partner and I have an established relationship, and have worked together in this manner since developing and ultimately deploying a pilot study based on similar research questions. Additionally, my critical partner is currently certified on all mandated training modules through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI program) offered by the DePaul University Institutional Review Board. This added an extra layer of credibility, as my critical partner is aware of the requirements related to working with human subjects.

Dependability and transferability. Also dependability and transferability are noted in this study through additional safeguards in the data collection process. By providing complete transparency in the collection process and subsequent data availability, I ensured readers understood the inductive coding and analysis methods utilized in this study. This procedure is recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) to ensure findings are consistent and dependable. Additionally, this study strived for transferability in its research design. According to Ravich and Carl (2016), transferability is, “the way in which qualitative studies can be applicable, or transferable, to broader contexts while still maintaining their context-specific richness (p. 189). Though not generalizable, this study provides thick, rich descriptions of data that may apply to other situations in similar, but not identical conditions. This will allow future researchers to conduct similar studies, but with their own research questions and individual approaches and methods.

Limitations and delimitations

Participant selection for this study was delimited by several factors. First, participants must have graduated from an American Catholic institution between 2000 and 2015. Additionally, all participants must identify as cisgender, gay. This study did not include individuals that identified as queer, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, or questioning. Additionally, this study does not include graduate students, and only addresses students who graduated from American Catholic institutions of higher education. Further, I established these delimitations to reduce the risk of study findings being generalized for the entire LGBTQ community.

Regarding limitations, this study focuses exclusively on gay men. By limiting the research criteria, this study does not capture the voices of other sexual minority students at

American Catholic institutions of higher education. Also, this study was limited to six participants and does not reflect the lived experiences of all gay men that attended American Catholic institutions of higher education. Further, this study examined gay male alumni that graduated between the years of 2000 and 2015. Therefore, this study does not capture the lived experiences of gay, male alumni from other points in history.

Finally, although this study attempted to recruit the most diverse pool of candidates from various racial backgrounds, no African-American students responded to the participant solicitation. This limitation may be a result of the small pool of gay or same gender loving, male African-American alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education. At DePaul University, the largest American Catholic institution of higher education, only 7% of first-year students and 10% of transfer students were African-American in 2016 (DePaul University, 2017). As explained in the literature review in the quantification section, those percentages must then be adjusted downward when adding the selection criteria of gay or same gender loving, cisgender, male alumni. Therefore, the limited available pool of alumni may have contributed to this study limitation.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of gay male alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education. Through a qualitative study rooted in phenomenological methods, this study utilized in-depth interviews to arrive at the essence of such an experience. This research study adds to the limited body of literature on this subject through examining gay alumni, an approach not seen in existing studies. The findings of this study will assist educational leaders at Catholic institutions in providing support and formulating policies and procedures that protect this vulnerable population of students.

CHAPTER FOUR: Presentation of Findings

This chapter details the salient data and findings related to the lived experiences of six alumni from various American Catholic institutions of higher education. Specifically, the research questions of this phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of gay men both inside and outside the classroom environment. Further, the posited research questions queried how both the campus culture and Catholic affiliation of the institution influenced the lived experiences of the alumni. In this study, I recruited six gay, male alumni of various American Catholic institutions of higher education. I recruited the alumni by leveraging my established professional network as an administrator in higher education, guided by the requirements of the DePaul University Institutional Review Board. Selection criteria for this study dictated that each participant must have graduated from an American Catholic institution of higher education as an undergraduate between the years 2000 and 2015. Further, my selection criteria required that two of the participants must have attended the same college or university. This requirement created three sets of institutional “pairs” for comparison sake.

After a two-month recruitment process, I utilized maximum variation sampling to yield the most diverse group of participants for the study. This diversity addressed factors such as: race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, college major, college/university attended, age, and religion. Once selected, I interviewed each participant in two, 90-minute sessions. The first interview focused on the time prior to the studied phenomenon, attending an American Catholic institution of higher education. The second interview examined the actual phenomenon itself, attending a Catholic institution of higher education. At the permission of the participants, the interviews were digitally record, transcribed, coded and themed and the results of the interviews

are discussed in this chapter. Further, the major themes of the study are unpacked in depth in chapter five of this study.

As an alumnus of two American Catholic universities and both an administrator and faculty member of another Catholic institution, I have great interest in the findings and recommendations of this study. During my time in college, I encountered several of the challenges, successes and feelings detailed by the participants of this study. Further, I recalled how several of the ecological system factors detailed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) influenced my own college experiences through the voice of my participants. Additionally, I have great interest in the findings of this study because they affect my professional role as a policy administrator and assist me in providing resources for students through my role as an adjunct faculty member. Remaining true to the philosophy of phenomenology, I carefully bracketed my own experiences before conducting each of the twelve interviews in this study. This bracketing occurred by arriving 15 minutes early to each interview and clearing my head of all possible distractions. Further, I strived to ensure that I did not discuss my own experiences as an alumnus of a Catholic university with the participants during the interview process. This action was important, as I did not want the alumni to be influenced by my experiences.

After carefully following the participant selection and data collection protocols found in chapter three of this study, the focus of this study now turns to thick and rich details of each participant's experiences, which describes the phenomenon of attending an institution of higher education sponsored by the Catholic Church as a gay man. The thick and rich description of interview data for each alumni begins with the summary table below, which was collected from the DePaul University IRB approved pre-interview intake form (see Appendix B):

| Participant | Institution | Major | Attended From | Race/Ethnicity |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Adam | Carman College | Business Administration | 1996-2000 | White |
| Mateo | Carman College | International Business | 2003-2007 | Latino |
| Jackson | University of Santa Monica | Management Information Systems | 2000-2004 | White |
| Travis | University of Santa Monica | Finance & Political Science | 2005-2009 | White |
| Jeff | Canon University | Sociology | 2002-2006 | White |
| Phil | Canon University | International Affairs | 2011-2015 | White |

Table 1- Participant Summary

Throughout the findings and discussion section, pseudonyms replace proper names and other identifiers related to the lived experiences of the alumni. Additionally, verbatim quotes from participant interviews are included at numerous points in this chapter. Within such quotes, an ellipsis indicates a break in thought or pause in speech from the participants. Further, an ellipsis in brackets [...] indicates the removal of non-salient or non-contributory language related to the topic.

Adam

Reflecting back on his experience at Carman College from 1996-2000, Adam wove the narrative of a simple boy from the country that flourished while attending a small Catholic university in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city. Born in 1978 and the oldest participant in this study, Adam recalled an atmosphere, both growing up and in college, that was heavily influenced by his rural upbringing and the impacts of a nation coming to terms with the AIDS epidemic and activist calls for visibility among the LGBTQ community. Although Adam experienced several situations that could have derailed his overall success, his drive, honesty and

humorous personality provided a sense of grounding as he traversed four years at Carman College.

Life in the country Adam grew up approximately 50 miles south of a large city on a farm with his parents and older brother. Overall, he recalled a normal upbringing that contained the usual difficulties found in other area nuclear families. Adam's parents are still together today and reside on the family farm after 47 years of marriage. When asked about his overall perception of his life at home prior to college, Adam recalled:

Overall, I would say it was a happy decent childhood upbringing. We weren't the Walton's. My parents definitely had their fair share of marital issues...dad's drinking...other things. Overall, my parents provided a stable household for us. Both mom and dad worked, it wasn't crazy, we weren't in a meth den, overall it was a happy childhood.

During the interview, Adam referred to his father's ongoing struggle with alcoholism. Describing him as a "weekend drunk," Adam watched his dad consume "a beer or two" at night during the workweek, but explained the weekends were a "free for all," with his dad often binge drinking in the garage, isolating himself from the rest of the family. Although Adam had a distant relationship with his father, he detailed a strong bond with his mother. He described her as involved but "not overbearing," something he appreciates to this day. Adam further explained that he and his mother are still very close and she remains an important part of his life.

Adam's parents enjoyed stable employment during his childhood, with his dad working blue-collar jobs and his mother a receptionist at an area doctor's office. Living in a family with a socio-economic status that most would consider "middle class," Adam and his brother received many material possessions from their parents. Furthermore, they both were fortunate enough to enjoy items such as cars and toys. He acknowledged:

We never did without. I never felt poor, but we certainly weren't the richest family in town. There was really nothing I needed. Yeah, we didn't go to Disney World for vacation, but we had a nice home, we had nice cars, we had four wheelers and stuff, so it never felt like we did without.

As a child, Adam tried hard to be courteous and kind to those around him, modeling the behavior after his mother who was humble, but respected member of his rural community. Although, even as the polite, younger child, Adam's differences were evident in his personality, especially when it came to his extroversion and penchant for fashion. In speaking of his personality as a child, he explained:

As a little kid, I was always respectful but inquisitive. Umm... I always probably either acted or at least thought I acted more mature than I was. I would say that I was a social little kid, but definitely more of flair for the dramatics...always wanted to do the right thing. I never wanted to disappoint my parents or get bad grades; I didn't want to be too much of a problem. I was definitely and still am to this day have kind of a stubborn streak and overall I would say that I was a good kid. I remember...I think back to it now...and it was my mom's way of acknowledging I was gay...she always called me a "fashion plate." I wanted the nicest clothes or newest things.

As with all of the alumni, Adam distinctly recalled feeling different from other kids, specifically boys, at numerous times throughout his childhood. These feelings, compounded with a childhood weight struggle, led to moments where his self-esteem was low. Although he did not have the maturity or insight to properly identify and label his same sex, sexual attraction as a child as with the word "gay," he remembered:

As a little kid, pre-school, kindergarten, [I knew] that in some ways I felt different about boys than what society told me should I feel. I think we may be always the last to admit that to ourselves. I think instinctively people knew. Growing up, I was always the husky, pudgy kid. My weight was an issue, I turned to food for comfort, but I was always picked on because of my weight by my brother or other people. Then, along with that, you're a sissy, a queer...gay...quit acting like such a girl. At the end of the day, it's not like...I never felt like I want to end my life or this is horrible or anything but I always felt and knew I was different and it didn't come into fruition until I got a little bit older.

As he reflected back on life prior to college, Adam explained that in addition to some of his existing insecurities about weight and masculinity, several negative messages about same sex,

sexual attraction were present in his environment. In describing members of his family and surrounding community, Adam recalled:

Growing up in a small, rural town, not that far away from a major city, I remember growing up hearing my brother's friends, my dad and his buddy, it was absolutely common to hear "queer," "fag," "cocksucker," "dickhead," "bottom feeder." It was not uncommon to hear that. I knew somewhere in the back of my head that it was derogatory or not right or somehow made me feel lesser of a person, but at the same time, everyone was doing it. It was just the environment you grew up in the country.

When asked about his earliest recollections related to sexual orientation, he, like other alumni in the study, stated early feelings were a precursor to what would eventually become a label for same sex, sexual attraction. Adam noted:

I remember knowing I was different at a very early age. Ironically enough, my mom was teaching Sunday school. I remember there was a little boy in the class from the neighboring town. I was five, but I recall feeling differently about him than I thought I should, right? And, also too, being completely honest...I remember growing up and if I saw my dad in his underwear, I was kind of like naturally curious...that's kind of interesting. I just knew I was different.

Raised in a Roman Catholic household, Adam warmly recalled his religious upbringing and the impact it had on his childhood. In fact, weekly trips to Mass and CCD (Catholic religious education) were staples in his life prior to college:

Catholicism was a big deal. My mom was a Sunday school teacher from kindergarten until 4th or 5th grade. We piled into the Pinto™ or Buick™ and the whole neighborhood went to church or Sunday school. My mom was also part of the CCW and very involved in the church. She used to wash and iron the altar boy robes. So, religion was a big deal. Every Saturday or Sunday went to Mass. And, I did all the sacraments: confession, communion, confirmation. It was a huge part of my upbringing.

When asked how his Catholic upbringing impacted how he viewed the world prior to college, Adam further detailed:

It is like doing your chores, cleaning your room. It [Catholicism] was just another part of your life. It was a little weird because most people in our town were Methodist or Lutheran, so a lot of kids at school who I saw during the week, I wouldn't see at Mass. I would only see a small select group of those folks at Sunday school or at Mass on

Saturday night. As I got older, it [religion] was like..."OK, I believe there's higher power, but I don't know if God is as I was taught growing up." I think as I got older, I started to question to more and more about why we have to go to Church or why it was relevant or who decided this was important.

When asked about his memories of school, Adam had mostly positive recollections about attending. However, there were times where sexuality or community culture factored into his experiences. In elementary and high school, Adam prided himself on being a good student that got along with classmates. Just like at home, Adam's extroversion and willingness to speak up came through in the classroom. However, he carried insecurities about his weight and sexuality into the school environment. Luckily, the combination of a small community and an older brother created a less stressful path throughout school:

I liked to excel in school. I liked to be a good student. I certainly wasn't an A student, but more of a B, B- student. I liked going to school. I didn't dislike it. I liked to get along with my teachers. I would act out sometimes and I had my fair share of detention and tardies and stuff like that, but I never wanted to be a disruptive kid. Still to this day, it annoys me, when we were asked to read out loud, of course I would volunteer. I remember getting annoyed when other kids were quiet. I was like, "speak your voice!" "Say something!" That was pretty much like elementary school through junior high. I think as you start to turn the corner into middle school/junior high, you start to see like...oh...I think growing up everyone was friends and then in junior high and high school you see maybe I'm not the most popular. Then, puberty, and maybe I am a little bit different. I started to piece it together. I think in high school it was interesting because the smaller school...I wasn't as nervous going in as a freshman because my older my brother and I are four years apart. My older brother was very much a big fish in a little pond. So, the upper classmen knew me. So, even if I was different, fat and gay, I didn't feel like people messed with me.

Although sexuality was rarely a topic of conversation in the classroom, Adam did recall one situation during his senior year of high school where a teacher expressed negative views of same sex, sexual activity. True to his personality, Adam did not hold back with his feelings. He clearly recalled:

I remember Mr. Smith...he was ex-military. In Sociology, it [sexuality] came up my senior year. When talking about gays, he was like, "I think it's a choice and people can choose." As a senior in high school in the mid 1990's...it wasn't quite to Ellen and Will

and Grace [on TV] ...but *Philadelphia* the movie was out. I remember raising my hand in class very defiantly speaking up and saying, “Mr. Smith, I don’t agree. Being gay isn’t a choice. Why would people choose to live in a world where people would knowingly choose to be discriminated against, or talked down to. You are born that way!” It got a little heated but at that point, I had no problem saying that.

Outside the classroom, Adam recalled he was fortunate to have several close friends within his small-knit community. In fact, Adam’s rural community was so small that the local newspaper took a picture of his classmates each year from kindergarten to high school, ultimately displaying the pictures in his senior class yearbook. He also recalled being involved in several school and community activities prior to college. In line with his bubbly, but sometimes reserved personality, Adam explained:

I did theatre. I was in musicals. I liked public speaking and debate and stuff like that. I’m still like that today. But, even as a kid, I liked playing with other kids but was also fine doing stuff on my own. I could play with Legos™, cars, read a book... I never had to be entertained. I feel like kids today constantly have to be doing something. I was never that kind of kid. My interests were just as fine being with parents and friends. Sometimes, I actually preferred the [company of] my parents. I was a little bit more mature. I remember in junior high, boys would rough house with other boys... I remember thinking in particular, “why would you do that?” “Why would you...would you want to run around dirty all day and not shower?” “Why?” I just remember thinking that kind of stuff. I didn’t see the appeal.

Growing up, Adam had a tenuous relationship with sports, often equating activities such as baseball or basketball with masculinity. He recalled:

I’m not coordinated. Sports were never my thing. I feel that now in my 20’s and 30’s, that I’m more interested in sports like spectating and going out to a bar to watch a game. But, I think as a kid I never had a big interest in sports. Part of that was because like I was fat, I was uncoordinated and the labels of queer and gay applied to me. You don’t see those people in sports so why bother.

At the national level, Adam distinctly remembered sitting down with his family at the kitchen table, with the *ABC Evening News* on the background, hearing about the AIDS crisis. In hearing the news reports, he worried that the virus might someday kill him for being gay. Further, growing up in the late 1980’s and the early 1990’s, Adam clearly detailed how the LGBTQ

community entering popular culture and starting to challenge societal norms. In addition, he recalled controversy regarding LGBTQ individuals serving openly in the military that stemmed from the Bill Clinton presidency and how it influenced the world around him. He explained:

Don't Ask, Don't Tell. You know, I love the Clinton's...but Don't Ask, Don't Tell was a big deal. The President said if you want to be in the military, you Don't Ask, Don't Tell. To me, that applied to everything. Don't Ask, Don't Tell, if no one asks, I'm not bringing it up. That was a big thing. Nationally you started to see, some of the movies like Clueless... Cher [the main character] falls in love the gay guy. Now, she has a shopping buddy! It [gay people] started to be introduced. In 1992, the movie Philadelphia with Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington came out. You started to see movies that weren't just Paul Lynde in the background. You started to see more and more [gay people] people on TV, in national spotlights...like K.D. Lange...she was one of the first people to come out...Melissa Etheridge. There are gay people out there! Magic Johnson and HIV...is he gay? Not gay? This can happen to straight people. Ryan White! Late 80's, early 90s! Here this poor kid got HIV from a blood transfusion.

Different things started to happen...being gay didn't mean that you were in a certain box...like you had to check off all these requirements to be in the gay box. More people were starting to be open to it. We were still a long way away from full acceptance, but things were starting to change in the mid 1990's. Also, too, with the AIDS crisis, by the mid 1990's there were drugs...the cocktail [AZT]...it's not a death sentence anymore. So, it was with some of those things that I thought "wow, maybe this [being gay] isn't so bad after all."

Although Adam's father frequently distanced himself from the family due to troubles with alcoholism, his mother was adamant that her son experience life outside of the country. Often, Adam's mother would take him to the nearby city for shopping trips or cultural events. Through these experiences, he was able to see life outside the country and begin to question societal norms as they related to sexuality. Adam remembered:

My mom was big on going into the city to shop or seeing plays. Being in the big city was quite different. You saw people. You saw people who were gay at the big department store, or other gay guys, so you'd start to see or feel something different. You know, on a kind of a larger level, I kind of got the impression that if you were in a major metropolitan area it would be easier if you were gay but small town or even suburban America, you just didn't talk about it. People may have known it, you yourself may have known it, but you just didn't talk about being gay. You just didn't bring it up.

A change of plans. When it came time to graduate high school, Adam was ready for a change of scenery. However, growing up in a small, rural town with two parents that did not attend a four-year institution, he was a bit lost about how to select the right college and navigate the overall process. He remembered:

For me, I was the first person in my family to go to college. My dad and brother didn't go and my mom only did junior college. So, I was the first person to go to college in my family. Growing up in a small town, blue collar, I didn't really know a lot of people that went to college. Even in the neighborhood...so we grew up in a subdivision, but everyone had five acre parcels. So, I can recall that one girl went to a school down state and dropped out. Another girl went to an art school in the city. So, I didn't really know a lot of people who had been away to college. But, I knew that I had to get out. I had to get out...I spent my time...it was time to leave the country.

Upon reaching April of his senior year without a college selected, Adam began to solicit help from members in his community to aid in the process. Coming from a graduating class of just over 100 students, Adam was not looking for a large college or university so as not to feel overwhelmed by size. Rather, he was seeking something closer to home, allowing the opportunity to see his parents and do laundry on the weekends. As luck would have it, his mom's employer had connections to his future alma mater, Carman College:

My graduating high school class was 112 people. Even though I looked at three other big schools, but I couldn't imagine having business or accounting 101 with a class of hundreds of people. So, I looked at some larger and smaller schools, but it was April of my senior year and I was still undecided. My mom is a front office manager at an orthodontist, and she was like let's check out Carman College: its Catholic School...and two of the doctor's sons went there. Carman College was close enough that I could be home in the hour on the weekends but it was far enough away that I could live on campus. Alright, fine.

Within a few weeks, Adam was taking a campus tour of Carman College. Almost immediately, he fell in love with the institution:

So, like early April and we went to Carman College for a tour. I fell in love with the campus. I liked the buildings. I liked the quaintness of the campus. I liked the fact that it was the stereotypically small college...it had the quad, the chapel, the dorm rooms the rec center. Although, you were basically in a suburb, when you pulled off the road onto

Carman College drive, you were in a safe cocoon bubble. It felt like you were hundreds of miles away from everything, but yet you were close to everything. I knew I could be downtown in an hour or back home in an hour. I felt a good fit. The Catholic thing aside...OK fine, and to me that was a non-issue...it honestly was a non-issue. Somewhere in the back of my head I knew it made my mom happy I was going to a Catholic school. But they never said I had to go. I remember feeling comfortable; the college guide was great.

When pressed on the fact that the Catholic Church sponsors Carman College, Adam recalled that he did not take issue to being a gay man at a Catholic institution of higher education. He elaborated:

Catholicism and church were such a part of my life growing up. I did Sunday school, I did a communion, confirmation, altar boy for five years. So, if I was gay, certainly I can be at a university that is Catholic where I have to take a religion class or two and going to mass is totally optional. And, yet, I'm in college. There maybe someone else like me...people in the same boat...it can't be that bad.

With his enrollment at Carman College secured, Adam attended summer orientation and prepared for the first year on campus. During orientation, Adam experienced his first glimpse of what college would be like in the proceeding four years. In addition, Adam made a decision regarding how he would conduct himself upon arrival on campus in the fall. He elaborated:

So, I picked the Monday and Tuesday after my high school graduation for my orientation. We had to stay overnight on campus in the dorms. I remember I was terrified because it was a dorm room and they were going to do a little bit of a science experiment with you and see you with a roommate. I lucked out and didn't have a roommate that night. I was petrified at the idea of sharing a bathroom. What was the shower experience like? Where was I going to poop? Just, all of that stuff. First time doing that stuff. I came back from orientation really excited. I was excited all summer. I remember thinking when I went to Carman College that fall, I was going to go to school, work hard, and focus on my classes and socialize but not be overly social. I'm going to keep to myself. That lasted all about two hours after I arrived in the fall.

This change of plans, as Adam explained, began when he was approached by two openly gay upper-class students during move-in weekend. During the weekend's activities, which included a relay race with new students, Tim and Jarvis, both sophomores, came up to Adam's team. He explained:

Well, Tim and Jarvis, they were upper classmen, somehow joined the orientation activities. I was with a fellow freshman and they were on the team next to us. Tim and Jarvis were pointing and looking at me. They were like, “hey, what’s your name and story?” The relay races went on, and as we were leaving, Tim and Jarvis came up to me and were like, “hey, you seem cool...let’s hang out later!” So, I think I saw them over weekend randomly, but wasn’t overly chummy with them at first.

As his first week of classes began, Adam was still dedicated to maintaining his studious, reserved approach to college. However, this plan was scrapped when Jarvis, a student worker in the library, approached Adam as he was studying:

Probably a few days into the semester, I was at the library. Well, Jarvis was a library worker and I remember he came up and said, “hi” and I said “can I help you?” He said, “I notice you keep coming in here a lot!” And, I said, “I’m here to study.” And, he was like “is that the only reason you’re here?” And, I’m like “pretty sure!” And, he said, “regardless, I’ve seen you around a few times and our group of friends sits together at 5:00PM in the cafeteria for dinner.” And, that was the impetus for meeting him at dinner.

Shortly after taking up Jarvis’ invite, Adam’s sexuality was questioned by members of his newly found dinner group. This led him to be open with his new friends and start to begin navigating the culture on campus:

Jarvis hung out with the theater crowd. That group was either gay or super gay friendly. So, it was one of those things where within the first or second dinner with hanging out with relatively complete strangers, they asked, “Are you gay? Do you like men? Do you like women?” And, I said, “I guess I like men.” And, they said “you’re gay!” And, I was like “you didn’t need to tell me that...I got that down.” Within my first few weeks at Carman College, I was out to people on campus. I wasn’t running around with a rainbow flag, but I no longer felt the need to be like, “I’m not gay.” I was like, “Yeah, I’m gay.” I was fine with it. And, most people who I told were OK with it.

Campus poster child. After several weeks of dinner with his newly found friend group, Adam began branching out and joining student organizations on campus. In 1996, Adam’s first year at Carman College, there was a recognized student organization for LGBTQ students called “Community.” Adam found a sense of belonging within “Community,” and appreciated that a Catholic institution of higher education would allow such a group to meet. However, in light of

his Catholic upbringing, Adam was dumbfounded by where the group congregated for meeting.

He explained:

In the back of the chapel, there was a little living room off the kitchen and we met on Wednesday evenings at 9. So, I'm like, "OK, so I'm at a Catholic university, it's the mid-90's, being gay in society is becoming if not more acceptable, more widely open. This was a recognized organization by the campus...at a Catholic university. And, of all places it could meet...a library conference room...the student union...we had our meetings in the living room of the chapel. That's kind of fucked up in retrospect...kind of fucked up!"

Adam further elaborated that he felt mixed emotions about the existence of "Community" in light of the attitudes towards the LGBTQ community at that time:

So, it was very much a very schizophrenic from what I was taught as a kid. I'm at a Catholic university, it's a very much a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" climate. Pope John Paul still had his marbles and was saying, "homosexuality is a sin and we like you if you don't act on it." Also, it was pre-sex abuse scandal in the church. So, it felt to me that the rug could be pulled out at any time. I felt that I'm a part of a group that supports LGBT people and their supporters at a Catholic university, it's a recognized group and they're letting us having the meetings regularly in the chapel living room. Isn't this contrary to everything I was taught?

When it came to romantic/sexual experiences with other gay men outside of "Community,"

Adam typically found himself meeting the individuals online or off campus. He spoke of spending time in the campus computer lab located in the basement of the main academic building talking to other gay men in chat rooms or over instant messaging programs. He elaborated that unlike today, students at Carman College did not have internet connections, wired or wireless, in their residence hall rooms. As a result, he had to use public computers in high traffic places to meet other gay men on campus or in the surrounding communities. Additionally, due to the small community at Carman College and his visibility on campus as an out, gay man, he faced a unique situation where other gay men did not want to be "outed" by association:

I hooked up with Carman College students I knew through "Community", or as friends. But, honestly, most of the people I hooked up with during college were off campus. I had my older brother's ID and I met them out at the gay bars. So, I was hooking up off

campus or meeting them online and bringing them back to my room. There were probably so many more opportunities to hook up on campus but I didn't either notice them or I was too "out." If a guy was questionable or bisexual, the gossip mill on campus would have been big because he came back to my room. So, I feel that those who might have been bi-curious or maybe even gay purposely stayed away from me because they didn't want to be associated with being gay at the time.

In addition to his association with "Community," Adam was very active in campus ministry, attending weekly mass and eventually leading the student retreat on campus. He vividly remembered the strong presence that campus ministry had at Carman College, commenting how Sunday Mass was a social gathering for many students:

At Carman College, going to mass on a Sunday evening at 8PM was very much a social activity. Carman College was a suitcase campus – most people, unless you didn't have a way home, went home on Friday. It was a ghost town at 5PM on Friday and didn't start up again until Sunday at 6PM. If I didn't leave my parent house by 6PM on Sunday evening, I started to get nervous. I had an hour drive in front of me, I had to run my laundry back up to my room, freshen up and get to Mass by 7:50 to find a seat. After mass, it was cookies, punch and hanging out with my friends. You either hung out in the chapel or went to the student union, but Mass on Sunday was very much a reintroduction to the week and a part of life. If you didn't go to Mass on Sunday evening, there was something not right with you. You feared missing out if you didn't go.

Adam noted that he interacted with the vowed religious members of the campus community, the Carman Sisters. This group of vowed religious women established the institution to provide college educations to underprivileged and minority students and were heavily involved in the operations of the campus, especially university ministry. He warmly explained how he felt welcomed by the sisters, even dining on occasion with the campus President, Sister Jane. Adam explained:

My interactions with the sisters were very positive. They were very welcoming. By the end of my first semester, I was at mass regularly. I went to holy day Masses. It wasn't foreign for me to stop by the chapel during the week – it became a very normal part of life. And, interactions with the sisters were very comfortable. And, they knew I was gay. When I was on a retreat my sophomore year, everyone knew I was gay on the retreat. I said it out loud. Then, I became a leader on the retreat. That should tell you how engrained I was in the campus ministry culture. And, looking back on it, I know Sister Jane knew I was gay. I very clearly fell into a group that was OK with me being gay,

letting me come out, and feel welcome. I was an out gay man at a Catholic university. It felt very natural to me.

After living on campus with a roommate his first year, Adam decided to apply to be a Peer Leader. Similar to the undergraduate Resident Assistant position found at most colleges and universities, the Peer Leader position was a hybrid: part resident assistant, part pastoral counselor. Given his involvement in campus ministry, Adam felt the Peer Leader position was a perfect fit for his personality and interests:

I ended up getting involved as a Peer Leader on campus. It was like being an RA, but I was also there to help guide them to Jesus. Also, and the big selling point for me, was that I got a free room by myself. I like people, I can talk to people, where do I sign up? So, I got to be a part of campus ministry and it was a little bit of an authority figure to make up for what I was lacking as a gay man. It was cool, I liked it. Being from a small town, I had a pulse on everybody's business – what's the gossip.

Although Adam overwhelmingly spoke about how he enjoyed his role as a Peer Leader on campus, he did encounter two situations in which he was harassed because of his sexual orientation. The first situation occurred when his residents overheard him playing a Janet Jackson album one morning:

My residents knew I was gay and most of them didn't care. I remember it was my sophomore year and I was listening to the *Velvet Rope* album by Janet Jackson. And, I heard one of the students across the hall from me say, "God damn it! If Adam plays that Janet Jackson album one more time...that fucking fag!" It sort of bothered me.

The other occurred when Tim and Jarvis came over to watch television one evening.

Remembering the first incident, Adam had heard enough and took matters into his own hands, plotting revenge against his residents. He explained:

Melrose Place was big at the time, so I had Tim and Jarvis over to watch it at 8PM. Coincidentally, I had the controller for the heat in our part of the building in my room. And, I could hear the other guys making fun of us for watching the show. So, I cranked heat up to 85 degrees in their rooms in retaliation. By the end of *Melrose Place*, they came over and asked to turn off the heat. And, I said, "No. When you quit making fun of us for watching *Melrose Place* and grow up and act like nice young men, I'll turn down the heat!" Then, they apologized. Never again did I have a problem.

Outside of the residence halls, Adam also encountered one salient incidence of homophobia. As a business administration major, he signed up for a capstone course with Dr. Taylor, an African American professor. In a discussion about marketing to the LGBTQ community, Dr. Taylor attempted to move past the topic quickly in class. However, Adam was angered by this move and made his sentiments known:

It was the fall of my senior year and we were discussing marketing to the LGBT community in class. She [Dr. Taylor] said, “I don’t believe in that. It doesn’t have a place in marketing.” She literally skipped the topic. It was the late 90’s – Will and Grace was on TV, Ellen [DeGeneres] was out – the fact of the matter was that we had seen successful gays in society. The buying power of the LGBT community was called “the pink dollar” in the book. She was like “I don’t support the pink dollar.” I thought, “first of all, you’re a minority of yourself and you don’t support this?” How do you not recognize the spending power behind the “pink dollar?” And, I’m an adult gay male in your class who you’ve been totally cool and friendly with and you just made this blatant statement in front of 20 some young odd professionals! Catholic university or not – that’s horrible.

Similar to his confrontation with Mr. Smith back in high school, Adam explained he was not about to let Dr. Taylor get away with making those types of comments in class. He explained how he made his displeasure known to her:

Unlike high school, I was floored for a moment because at this point it was almost 2000 and I was well known on campus. I had dinner with the President multiple times. Clearly, Dr. Taylor knew I was gay and was making this statement in front of business professionals starting their career. It was appalling. So, I raised my hand and said, “Dr. Taylor, I respect you. But, I have to disagree with your statement. All people regardless of background, beliefs, should be worthy of some type of advertisement focus or dollar. That would be me like saying black females aren’t worthy of attention or marketing.” And, she was like, “it’s different because being gay is a choice. I didn’t choose to be a black female.” And, I said, “I didn’t choose to be a gay white male.”

When pressed by Adam, Dr. Taylor doubled down on her statement. But, not before being challenged by other students coming to his defense:

Then, other people in class who I was friends with began speaking up as well. I was like, “I just don’t get how you can sit up there and say that.” Finally, she said, “it’s my class and my topic so we’re going to move on.” After that, I never had any other ill interactions with her. She could have been terrible and given me hard grades, but she didn’t. It just

wasn't the same in class with her after that. Even after all the sisters being good to me, having multiple dinners with the President of the university and being best friends with a senior administrator's daughter, never in my college career did I feel that kind of discrimination like that until that moment my senior year.

Adam's body language tensed and tone of voice clearly raised while describing his situation with Dr. Taylor, as it was apparent the confrontation in class still impacted him as a grown adult.

Conclusion. After four years at Carman College, Adam was ready to use his newly awarded degree in business administration to enter the work force. During the interview, Adam was asked to reflect back on his experiences at Carman College and provide any advice he might have to other gay men that might be considering attending a Catholic institution of higher education. He smiled widely and provided these thoughts:

I would say, be you. Be yourself. Don't feel that you need to hide or conform. There were only 10-20 of us that were out. So, by law of the 10% rule [Kinsey] there were more people there. Be visible. To any gay guy I say be yourself. Life is too short, people will always love and accept you for who you are, and I feel that you'll be more respected and liked for being out. And, ultimately, being out has helped me to where I am today in my career and relationship.

For Adam, attending Carman College from 1996 to 2000 was a positive, growth-filled period of his young adult life. Having transitioned from a middle-class, stable upbringing on a country farm to a business administration major at a small Catholic college, Adam experienced coming out, having meaningful involvement on-campus and a challenging interaction with a respected authority figure in the classroom. Further, he was an early adopter of technology, using instant messenger and chat rooms to connect with other gay men for friendship and sexual encounters. Finally, he learned to navigate how the campus environment was both conflicted and supported by messages from Catholic teachings. With Adam's story unpacked, the focus of these findings turns to Mateo, another alum of Carman College.

Mateo

Arriving three years after Adam graduated, Mateo encountered a campus culture that was both similar and drastically different in several ways. Mateo, an international business major, attended Carman College from 2003 to 2007. He was an on-campus resident for two semesters, subsequently moving off campus to a nearby house with several friends for the remaining three years. Mateo, a Mexican-born, first-generation college student, recalled great admiration for his professors, but spoke of great barriers presented by administrators and instances of homophobia and racism from his fellow classmates. Mateo's story is multi-faceted, and best understood when analyzed from his roots as a quiet child in Mexico. Although he experienced many barriers throughout life, Mateo's drive to succeed and positive attitude afforded him the ability to succeed in college and learn about himself in the process.

Intersecting identities. Hailing from a central Mexico community and a tight-knit family, Mateo spoke positively of his childhood and experiences before college. The oldest of two children, Mateo recalled a happy upbringing, full of "typical" activities, including many trips around Mexico and neighboring countries:

I lived with my parents. It was mom, dad and my sister. You know, my family was pretty close. Typically, my sister and I stayed at home, went to school, you know hung out with friends after school, did homework, went to bed. On the weekends, we went to visit my mom's side of the family. I remember more connections with my dad's side of the family. Because, we used to travel a lot. So, every summer we were going somewhere. As a family, everybody would go places together. So, we'd take road trips. We really went everywhere in Mexico from North to south.

When asked to describe his personality before college, Mateo explained that his reserved, quiet nature has been consistent throughout his life. Specifically speaking about his time in Mexico, Mateo elaborated that his shy personality was driven by an inability to confide feelings about his sexual orientation with members of his family or community. He explained:

I was a happy kid. I think I was. Except for really being who I really was. I couldn't confide in anybody about my likes or dislikes. I remember liking things like the Backstreet Boys [the band] and that it was for different reason than my friends like them. But, I think that emotionally I was a happy kid. You know? I was always wondering what it would be like to be with men, but I didn't have the balls to approach anybody. So, I was always like reserved. So, that made me into a very shy person. So, like if I don't know you, I probably will stay back. I'm not the person to start conversation and I think it's because of that.

Beyond his personality, Mateo recalled that his family's socio-economic status afforded him exposure to experiences that were atypical for his classmates. As a member of an upper-middle class Mexican family, Mateo explained he traveled frequently and took the opportunity to study in the United States. He recalled:

We were pretty well off. You know? My grandparents on my dad's side of the family were very wealthy. So, I think that's why we were able to travel a lot and most Mexican families probably couldn't. I had everything I wanted. I never felt poor or wealthy, I just know my experiences didn't compare to my other friends.

Looking back, Mateo recalled how his race and physical appearance had an influence on his life in Mexico. These, combined with his socio-economic status, placed him in a comfortable position in society relative to others in his community. He explained:

So, I'm fairly light skinned and it [race] was never an issue for me. I remember race in Mexico differently. Mexico also had darker skin people. And, it was always.... you wanted to be lighter skinned, blue eyes, blonde hair. There were Mexicans like that. There's a big spectrum. Mexican can be blond, blue eyes, or really dark...think African American. It's not as drastic as here, but there are still jokes and a sense of racism. However, not as bad as here. It's not as drastic. Because, you have white people, black people, Asians...we had them more mixed in. We had people immigrate to Mexican from all races. So, it was a melting pot.

Mateo was raised Catholic in Mexico, though his family was not as devout as the other alumni in this study. He took religious education classes later than most American children, and detailed on how his mother's growth in her own religion influenced his experiences:

I think maybe when I was around ten was when my mom started to want to get back in the church. She was involved in the Church before she got married. My mom's side of the family is religious. When she got married, it was more about going and taking care of

the family and the religion took a second role. But, I think when I was ten years old, she really wanted to teach us about religion. So, she started to go back to church and started to take us there as well. I remember like doing my first communion so we had to go to a lot of classes for that. So, yeah, so that's what I remember. As of right now, my mom is a very religious woman. She goes in Mexico every Saturday to church.

Looking back, Mateo always felt that he was sexually attracted to men. He recalled two experiences in his childhood that were salient in helping him figure out his identity: one with a friend and another with a bus driver on a family trip. Further, he elaborated that the masculine culture in Mexico drove him to date girls in middle school to conceal his sexual orientation. He explained:

Well, I think that I always knew I was attracted to guys. When I was little, my mom told me that there was a bus driver on our trips. And, I remember the driver...he was the same driver every time. And, he was good looking. And, my mom always said, "you always made me wonder because you always said hi to the driver...spend time with him talking." So, uh, yeah, I think that that was factor. But, I always knew I was attracted to men. In elementary school, I remember wanting this one guy. I was so attracted. We were friends...nothing really happened. But, uh...we did a lot of stuff together. So, I definitely knew that I was different. I mean, I also dated girls but I would get bored. They were trying to do more and it was like *yawn* what do I do? But, I had to keep the appearance up...be straight.

In Mexico, Mateo attempted to conceal his sexual orientation to others in the community. He noted this need to assimilate was driven mostly by the masculine culture of his country. To appear feminine, according to Mateo, was bad and opened oneself to ridicule from peers. As a result, he often had to communicate with other gay men in chat rooms or using instant messaging programs. He explained:

I always knew that I was gay and it was I couldn't talk to anybody about. I think that it was more about finding people online in chat rooms "back in the day." That's how I started meeting older gay men. I really never had any gay experiences in Mexico. All of my friends...I always felt like I couldn't really tell them because they would make fun of people they thought of as gay or feminine. I remember we lived in a subdivision so all the kids knew each other. And, there were like two of them that were like feminine and you could totally tell they were gay. And, they got picked on so hard and made fun of and bullied and it was not a good thing.

When he turned 15, Mateo was afforded an opportunity to move to a large city in the Midwestern United State and attend high school. This move would require leaving his immediate family and residing with his aunt and uncle. Mateo recalled his excitement about moving to the United States, eagerly pouncing on the opportunity:

So, I think that when I had the opportunity for me to study in the United States, I took it no questions asked. I was out of here. And, so when I arrived in the United States, I went straight in to high school. I was placed in sophomore year based on my education in Mexico and my tests.

Outside of academics, Mateo further elaborated about how he hoped the move to the United States would allow for sexual orientation exploration. He explained:

I think it was also about my freedom. I knew that maybe in the United States I was going to be [an out] gay man. And, I think I was also getting the opportunity to learn in a different country so why not? I felt like I already knew what life would be in Mexico and I wanted to see what else there was. It was more like an adventure; you know? And, also, I didn't think that I could be totally open in Mexico.

A brave new world. When he arrived in the United States, Mateo made it a point to focus on his studies in order to attend a reputable college or university. Although he mostly enjoyed high school, he recalled feeling frustrated due to his placement in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Even though he had worked with a private English tutor in Mexico for several years and spoke fluent English, he was forced to take ESL courses that removed him from the typical American classrooms. He explained:

So, in Mexico, I guess I was an average student. I don't think I was a smart kid or at least I didn't push myself to be or get good grades. I think, you know, I was more interested in hanging out with friends and doing my thing. Especially in grade school was when I really wanted to hang out with friends. And, once I came to the states, then it was different because I didn't have friends, ha. So, I actually lived with an uncle who was very strict. He wanted me to get good grades, so I think it was just a combination of me needing to focus in school. So, I was getting A's and a few B's.

And, then my senior year I had AP classes and but I was also part of an ESL program and I was taking classes in Spanish. I really disliked those classes because I felt segregated. Because, my first year, I never really got the experience of high school because I was

with kids that were put in classes with me that were from different parts of South America. I was like, “Ok, well...this isn’t what I came to the states for.” So, then my junior year I fought my way...first of all, the classes in Math...I learned this all years ago. I can do this in English. So, I fought my way to get classes in English. And, senior year, I had worked my way into AP classes.

After Mateo’s transition from Mexico to the United States, he began to feel comfortable with his surroundings and made friends. His first experience telling anyone he was gay occurred during his junior year of high school. He vividly recalled:

I came out when I was in high school. I want to say junior year is when I met my still best friend. In high school, she identified as a lesbian but has since transitioned to a male. We had driver’s education class together, so we were always in the same car. So, that’s how we got close.

Luckily, Mateo’s high school was beginning to form a support group for LGBTQ students. He remembered:

Then, the school started doing the gay/straight alliance. But, it was a lot of back and forth...yes/no/yes/no from the administration. And, so I joined as a straight ally. So, I really didn’t have the balls to come out even though she knew. And, she knew I wasn’t really ready.

As a member of the gay/straight alliance at his high school, Mateo distinctively remembered the specific meeting in which he decided to start telling other about his sexuality. He explained:

Then, my senior year I said “fuck it.” I remember very clearly we had a speaker to come to the group. It was an older gentleman who said he hated himself for wasting his life. He could have done all these things but he stayed in the closet. And, he had regrets. And, that was a turning point for me. I was like “I don’t want to be that guy. I don’t want to have the same lies. I want to be who I am.” And, then I started to have gay friends in the gay/straight alliance, so I didn’t feel like I was by myself anymore. I mean, it was a safe group. But, I didn’t come out to the whole school. I still wouldn’t let myself be too feminine...too queer. There were things happening at school. People were shoved in the bathroom toilets...I saw writings on the wall.

Mateo noted that the fledgling gay/straight alliance was greeted with opposition from various members of the high school administration. He recalled students and faculty alike being

concerned that the organization would be dissolved and those who supported its activities might face retribution:

The administration was fighting to shut it down. And, I remember the [mental health] counselors were advising the group because they were afraid the administration was going to shut it down. The counselors even felt the administration were trying to find ways to fire them. It was to the point that one of them had to back away. She was like, "I want to help. But, I don't want to lose my job."

When asked to expand more on his recollection of the administration's angst towards the group,

Mateo recalled:

I think the principal didn't want to make our school a "gay school." Or, make it known it's OK to be gay there. We weren't at the point where that was OK to do. So, I think it was more...not wanting to put on the spotlight. It was a public school. The Assistant Principal was very homophobic. And, he didn't want the club in the school. We had it [the group] for two years, but after we graduated it was done.

Although he was beginning to come out to select classmates and friends, Mateo had yet to tell his parents in Mexico. When he finally felt strength enough to speak with his family, he began with telling his mother:

I remember that year when my mom came to visit and I told her. She said it was a surprise for her because that wasn't what she wanted for me. She came with good intentions. She wasn't happy that I was gay because she felt that I was going to lead a harder life. She wanted the best for me. She didn't think that I could be happy gay. She didn't have the right things...she didn't facts. I think that I taught her about homosexuality. So, she grew after that.

Once his mother had the opportunity to come to terms with his sexuality, she then decided to tell his father, unbeknownst to Mateo:

After I told my mom, she told my dad without telling me. My senior year when I was on the phone with my dad, I said, "listen, there's something I need to tell you." And, I told him and I remember he told me, "listen, you're my son and it doesn't change anything and I still love you." And, that was like "OMG!" Because it's the hardest to tell your dad. And, when he told me that, I was like "OMG! How was I so afraid about that?" Then, later I found out he was hesitant to talk about it when she first told him. He had to really think about it and get over it and work things out. I think my mom really made him realize that wasn't anything they did...I'm just gay. It wasn't their fault. They just

thought “it’s my fault that you are.” I mean, yeah, he was amazing. When I told him, he was really in an OK place.

During the interview, when Mateo spoke of coming out to his father, he began to cry. It was a moving moment to share with him, as it was very clear both in words and through physical expressions the emotions that existed within that situation.

As Mateo explained, his participation in this study was unique because he lived in two different countries prior to college with differing cultural norms as they relate to same sex, sexual attraction. In describing the cultural atmosphere towards gay men prior to college, he was quick to explain the notable differences between the two countries:

Umm...well, in Mexico my whole life was bad. It [being gay] was made fun of...it’s not something you wanted to be. You didn’t want anybody gay in your family. If you do, you pretend they don’t belong. You don’t pay them too much attention. So, in Mexico [coming out] was a complete “no.”

Of the United States, he detailed:

Nationally, I was new to the country, you know? But, I could see that it wasn’t supported. Then, I remember hearing that you could get arrested for making out with a guy. I was like...wow! I mean, although, I never heard of any cases of that happening. I mean, gay marriage wasn’t allowed. It was very clear that it wasn’t supported in that sense. We had the gay parade. It was a big thing, you know? It was a big thing and grew over the years as people started to say “gay’s OK.”

Throughout high school, Mateo was focused on academic achievement so he might achieve his life-long career. Coincidentally, Mateo’s move to the United States placed him in a location where he was geographically close to several colleges and universities that offered programs that would lead to his career goals². However, unlike his privileged upbringing in Mexico, Mateo would need to pay for college on his own. As a result, he was dependent on scholarships and grants to pay college tuition as well as the fees that come along with professional training for his

² Mateo’s first major is not listed in this study to protect his identity and that of his alma mater.

desired career, which in some cases can be as much as the cost of college itself. During his senior year of high school, Mateo visited Carman College, which is regionally known for the program that coincided with his first major. He explained:

Carman College was the closest university that offered my major. Carman College was giving me a significant amount of money to go to college. And, I also got a private scholarship...you know? Because of my good academic performance in high school. So, I mean, it was a combination of all that. I was able to afford the tuition with my scholarships.

While scholarships and the availability of his major were the major driving factors behind the choice to attend Carman College, Mateo also took pause to reflect on the religious affiliation of the institution. However, in the end, he explained that it was really a moot point:

Umm...well, I mean, it didn't really put much thought behind that it was a religious school. I felt like all the other pluses outweighed that. I wasn't too concerned about it either. I figured there'd be gay people here, right? That's what I assumed. I didn't think it'd be a big issue.

After moving from his home in Mexico and attending high school in the city, Mateo was ready to pursue his lifelong career dream. Luckily, Carman College was known for their academic programs and his good academic history provided the opportunity for several scholarships to defray the cost of tuition and fees. Mateo was excited to attend college for the first time, hoping to find his place amongst his peers and live as an out, gay man in higher education. However, Mateo's four years at Carman College ultimately did not meet his expectations on several levels, from his living arrangements, the narrow-mindedness of his cohorts and the administration's support towards the LGBTQ community.

In the fall of 2003, Mateo began attending Carman College and lived in University Hall, one of two first-year residence halls. Mateo was assigned to the smaller basement floor of the building, inhabited by 35 first year students sharing a common bathroom. From the beginning,

Mateo decided to be careful about disclosing his sexuality, surveying the surroundings before talking to anyone:

Freshman year, nobody knew. I think it was you know like...I was uncomfortable. I mean, I had a really good roommate – Patrick. And, I found him attractive...I was like “if he only knew!” But, my first thought was “don’t tell your roommate – he’ll act weird.” Then, you share bathrooms and I just didn’t want people to be like “oh, here comes!” You know? I needed to take a step back and see who I surrounded by before make any moves. Going to college, that’s what it was.

According to Mateo, his fears were realized when he interacted with other students on the floor.

One student in particular, Richard, frequently made derogatory statements about LGBTQ people.

Further, Mateo felt that he didn’t quite fit in with the students on his floor for other reasons. This lack of fit would be a theme for the rest of his time at Carman College. He remembered:

Richard, the big blonde dude – he was an asshole. He was terrible. He would joke around, and throw the around the word “fag” as much as he could. It felt like some of the other guys did it, too. I get it, they were young and mostly from the suburbs – suburban kids, you know? Most of them were very well off. But, some of them didn’t care about school at all. They were there to party. I was like – I don’t want them to know. I didn’t have any friends on the floor to be open with.

Although he did hear derogatory statements from his fellow residents, he did recall his floor resident assistant attempting to address same sex, sexual attraction at a floor meeting. However, this instance wasn’t enough to make Mateo comfortable on the floor. He explained:

I remember my RA said at a floor meeting – “if you’re gay, that’s OK.” I remember I thought – he said “gay.” But, I just remembered that I didn’t want it to be uncomfortable for anybody else. We shared showers, rooms. I just didn’t know if it was the best idea to tell people that I was attracted to them.

A lack of fit. A lack of support. Although Mateo struggled to find community and be his true self in the residence halls of Carman College, he did have hope that like high school, his college experience would include the camaraderie of other LGBTQ students. As luck would have it, Mateo found a friend in the one other out gay man he encountered on campus, Andy. Andy was two years older than Mateo trying to start an LGBTQ organization on campus. Although,

according to Mateo, it became quickly evident the administration of Carman College was not ready for such an organized group. He detailed:

I remember talking to Andy. He was my rock at Carman College really. And, I remember he wanted to start like a gay club. And, I was like, “dude, I’d totally do it.” So, he started talking to administration and they weren’t willing to do it. He also started talking to some people at a nearby Catholic university to make it a mutual organization between the two schools. They [the administration] always said no and, “you shouldn’t do it – it’s a religious school.” I don’t think he ever got anything done. It was block after block after block. It was a big “no.”

Sadly, the Carman College LGBTQ club, “Community,” detailed by Adam earlier in this chapter, had dissolved on campus shortly before Mateo arrived, leaving no formal group for such students at the college. Moreover, like Mateo’s experience with high school, he also faced another set of unfriendly administration towards such a group. When asked to further detail his interactions with campus administration regarding the possibility of an LGBTQ student group, he further elaborated:

It’s just wasn’t accepted. It wasn’t specific actions of people saying it out loud, it was just a sense that this isn’t right. Know what I’m saying? After how much trouble Andy really went through not get anything done with the gay straight alliance, it was very clear that Carman College was not accepting. It was very clear that the administration was not supporting this and they were like “you should just drop it.” And, so, if the top isn’t really supportive, what do you expect everybody else to do? If anything were to happen like a hate crime, they’re not going to stop it because they don’t think that it’s right.

Mateo made it clear that he did not feel as if there were many LGBTQ students at Carman College. As such, he was only openly gay to a handful of friends on campus, including Andy, and his two friends, Angelica and Rose. Moreover, he felt the culture of Carman College was unfriendly to LGBTQ people, making them seem invisible or hidden. However, he was determined to make connections with other LGBTQ people and took to the internet, both on gay-themed websites and in chat rooms. While online, he came across two other Carman College

students in his similar situation. He was struck by how one of the students presented himself online. He elaborated:

I remember being on Gay.com, the dating website. I met a couple of people from Carman College through there. Both were commuters. They were both in the nursing program. And, I remember one of them had the Carman College mascot as their profile picture. I was like, “gasp, OMG! I go there!” I was like, “who are you?” But, you see, even him, he wouldn’t put a picture of his face, he was trying to fish for someone at Carman College, which he did. Then, he sent a picture of who he was.

Outside of his quest to meet other LGBTQ individuals, Mateo was working on developing both his physical and emotional well-being in college. He explained that throughout his childhood and into high school, he was overweight and suffered at times from low self-esteem. However, Mateo began to exercise with his friend Rose, an R.O.T.C. student:

In college, I tried to work out just because the rec center was there. And, I remember Rose was in ROTC, so she had to do training on her own. And, so I joined her and soon after that I started seeing a result in my body and thought this is what I should do. I remember high school I was chubby. It was in college when I started to work out. And, I was eating on campus, so that’s when I started to work out more and see results.

Emotionally, Mateo still struggled to balance his sexuality, his thick accent, and his feeling of isolation from others on campus. He distinctly remembered situations in the residence halls where Richard, the floor bully, made racist comments. And, although Mateo’s roommate, Patrick, tried to intervene, he was still left feeling unaccepted by the community. He explained:

I was still trying to fit in. It wasn’t just that I was gay, it was also the fact that I still have a thick accent. You know? It was mainly white dudes and white people at Carman College. I felt like an outcast, you know? In University Hall, it was mainly white people and I remember one of the jokes one night...one of the first nights...from Richard. He made a joke about me being Mexican in front of everybody on the floor. I was like....ah! I felt awful. I remember Patrick [my roommate] saying, “Don’t pay attention to that...he’s just kidding”. I remember Patrick in our room later on asking how I felt about because he wanted to make sure that I was OK. And, I said, “Well, I don’t know. That’s not very welcoming.” And, it was in front of everybody so it put me in a bad light already with everybody else. So, I felt like I really never made connections in University Hall.

In sum, Mateo decided that one year in the residence halls was enough and he decided to live off campus his final three years in a house with his friends, Angelica and Rose. Mateo remembered feeling sad leaving the residence halls, but wanted to live in an environment where he was welcomed and could be himself.

Mateo soon realized that the training related to pursuing his lifelong dream almost doubled the cost of tuition. As a first generation college student, this came as a surprise to him, ultimately forcing a change in major. He detailed:

So, I started taking courses in my major during the first year. Then, after that, it was very obvious that I didn't have the funds to continue. Because, you have to pay tuition, and a ton of fees. You know? That was a lot more than I anticipated. And, it's not a guarantee that you'll progress. It was very clear that I couldn't afford it. Then, I started taking business classes and started liking it. So, I thought about doing a double major, because it was an extra incentive to get hired. And, I remember really liking international business classes so I moved in that direction. I graduated with a double major.

After switching majors, Mateo found that the atmosphere of classes and colleagues in the business college were more accepting. Further, he found a sense of "fit" in both the rigor of the courses and the diversity of his colleagues. Much like his struggle to get out of ESL classes in high school, Mateo found the teamwork, collegiality and challenge of his business classes fulfilling:

It was two different groups, you know? And, I think the other major classes were relatively easy. Like, if you get a bad grade, it's because you didn't do the work. It was so easy. And, in business classes, it was a lot tougher. The professors alone were so much more...you have projects. But, I really enjoyed it a lot more. I was more challenged.

Beyond his classes and exercising, Mateo was minimally involved on campus. Although, he did recall participating in the Latin American student organization. Although Carman College was a Catholic institution, he didn't interact much with the vowed religious members of the community. However, the university president, Sister Jane, also spent time with the Latin American student group and the international students on campus. He recalled:

I'd talk to her [Sister Jane] because the Latino organization. She was also supporting international students. So, Thanksgiving or those holidays that, you know, international students didn't go anywhere else but on campus, they would invite me, you know? I was there with Sr. Jane and the nuns. But, beyond that, I didn't really go to mass or anything.

Conclusion. Unlike Adam, Mateo had a harder time finding a sense of community at Carman College. Throughout his four years on campus, he encountered racism in the residence halls, struggles to finance his dream career and campus administration that were not eager to support his desire to recognize a student group for LGBTQ individuals. Coupled with an atmosphere where few LGBTQ individuals were visible, Mateo recounted numerous times that he didn't feel accepted at Carman College. When asked to elaborate on why he didn't feel accepted, he explained:

Again, I think it's also the fact that I was a minority as well. I think a combination of both [gay and Mexican] kind of kept me a shy individual...reserved. So, I went to class, did my homework and then left campus, you know? That's probably why I had good grades...haha! Because, even like the parties on campus, I wasn't invited to those. If I went to some, it was because I was with other friends. You know? It was because I was friends with them, not because I was invited. Even, then, nobody took the effort to get to know me. I was like, "start a conversation!"

When asked what advice he would provide to a gay man thinking of attending a Catholic institution of higher education, he quickly retorted, "Don't!" After a few moments of silence and a pregnant pause, Mateo's face became softer and he elaborated:

It's been years since I've been at Carman College, so I don't know what the culture and policies are anymore, or if there's any support for gay people. I don't know. But, if it's still the same, I just feel like if you want to go there, it's probably because you want to...it's the school you want to go to. You have to understand, though, you can't expect much of a social life or not be open, really. I feel like someone should go as long as you're OK with putting your gay life not as a priority. If that makes sense?

Although both Adam and Mateo attended the same institution, each clearly had different experiences throughout their time on campus. Adam found connections with friends, both LGBTQ and straight, within a few days of arriving on campus. As such, his trajectory towards campus leadership and integration within the community was fueled by the sense of belonging he

received throughout his time at Carman College. However, Mateo experienced a series of situations that hindered his association with the overall community. By experiencing racism in the residence halls, absent support from campus administration regarding forming an LGBTQ student group and financial difficulties, Mateo lacked the same connection and affiliation enjoyed by Adam during his four years on campus.

Jackson

Approximately 100 miles away from a major city, Jackson began his studies at the University of Santa Monica in the fall of 2000, concluding his degree in the spring of 2004. Compared to Carman College, the University of Santa Monica is a larger, yet rural located Catholic institution of higher education. With a strong emphasis on athletics and rooted strongly in the ideals of Roman Catholicism, the University of Santa Monica principally attracts students that are serious about academics, but are looking for a traditional college experience. During his college search process, all of these elements appealed to Jackson and set him on a path to a mostly positive, yet growth-filled four years on campus. Jackson's time at the University of Santa Monica began with his experience growing up in a blue collar, suburban home with devoutly Catholic parents, looking to provide him with a future that built on their humble, hard-working life choices. With his tenacious personality and a strong drive to succeed, Jackson flourished on campus and learned many important life lessons along the way.

Simplicity in the suburbs. Although he grew up within an hour drive of a medium-sized city, Jackson recalled his childhood was a mix of living close to the "big city" but with lifestyles and ideals that drew primarily from the country. As an only child, Jackson was raised in a devoutly Catholic household and attended public schools throughout his time before college. He remembered:

I have two parents...umm...both married until my dad passed away in 2010. Pretty stable, Catholic household. Umm...public high school, public schools all the way through. You know, country-like environment but an ex-burb of a major city. So...umm...you know a little bit less progressive of an area. It was still in the sphere of the “big city,” though. But, definitely country. You know? High school kids with pickup trucks and gun racks and confederate flags and the like.

Jackson’s father was the family breadwinner and preferred that his wife was a stay-at-home mom. Working mostly blue-collar jobs, Jackson’s father instilled a strong work ethic in his son:

My dad worked in printing. So, he what he did was free press. So, preparing the film and the plates to go on the press. You know, originally as a tradesman/artisan because a lot of that was stuff you did with your hands. But, later on it evolved into a technological job and preparing tickets and jobs and things like that. Umm...my mom was a stay at home mom when I was little. She was...uhh...I don’t want to say forbidden to work, but pretty much forbidden to work until I was in school. And, she worked at like McDonalds and things like that for a few years when I was little because the schedule was flexible. Then, ultimately she got a job working for someone she knew from high school that was a dentist as a receptionist.

From a socio-economic perspective, Jackson recalled that his parents always provided his basic needs, with some periods better than others depending on if his father’s side jobs were prosperous:

So, I would describe my family as lower middle class. Umm...in that there was always food on the table but sometimes, you know, things were tight. But, sometimes they were good. My dad for a while sold real estate so when he would sell a house we’d have a few thousand dollars and when he didn’t, we kept lights on and food on the table. I don’t think he ever had savings to speak of. So, yeah, it was, it was tight but we were fine. We owned a house, we always had a dog and I was well taken care of. But, yeah, it was the basics.

Religion was a very important part of Jackson’s upbringing. He remembered that although his mother was the leader when it came to religion in the household, his father always ensured a unified front:

We were adherent, or observant. We went to Mass every week. It was very rare that we would miss a Sunday or Saturday night. I did CCD and things like that. I did all the sacraments, first communion, confession and all that good stuff. Umm...yeah, so I mean, Catholicism was very important especially to my mom. Less so to my dad. He had kind of a sense that he had paid his dues going to a Catholic high school. So, you know, he

was along for the ride and he would come with us but I think he was less invested than my mom was. But, you know, they presented a united front when it came to that.

As he matured, Jackson found that his Catholic faith blossomed along with him. In fact, he began to explore his faith independent of his family:

I had a dedication to it. Like, sometime I went to church by myself or I'd arrange my work schedule so I could attend mass. It was very much driven home that it was important and what you did. As I've grown up, things have obviously changed when it comes to that. But, it definitely played a role in my life.

Throughout his childhood and into his teenage years, Jackson recalled that his overall personality was more reserved, but with an inquisitive nature. Once he matured into puberty, this inquisitive nature would be a double edge sword, causing him to explore the world around him yet bringing with it a sense of isolation at times:

I was definitely closeted, introverted. Umm...you know a little on the nerdy side. Somethings never change. And, very curious especially when I hit puberty about the world around me and, you know, what is this thing to be gay in gay culture. Wondering more about it even though there weren't many resources at the time. I was pretty far removed from anyone or anything that could have been an influence or a mentor when it came to that.

In addition to growing up in a location that was devoid of LGBTQ culture, Jackson recalled several salient popular culture and national-level affairs that caught his attention. He remembered:

There was the whole "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" thing. I think Defense of Marriage Act rose up during that time. So, it was basically, you know, a non-favorable environment. You looked around at the political atmosphere and saw that they don't accept you. They don't want you. You're an "other." And, that was tough. That was definitely tough. It supported all the other biases and, you know, discrimination that you might experience because this is all OK because it's just the way it is.

When asked to expand upon his feelings related to this sense of cultural isolation, Jackson admitted he felt disappointment about the time in which he grew up. He explained:

Ummm....so when I talk about it now, I think about it in light of what I see today as young people's experience and people that are in high school now. They're out now and

proud and going to prom and having boyfriends and having like normal interpersonal relationships with other gay people and that I feel a little robbed of that. I feel a little jealous that I didn't grow up ten years later and get to have that I guess fuller experience, less repressive experience. Umm...so I generally think about it that way and I look at the comparison of the two.

Of the six alumni in this study, Jackson had the most difficult time in his coming out process. As a child, Jackson knew he felt excitement from sexual interactions with other boys. In fact, he vividly remembered one encounter with a neighborhood child when he was five years old:

There was an experience when I was like 5. But, I don't even know if that counts, honestly. There was a boy across the street who was a couple years older and it was a "you show me yours, I'll show you mine." I think everyone does that. I still vividly remember that experience to this day. That was my first same-sex...I wouldn't say sexual...at 5 it's not fucking sexual. But, I vividly remember the thrill...that it kind of felt right, that it was a good experience. And, so that feeling just kind of remained dormant for a number of years. It was kind of there but I didn't know what to do with it.

As Jackson reached puberty, he recalled his attempts to put a label to his earlier encounter with the neighbor boy. With his attraction towards other boys growing, he took to the internet in an attempt to learn more about his situation:

When I was about 13, I finally got the internet. And, I was able to look up...I would say Google™, but there was no Google™ when I was 13. I heard the term "gay" but I didn't know what it was or the definition, so I was able to look that up and be like "OK...attracted to guys." Also, I was able to very, very painfully slowly download some porn...as one does when they're a 13-year-old boy. And, an hour later, I had one picture and gosh darn it that picture had to be good enough. By that process, I kind of figured out what "gay" was and I had to kind of keep that to myself for a while.

Jackson recalled fear surrounding the idea of disclosing his sexuality to others, especially his parents. However, on the car ride home from soccer practice one afternoon, Jackson's mother decided to probe:

One day, my mom was driving me to soccer practice. I was 14 years old. And, she started asking me questions like, "hey, are there any girls that you're interested in...blah, blah blah?" And, you know, having newly figured out what I was a year before and at the time feeling fairly comfortable with her still, I told her. She said, "you are into girls, aren't you?" I said, "actually, I'm not sure about that." That did not go well. Umm...there were a few weeks of crying and tears and her kind of holing herself up in her room in bed.

Umm...to the point that, you know, I hated seeing my mom like that and I let her convince me to “give girls a try.” You never know until you try! So, I had a girlfriend and I was with her for a year.

Since coming out to his mother did not go positively, Jackson explained that he decided not to tell his father about his sexuality at all. Several factors played into this decision:

We never, it was never verbalized. My dad was....[Jackson sighs]...he would tell gay jokes. “Will and Grace” would be on TV and he would say, “we don’t support that in this house.” And, we’d have to turn it off. You know, but at the same time, I think later in life I think he did figure it out. He would say things like, “have you ever thought about being a priest?” [Jackson laughs]. So, I think he, I think he knew something might be up. And, then, you know, he’d tell me even after college and living away from home, “I really worry about you. I hope that you do find someone. I really just want you to be happy.” But, it was never verbalized. I think he knew, but I never told him.

Although Jackson’s coming out process was not immediately positive, he decided to pursue meeting other area men for friendship and dating. With the assistance of the internet, he was able to connect with other gay men in the area and has his first boyfriend at age 18. However, given his location, Catholic upbringing, and his conservative surroundings, Jackson took to great lengths to conceal this relationship. He explained:

I had my first “boyfriend” at 18. We met on Gay.com. It was an hour drive to get to his place. I would lie to my parents and say I was hanging out with my friends. His mom was really cool, so we’d hang out in his basement. That was fun. It lasted a month or two. Then, I was accepted to University of Santa Monica and him to another university so we called it off at that point. And, it’s funny though, I still talk to him when I go home. I chat him up...hey how’s it going? We’re still cool. I haven’t seen him years, but I still hit him up because he still lives close to my mom.

In addition to a dating experience, Jackson recalled that he truly enjoyed his academic life.

Attending a small school near his home, he was able to excel in academics throughout middle school and eventually graduated valedictorian of his high school class. He noted:

I always excelled from middle school on I was in the gifted and talented program...honors...AP...stuff like that. School was very important from an academic perspective. My father would always drive home the fact that I needed to strive for perfection that I needed to get good grades. Not only the standard that he set for me that anything less than an “A” wasn’t really good enough, but also I think from the

perspective of our socioeconomic status...he knew that I was going to need scholarships if I wanted to go to college and be successful. He didn't go to college, so he recognized that was pretty important that I did that. So, he always pushed me very hard. Thankfully, a lot of it came very easily to me, so that's good.

Additionally, Jackson was able to participate in several extracurricular activities. By

participating in several artistic activities, he found camaraderie with other peers, lending to a sense of belonging within the school community:

The biggest thing for me was the sense of community, right? It [the arts] was somewhere I could belong and be myself. Between band and chorus, the musical arts, they seemed to attract a little bit more progressive-leaning group of people. Umm...because I think you had to have some artistic skill and talent and relied on the ability to work together. If you are trying to build a formation on the field you have to be in synch to make it look right. You can't let other bull shit get in the way from achieving that.

Leveraging the underground. Jackson remembered a great sense of accomplishment as he progressed towards college. However, his family's financial situation and his status as a first generation college student left several unknowns as he began to look at colleges. After considering an Ivy League university and several local institutions, Jackson did not feel a correct fit quite yet. However, his mother happened to be working for a local dentist at the time, and fate intervened. During a discussion about her son's college search, the dentist came up with an idea:

So, yeah, my mom's boss, the dentist that she worked for, his son had gone to University of Santa Monica. Being from a Catholic family, it's assumed that you are a University of Santa Monica athletics fan by default no matter what. Umm...he was like, "you should apply. You'd really enjoy it there. It'd be a good experience." Then, he paid my application fee. I applied, I sent in the recommendation letter from the guidance office like date stamped on the deadline postmark date. And, I got in.

Shortly after his acceptance to University of Santa Monica, Jackson went on a campus visit with his mother. He recalled an instant sense of "fit" when he arrived on campus:

I went to look at the school and I fell in love with it. It was so beautiful, and the men were beautiful [Jackson laughs]. I think some statistic that 60 or 70% were varsity athletes in high school and it showed. And, it was far enough away. It was 300 or 400 miles away from home, which is close enough that I could get home in the same day, but

far enough that my folks weren't going to pop in for a surprise visit. I could start to be independent and on my own...form my own path.

With his Catholic faith in mind, Jackson was both aware of and comfortable with the fact that the University of Santa Monica was a Catholic university. In fact, he saw attending the university as a potential opportunity:

I think I saw attending the University of Santa Monica as an opportunity to possibly reconcile my faith and sexuality. Umm...you know, my Catholic identity was still fairly strong at that point. My gay identity was emerging. And, the two seemed to be in conflict. So, I thought to myself, what better of place to figure that out then under the structure of Catholicism...within the Catholic Church. It just made sense at the time that if I'm going to figure that out and reconcile the two, I'm sure there are other people here that are dealing with the same thing.

Although Jackson was open to the idea of exploring his sexuality in the same space as his faith, he was also interested in learning as much as he could about the LGBTQ on campus before he arrived. As with most other seminal moments in his life, Jackson took to the internet to learn about the university:

I just searched "gay University of Santa Monica." It was called "Outreach Santa Monica." I got to their website and had the emails for their board members and I picked one. His name was Harry. I emailed him, but never met him in person. He was a really nice guy. He graduated the year before I got there. Umm...but yeah, he was very cool and gave me the scoop. He told me it's no state school. It's not easy being gay there. He said a gay person would be a little bit of a rebel...a little bit subversive. "Outreach Santa Monica" was a 501-c-3, nonprofit, and completely independent from the university. They had a PO Box and managed their own website and email domain. Also, there was a special group for alumni, and they funded the student group. The alumni would collect membership dues from the alumni to fundraise. They'd also do one or two events off campus a year...like a spring dance off campus at a very nice venue. And, that'd be the big fundraiser for the year. And, that money would go to fund the student group.

When he arrived on campus in the fall of 2000, Jackson was elated that he could finally be himself. In addition, he immediately joined the student entity of "Outreach Santa Monica" and began to seek out other gay men:

Umm...Yeah, I was pretty much out right away. Haha. I...I got there, you know...umm...orientation week, freshman year, tried to do the very first event with

“Outreach Santa Monica” and meet people immediately because I was like, “I need my gays.” I was on Gay.com chatting people up trying to find other cute freshmen. I was finally free. I was finally, you know, independent, and able to do that. So, I pretty much started up on campus with rainbows flying out my ass. It was great.

As a non-recognized organization on campus, “Outreach Santa Monica” had to be creative when it came to advertising group events and getting the message out to the community about their mission. Jackson remembered how the group creatively made their presence known on campus:

Recognized groups that were sympathetic would reserve classroom space for us to meet up. For example, the gender studies group or the progressive student alliance would make the reservations under their name and we’d do our “guerilla postings.” As a rule, postings had to be approved to go up by student activities and have a little stamp on them that said how long they could stay up before being taken down. Obviously, as a non-approved student group, we couldn’t do that officially. So, we’d go out at 11PM or midnight and we’d poster all over campus, you know, everywhere. My favorite was putting one right on the Knights of Columbus door. About half of them would be up by the time classes started the next day and it was enough to get the word out there. We would do also a lot of newspaper stuff...letters to the editor. Sometimes, we’d even run an ad in the student newspaper that had journalistic freedom to publish even for a non-student group. We had the website, and around the time people were starting to become “techy.” So, they could search for us, they could find us. They also heard about us through word of mouth.

When asked whether “Outreach Santa Monica” ever engaged in the process of becoming an officially recognized student organization, Jackson explained:

We applied every year. The reason we were denied every time was that the group was in conflict with Catholic values. We were more of a social group...more of a support group. We were not there to talk about our Catholic-ness. We were not there to represent the official views of the Church, and so this was problematic. Over the years, we tried to form a gay/straight alliance, but that didn’t fly either. We tried a lot of things and now they finally do have a group that’s a gay/straight alliance of sorts. But, it’s very tightly guarded and controlled by faculty and staff members of the university to keep it in check with doctrine. But, you know, where they are now is miles from where they were in early 2000’s.

After speaking about the administration’s unwillingness to approve “Outreach Santa Monica”,

Jackson felt he needed to detail how there appeared to be a divide in campus culture towards

LGBTQ individuals:

From the perspective of LGBT students, the administration was behind the times; they were not approving of our group and they would use words like “intrinsically disordered” and stuff like that. It was Catholic doctrine at the time...it still is. So, that was one group. And then, there were the students who were fine. Honestly, I don’t know of any, or did not experience any harassment or discrimination to my face from any other students. So, it was two worlds – you could live in the student world and even though it was a conservative, religious institution, it was still a college with young people who their world-view still takes on a more liberal slant, no matter what. Progress marches forward. So, I never really experienced any sort of negative attitudes from the other students.

Jackson was clear to point out that he recalled the Catholic Church leadership had strong feelings about same sex, sexual attraction while he was at University of Santa Monica:

We were viewed as intrinsically disordered. There it is again. I was allowed to be gay, but not act on it. That I’m “allowed” as a loose term – I was flawed in some fundamental way. So, yeah, it was always in conflict. They said, “You can be you, but don’t really be you.” You can be you, but you can’t be in a relationship – God forbid. If it is, it’s a sexless relationship because that’s the only thing that’s ok.

When asked to comment on whether the administration of the university appeared to support the Church’s views towards same sex, sexual attraction, he explained:

They were towing the line. They were getting as close to it as I think they could because they, you know, they still have an informal relationship with the Catholic Church. Many universities have completely broken free [from the church]. University of Santa Monica really had to tow the line. The Church and the wealthy alumni kept them in check. They had a lot of wealthy alumni that would withhold funding under certain conditions. The mysterious board of trustees made a lot of decision around student groups. They would put pressure to maintain the status quo and a lot of that came from wealthy donors and benefactors.

Outside of his involvement with Outreach Santa Monica, Jackson recalled fond memories of living in the residence halls. Unlike Carman College, the University of Santa Monica had vowed religious members of the Church living in the residence halls with the students. Each residence hall was single sex and typically had a priest or sister as the hall chaplain. Overall, Jackson thoroughly enjoyed his two years in the residence halls, as he explained:

So, University of Santa Monica is unique in that there’s no Greek life. So, all the dorms were single sex. Your all male dorm operates like a frat house, but not really. So, everyone’s pretty close. We all take care of our own. We were a tight knit community.

There was never negative backlash for those who knew I was gay. I was their brother. Even though it wasn't a frat, I was their brother. I'm still Facebook friends with a lot of those guys today. I kind of drifted in that I made my friend selection more towards the gay slant, but they were always there if I needed them, so that was pretty good.

During his first year in the residence halls, Jackson had generally positive interactions with his hall chaplain, even coming out to him. He recalled:

Our rector was Fr. Brian. And, he...I'm trying to describe it all at once but it's a picture: balding guy, tall, skinny, probably mid-40's...very rarely did I see him in actual black shirt with the collar. Generally, he was in an orange turtleneck and a black leather jacket riding a Razor scooter with a cigarette. He was one of the gayest men I've ever met in my entire life and this was the chaplain of our dorm. Needless to say, I came out to him pretty quickly freshman year. And that was a good conversation. Of course, he towed the line as much as he could. You know, again, I was seeking reconciliation of the faith with being a gay man. And, so I think that helped.

Jackson was clear throughout the interviews that he felt the vowed religious members of the university community were "towing the line" during his time on campus. Although, at times he felt the priests and sisters deviated from such actions, sometimes to extremes:

So, we had an associate chaplain when I was a sophomore or junior – Fr. Carlos. He was from Chile. And, let's just say we saw him out at the gay bar and you know, there were three of us from the same dorm that he was the associate rector of. We were like, "hey, father!" And, he was like, "Hey! I just like the music!" And, we were like "that's bullshit, but awesome!" So, you know, we started to see that there were definitely cracks in the clergy and cracks in the cloth, so to speak? These are people, too. They have to sometimes tow the line in public, but in private there's a lot of gay priests. And, you know, it's interesting, right? Seeing Fr. Brian and his flamboyant self...seeing Fr. Carlos dancing it up at the gay bar. It was a different message. Even if it wasn't officially stated.

As the valedictorian of his high school class, Jackson was prepared to work hard to earn a degree in management information systems. Although the curriculum of the business school did not regularly include discussions on LGBTQ issues, he recalled having discussions related to sexuality during his liberal arts courses:

So, I was in the business school and being gay never came up in my core classes. However, if you take a few more liberal arts courses, it'll come up. Like, I took a gender and sexuality course and it would come up and we talked about it. We talked about trans issues, intersex individuals and things like that. And, it was funny, I was in the class with

another gay and I knew he was gay and he knew I was, too. And, sometimes he would preface his statements with, “as a gay man, blah blah blah blah.” I was just like, “girl, please.” So, I’d do the same – it’s like we were having a little “gay-off.” We were now the subject matter experts in the room. And, it felt good! I was the expert on the topic we were discussing. It was nice.

Jackson also explained that he was fond of the professors at University of Santa Monica, noting their willingness to support diversity:

They were great! They were all super lefty people. The dean of the college was always so supportive. We did a queer film festival my senior year and the college was a major sponsor – they were the official academic sponsor of the event. From the top down in that college, it was a liberal bastion. They were always very sympathetic.

Conclusion. Overall, Jackson enjoyed his time at the University of Santa Monica. Like Mateo at Carman College, Jackson encountered roadblocks from campus administration when trying to form an officially recognized LGBTQ student group. In addition, Jackson reconciled his sexuality and spirituality, noting the lessons he learned from interactions with the vowed religious members of the community and other students. When asked what advice he would provide to a gay man considering attending an America Catholic institution of higher education, he explained:

A couple things: first, closely examine the support systems that are in place. Examine the university administration towards LGBT people and issues. Find out if there is an officially supported student group. And, reach out to people that are there to get their experiences and impression of campus. Know what you’re going into. If you’re going there to try and reconcile Catholicism with trying to be gay, ultimately it’s a good place to do it. The outcome of my reconciliation was that I’m no longer a practicing Catholic and that’s for various reason. But, it allowed me to work through that. It was an environment with a very strong Catholic identity and I could work through it. But, yeah, know what your resources are and do your homework.

When asked if he would attend the University of Santa Monica again given the opportunity, he waxed philosophical for a moment, but ultimately explained:

That’s a good question. Your life is a tapestry of experiences for better or for worse. Umm...I think it was...I think it was good overall having gone through the challenge and the struggles. I think that has made me the man that I am today. Umm...but I often

wonder what if I had gone to a large state school that had multiple recognized LGBT groups and thousands of out queer kids. How would that have gone? So, I don't know. I don't know. I think if I had to do it all over again, I would have looked at other schools. I would have applied to the Ivy Leagues where there is a more welcoming community with academic rigor and support of the name of the institution from a career perspective. But, I...you know, given the same set of circumstances, I probably would have done it again.

Travis

In the fall of 2005, a second gay man arrived on the campus of the University of Santa Monica, Travis. While Travis' and Jackson had several similar experiences on campus, each came from different backgrounds and pursued different paths during college. Although Travis fondly remembers his time at the University of Santa Monica, he also dealt with varying levels of anxiety and self-doubt coming to terms with his sexual orientation. However, Travis was dedicated to his studies, driven by the notion of success. The roots of his journey begin about 200 miles away from the University of Santa Monica in a modest size suburb outside a major city.

Hockey and happiness. Growing up, Travis led what he referred to as the “typical American life in the suburbs.” The oldest of three boys with parents that were still married at the time of our interview, Travis reminisced about growing up in an environment with much love and support. With three boys in the household, Travis' parents were always seeking constructive outlets for male energy and decided to enroll all three sons in a local hockey league. From an early age, Travis recalled loving sports and competition:

I'm the oldest of three boys and we grew up playing hockey which was pretty much all consuming from weekends and nights stand-point, so both of my parents were really involved in practices, trips, tournaments and between three of us on any given weekend, that took up a lot of our time. So, we made many of our family friends through hockey. Umm...my youngest brother played at an elite level. He went on to play hockey at University of Santa Monica later on, but yeah, I would say really loving and supportive.

In addition to playing hockey, Travis was also involved with his high school and local golf teams. Further, he enjoyed activities outside of competitive sports, such as music:

Played golf a lot. I played varsity golf for my high school, so that took up a ton of time. And, besides that, music. I played the piano more as a true hobby not anything that I've ever done like professionally like that.

Like all the other alumni in this study, Travis grew up in a household that practiced Roman Catholicism. Similar to Jackson's experience, Travis' mother was the leader in his household when it came to attending Mass:

I was never a very religious person. We were... my dad just went to church and goes through the motions. Mom was more the religious...adherent. Mom was the one that got us to church, you know wanted us to go through CCD and that kind of stuff. Dad was like ...whatever.

In school, Travis excelled academically in the classroom. Fortunately, he was able to quickly comprehend concepts, leaving him time to manage a grueling extracurricular portfolio of activities. He explained:

School always came naturally to me. I...got stuff faster than like most of my peers. I was good at it. And, school was my niche. I was very active and I did very well academically. I never had to, you know, get told twice to do my homework and that kind of things. I really liked political science. I took an AP political science class and that's what really made me want to major in political science in college. So, I ended up majoring in finance and political science. I was the kid that was asking questions about and following the Bill Clinton impeachment while my brothers were like "who cares."

Regarding his own sexuality, Travis admits that he felt different from a young age. However, given his family structure, community culture and overall naiveté about LGBTQ+ affairs, he did not spend much time processing those feelings:

I guess I would say in retrospect there were times when...like...I clearly should have known at that time. I don't think I realized it or admitted it to myself until I was like 18. How? I just kind of let myself admit that...I guess. All the other like feelings I had prior to that I wrote off as bisexual. Or, maybe it's just a phase. When I knew that like I couldn't imagine me dating and having an enjoyable relationship with a woman, that kind of told me "what's going on here?" And, I would also say...uhh...back to your question...umm...when I younger I was immature to a certain extent. I was good at school but I wasn't grown up for my age. So, I think it did take me longer to realize whereas someone who was more mature 16 year old might have been at that point. You know, it might have been more evident to them...been able to process that better.

At the local level, growing up in the suburbs during the late 90's and early 2000's, Travis recalled a sense of social and cultural simplicity within his community. In regards to LGBTQ issues, Travis explained that the topic was ignored and very few individuals were "out" in his hometown. In speaking of his high school, he noted:

I would say [the school] was probably ignorant. I remember the handful of guys that were out publically were, you know, treated very stereotypically in the way high school kids would. I'm guessing that changed in high schools today but from my experience...but I was mostly going to high school...mostly white...maybe 10% minority students at my school...very few gay people...not something that was...just lack of exposure to that, I guess.

On a more macro scale, Travis recalled particular moments at the state and national level relating to LGBTQ culture. Specifically, he recalled a seminal "coming out" moment in popular culture during the late 1990's:

I remember states legalizing gay marriage and stuff. There were certainly [music] bands that I could point to as being LGBTQ inclined. I remember Ellen coming out just because my mom loves her and was just like surprised...I don't think she was surprised but how big of a deal that was at the time. I also remember when certain stars came out...Rosie O'Donnell as one of them.

With a lack of LGBTQ role models in his immediate community and minimal discussions about sexual diversity in school, Travis recalled feeling ignorant himself about what his same sex, sexual attractions meant:

I suffered from that [ignorance] too. So, that kind of led to me not probably being able to process my sexuality in a way that I might have would it have been talked about more. I know, that attitude including in my family, it wasn't hatred it was just "not something we're going to tell or talk about." Like, it didn't come up in sex ed. It was heterosexual sex ed. So, now-a-days, you need to...there are people like us out there. For me, how did it make me feel? It made me feel kind of uninformed. You know? And, uhh...I think I was in the same boat. It was really towards the end of high school that I was even...umm...like acting...started hooking up with guys. It was towards the later end of high school that there was even a conflict.

As Travis matured and began to consider colleges, he made the conscious decision not to disclose his sexuality to his parents or community. However, this decision did not come without conflicting feelings and emotions. He explained:

Yeah, so the decision...umm...so, I didn't disclose it [his sexual orientation]. I didn't come out to most of my friends and family until I was 25. I'm 30 now. And, my decision was basically...umm...I'm going to college regardless of it where it was. And, I wasn't as sure about it...I wasn't sure that was the label or column I fit in, right? So, I think a lot of my...uhhh...decision to not disclose it was...you know...did I want to put myself out there [as gay] and if it didn't end up being true...? I was still discovering it myself. I felt, uhh...you know, conflicted. Because part of me saw my friends getting into relationships. I never really felt depressed from it, but it felt burdensome, I guess I would say.

Sports and Brotherhood. During his senior year of high school, Travis began the process of applying to colleges and universities. He remembered that choosing a university closer to his hometown was important, as he wanted to remain in close contact with his family. Further, as the oldest of three children and the first to attend college, he had a bit of trepidation attending an institution too far from home. Although he visited a few schools throughout the country, Travis ultimately chose to attend the University of Santa Monica for several reasons. Not only was he familiar with the university because of its strong sports program, but it was a beautiful campus:

I'm the oldest kid of small family. I didn't want to go to attend a local state college like everyone from my graduating class. I wanted to try something new, but I was kind of afraid of going too far. I'd known University of Santa Monica from hockey and football. I wasn't particularly...umm...it wasn't like my dream school, so to speak, from a young age but it became it early on in the process. I liked that it was close...the Catholic thing was neutral to me. I didn't have to go to a Catholic school. I loved the campus, dorm life and the student life there. It was the whole package.

Upon arrival at the University of Santa Monica, Travis immediately found a home in the all-male residence hall. Further, he created bonds with his floor mates that first year which would continue throughout this life:

I lived on campus three years in the dorms with like a random roommate. The guys that lived in my hallway freshman year wound up forming a cohort and lived together the next three years. We stuck together...they're my best friends and I've been in all their weddings and vice versa. It was a great situation there. We lived together in a house my senior year where we all had bedrooms.

Like Jackson, Travis distinctly recalled his hall chaplain, Father Rick. Although his interactions with Fr. Rick were minimal, he did remember the approach the chaplain took towards educating his residents on alcohol. Further, he remembered Fr. Rick's support of an openly gay resident assistant in the building:

All of the dorms have a chaplain in residence. Ours was Father Rick. He was the chaplain all three years that I lived in the dorm. So, like, typical interactions...saw him around the halls...he was kind of a weird dude...but he also taught our ethics class, so I had him for class too. He was a quirky too... went to University of Santa Monica...he ended up graduating and then getting his divinity degree there and never left, so he's still there...he's pretty high up in the administration. I mean, he was basically there trying to crack down on people for drinking in the dorms. When I was a freshman, one of the RA's was openly gay. And, he mentioned it in his welcome. I don't remember like what exactly he said, umm...but I remember that Fr. Rick said to us, "uhh...like...nobody's going to judge you for it." But it was never discussed again. He was usually talking about dorm related things or what's going on that weekend. He was a weird guy and obsessed with Disney. He had all the movies on DVD. He was just a bizarre dude but a pretty smart guy. He gave us a lot of slack actually...wasn't a hard core disciplinarian.

In the classroom, Travis found the transition from high school to college more challenging than anticipated. He opted to major in finance and political sciences, two majors in different colleges. Like Jackson, Travis' business classes were more career focused, but he did recall discussions of LGBTQ subjects in his general education courses:

The classes were more big boy...something I had to put more work into. It was more like...less busy work and memorization and more writing and thinking and explaining and opinions and that kind of stuff. And, uhh...yeah...I mean...I was in the business school and I also did a second major in political science, so I kind of had those different spheres that were a lot of times different...finance was more math geared, poly sci was more writing. I took a couple of anthropology classes where [LGBTQ topics] came up. It would come up tangentially in some of those anthropology classes.

Like in high school, Travis decided to stay "in the closet" about his same sex, sexual attraction.

When he reflected back on this decision, he explained:

I think it was like...this [his same sex, sexual attraction] is something I can deal with after college and this is not the right environment to do it just because there's not that...I didn't have a go-to support that I could go to. If you were to ask...if you were going to come out who would you go to on campus? The answer was I don't know. And, fortunately, I wasn't grappling with it in a dire situation but might have been. But I think it was for me, I can put this off until I'm living in a city or I'm out of college...somewhere that's probably less impactful. Part of me knew that college is college and I wanted to enjoy that experience.

However, unlike high school, Travis explained that the University of Santa Monica did have a slightly more visible LGBTQ culture but still had much room to grow:

The whole thing when I was there...the inclusivity slogan was called "Gay? Fine by me!" Which was a step in the right direction for the university. And, there was a group on campus that was essentially promoted tolerance. They basically said, "hey, guys! I know there's campus doctrine that says you should think about gay people in a bad way...hey...you can also ask 'what would Jesus do?'" There weren't any outwardly homophobic...uhh...attitudes, and if there were...umm...they would probably be chalked up to the bro-ey, jock nature of guys in college. It didn't come from a religious point of view. There weren't a lot of out gay people, so I don't think it was much of a topic that a lot of people had to deal with in practice. Though, having come out now, I know in retrospect there had to be a lot of people dealing with that. I think...uhh...there wasn't really a model for coming out on campus, I guess. You know? There weren't a lot of people like 'oh yeah! You're so and so that came out!'"

While the University of Santa Monica had a handful of LGBTQ students and supporters, Travis did not recall a visible support program for individuals that might be struggling with their sexuality:

I don't remember there ever being anything advertised...hey...are you struggling with your sexuality? If so, we have a support group...weekly meeting...talk to this person. My only recollection of the only sponsored or organized was the "gay? Fine by me!" Which, to my recollection, was kind of a student formed group and it didn't really have a top-down mandate from the university. It was kind of like...hey we need this...because someone probably had a friend or relative that was gay. Or, they have these support groups at a lot of schools...why don't we have this? Let's suffice to say that it wasn't really substantial if it existed at all.

One foot in, one foot out (of the closet). Although Travis was not ready to disclose his sexuality to others on campus, he did have numerous same sex, sexual encounters with fellow classmates. He described using the internet to meet the other guys:

I used Craigslist. It was a website that was the precursor to Grindr to hook up with guys. Yeah, I used that exclusively. I used it because there wasn't a place at the University of Santa Monica that gay people would hang out. There was one gay bar in town that I heard of, but I've actually still never been there to this day.

Travis further explained that after he would have sex with other students that he met on the internet, he would see them out at local bars. Also, these interactions had a distinct emotional impact on him. When describing these encounters at the bars, he explained:

It [having sex with men] never came back to bite me. The day I graduated and for several years after, no one ever approached me and said, "I knew you were gay" other than guys I hooked up with. So, really there were no negative consequences to hiding it. I was never outed or anything which was fortunate for me. It probably wouldn't have been a good thing to deal with it. And, and, of course like...umm...when I saw these guys out at bars and stuff...of course we didn't acknowledge it at all...uhh...but that was kind of like fun to have this secret...but also stressful...maybe not stressful...but anxiety inducing. You don't want to get found out.

Travis noted that these interviews were the first time he really thought about his sexuality in college. When reflecting back on his interactions with several classmates, he indicated that many of them were likely gay as well, but struggling with their identities, often having relationship with women at the same time:

Now looking back...several of us were gay. We were all in various stages of trying to come to terms with it...or try to date girls and fix it. It [being gay] just wasn't something that came up. And, I think that kind of reinforces itself. If that's not something that anyone had a lot of experience talks about...and look around and no one else is coming out...it's just not something that happens. Looking back, it felt unnatural...forced. Umm...but, I think for me at least it was like, I...I was having a really good time in college with my social life, my class life, and I that I'll figure the sexual thing out after college. I didn't feel any overwhelming need to like come out or like...or this is going to kill me. I didn't feel that crushing pressure.

When Travis thought back on his physical and emotional well-being during college, he remembered parties and athletic events fueled by alcohol, but an overall sense of happiness:

I would say in college I was right up there with every other alcoholic. I mean, we were drinking a lot on weekends and stuff. Especially senior year. But, I mean, mentally I was super happy and having a great time in college. I had really good friends. Junior into senior year I was dating a girl and it didn't end up working out for us (laughs). Then I

was like, this [relationships with women] didn't work so it probably won't ever work. I was kind of pushing off [coming out] from a mental perspective until after college. I wasn't intending to come out...uhh...and at the time, I don't think I was particularly...I was anxious about someone finding out...but I didn't have anxiety about it. That happened after college. I was very happy. Physically, I was...we were partying a lot...but I ran a marathon my senior I was working out a lot...I was living the life of a 21 year old.

Travis went on to explain that consuming alcohol at sporting events and parties helped lower his inhibitions when it came to seeking out sex with other men:

I mean, it made it...I would have done it [sex with men] either way. It did make it easier to experiment, but...I would say the predominately when I hooked up I had been drinking. But, there were times that I wasn't drinking.

When he thought back to the relationship with a female classmate his junior year, Travis explained that he did not engage in sexual activity with men while they were together:

I didn't have sex with men while were dating. But, both before and certainly after. And, that was probably like a four month relationship, but we were really good friends before...it was four months that we were dating and yeah I just kind of figured you know this is not working...this doesn't feel as good as before with a guy.

Raised Catholic, Travis was aware the University of Santa Monica religious heritage. However, he felt that the university was "Catholic-lite" and explained how spirituality was culturally present in numerous ways:

Mass functioned as like a social event more than it used to function for our parents' generation. Now, it's more transactional. If you're not involved in the church you leave after mass. In college, our masses were at 8PM on Sunday. We got pizza after and hung out as a dorm, there were announcements...it was more of like a community atmosphere. And, you know there wasn't a whole lot wrapped up in sacrament. I think I kind of recognized the crowd it was playing to. We wanted to make this something that you guys want to enjoy and beyond just mass...uhh...and I've said to people it wasn't shoved down your throat. Some professors would start class with a prayer, sometimes they wouldn't...it was pretty lite. It was in the background but the academic setting was more forward. We had to take theology, but I took a class on pilgrimages which was across multiple different religions. I don't think we had to take Old Testament, but I took it. Nothing was required. The Catholic was in the background – it touches everything but it never overshadows things.

When asked to further expand on why the University of Santa Monica portrayed a “Catholic-lite” atmosphere, Travis explained:

Money. I think...umm...well I said money jokingly, but I also think that football rules at University of Santa Monica. So, I think, I think there’s a tension between... I guess let’s put it this way – if all they had to offer was mass and a basilica, they wouldn’t have the draw that they need. There’s a commercial element to the university. And, I think if you want to run an organization that’s umm...uhhh...appeals to a wider diversity of people, I think you have to realize that some of those rules are...excluding or marginalizing groups of your own membership. I think, you know, it’s taken with a lot of certainly there were gay Catholics since the beginning of Catholicism, It’s just taken a long time to rectify the fact that those people exist. If you are going to make rules that shut them out, then increasingly we’re going to have a hard time finding members for our church. I mean, I think we live in an era of transparency in the way that like you could be, you could be more, I mean, it was easier to be closeted back in the day, there was less transparency, and maybe that led people to not want to come out. I kind of felt like at a certain point, there’s just more chances for me, there’s more connections, there’s more people that know people, so yeah.

Conclusion. Of the six alumni in this study, Travis was the only individual to not come out until after college. As such, his contributions to this study provide worthwhile insights into the lives of gay men that may otherwise be assumed heterosexual by students, faculty and staff at colleges and universities. When asked to consider what advice he would provide to a gay man considering attending a Catholic institution of higher education, Travis elaborated:

I’ve been back to University of Santa Monica many times since college and, I have a brother that went there as well. I’ve been out [of the closet] eight years, but started college 13 years ago and there’s been a huge leap in modern attitudes towards LGBT people. If you’re gay and going to go to a Catholic college, I don’t think you’re going to have as hard of a time. Not because the Catholicism has changed, but people’s attitudes and willingness to really subscribe to the Catholic hard line has gone away. They are more likely to pick and choose. I wholeheartedly endorse University of Santa Monica as a place for gay people. I’m involved with our alumni board and you wouldn’t feel excluded as a non-religious or gay person. It has to do with the attitudes of the students and the power that they wield to get things done from an administrative perspective.

When asked if he would attend the University of Santa Monica all over again, Travis provided many thoughtful insights:

Yes, definitely. I think what I gained from it was incredible network of friends and great experiences. I think I was lucky because I didn't come out until after college. I think I kind of kicked it out until after college. But, I definitely would have done it over. In talking about it now...what I realized was that I was fortunate I wasn't at a place where I was mentally at a limit and had to deal with coming out. If I had, the University of Santa Monica might not have been the place for it back then. I was kind of able to delay it because I was hoping I'd be in a situation where I'd have a model for how this is done and I'd be in a situation where people were older and more worldly and removed the nature of a Catholic university.

Phil

For Phil, the first of two participants interviewed that attended Canon University, the combination of an urban setting, a large campus, and numerous opportunities for involvement equated to a positive experience that would lead to two degrees for the gay man from a privileged, but bullied background. In the end, Phil's sensitivity, drive and sense of humor paved the way to a successful college career.

A flurry of activity. Born in 1984, Phil was the second son of two doctors in an upper class home. Raised approximately five hours away from Canon University in the suburbs of another large city, Phil recalled a childhood full of opportunities and activities:

Growing up, it was busy. They [my parents] were very busy, so we had nannies to take care of us until I finished middle school. So, they would get home late...umm...leave early, so I didn't see too much of them, but I saw them more than enough and they provided with everything that I needed and wanted. They gave me great opportunities during the summer. I was a Boy Scout and I traveled a bunch of different places. I also did music, theatre, scrapbooking, and art classes. I also did soccer all throughout elementary and middle school. I mean, I did a lot. I was very involved. They did a good job of making sure that I was an active kid. I always felt loved, supported and encouraged by my parents.

Although Phil freely admitted that he grew up in privilege, he was grateful that his parents found a balance between providing for his needs and making him work for others:

I was never in want or need of anything. Granted, they wouldn't give me everything I wanted, but you know, we would go on nice trips. They supported me, encouraged me, I took piano lessons. But, at the same time, they did a great job of raising me to be

appreciative for that and not think more highly of myself because you know we got to go to fun places or got to do things other people couldn't do. They gave me an allowance and I worked my first job in my mom's OBGYN office. I worked at Michael's throughout high school. I mowed people's lawns. They never just gave me money. I worked for my money.

Like the other participants in this study, Phil was raised Catholic and was required to attend Mass and religious education at the church. Throughout his childhood, Phil was disinterested in the idea of going to Church, frequently zoning out during services or completely skipping them all together:

We went to a Catholic Church that was very close to our house growing up. Every Monday night from first grade through fifth grade, I took PSR (Parish School Religion) and we went to Church every Sunday. I was baptized, confirmed, and went to church every Sunday until I was in middle school. My mom is not Catholic, but while we were growing up, she would go with us to Mass. Honestly, I never really paid attention during church. My mom specifically told me, "think of it as an hour where you can just reflect. You don't have to necessarily pay attention." During middle school, they would let my brother and I go to the later Mass on Sunday. So, we'd just hang out on the playground and smoke cigarettes. Then, we'd then go get the bulletin, see who the priest was and come to the consensus that the homily was about loving everyone.

In school, Phil found that he excelled at subjects that required precision, like math. Overall, he enjoyed the rigor of classes and the atmosphere of academics:

I was a good student. I always did well and got good grades. I was never top of my class but I was always in the upper quarter of the students. Although, I never really felt very challenged during middle school and even high school for that matter. I liked math a lot because it was very precise. There was always an answer and a process. Maybe that's why I like to bake so much because that requires precision. And, I loved reading but not so much writing. I always liked science and trying to understand how things worked. I liked Spanish. Band and vocal arts. I liked the routine of school. I liked everything about the structure of the day. I loved covering my textbooks, I loved reading everything and I loved the homework. I really enjoyed it. The educational part of school, I loved.

Socially, Phil recalls having friends in school, but also having problems with isolation and the first signs of his eventual struggle with mental health concerns. Further, Phil's childhood was overshadowed by a serious medical condition that raised his anxiety levels:

I had a good, close-knit group of friends. It was good mixture of boys and girls. It was kind of more so girls. But, it was a good mixture. But, there were times where I felt like an outcast and I think it was because I was dealing with sexuality stuff. I mean, I also come from a family of depression and anxiety. Also, when I was in 6th grade I had a seizure. I went to a pediatric neurologist. They did a bunch of tests and it showed abnormalities in my brain. Then, I had another seizure in 8th grade and they started me on medicine. Most seizure medicines can be sedating and alter your mood. So, on top of dealing with all of these issues of sexuality, I was also dealing with having to take medication every day and being afraid that I might have another seizure.

Throughout his childhood, Phil described himself as happy and creative. As he aged, however, Phil recalled that his gravitation towards more feminine activities caused him to be a target for bullying in school and his community:

I played the piano until I was a senior in high school. They started me in band in 5th grade; I played the clarinet throughout middle and high school. They would sign me for a bunch of art classes and I loved to draw and create things. I loved to read and be outside. I always gravitated towards girly things. I would go over to my friends' houses in elementary school with an ulterior motive to see their sister's Barbie dolls. I would like to build dollhouses and play house and I was very into organization growing up. I liked to rearrange things. They would come home and be like, "how did this fifth grader move all of this furniture?" I'd be like, "it looked bad." In the early part of elementary was never the problem, but as I got older people made fun of me and started to call me things like "girl" or "pansy." It was kind of like that in middle school and that's kind of when I got more reserved or shy. I started thinking "something's not right." People would make fun of the way I talked, or my voice. I would be called "gay" or just not fun things.

At a young age, Phil explained that he felt different, finding himself reading the Sunday newspaper ads to catch a glimpse of men:

I was young. I don't necessary...I can't remember 5th grade, but I want to say 6th grade. Do you remember the Sunday ads? I would love the Sunday paper because in the ads there would be a like a guy in the Target ad in his undies. And, I would collect those. I had a giant shoe box. It started in middle school and collected them through high school. So, by then, I kind of knew, and that was the beginning of middle school. And, I had some girlfriends but never really was sexually interested in them. I just remember making out with some of my girlfriends and later asking my male friend, "do you get excited?" And, he was like "oh yeah" and I was like "well, there you go." Then, the internet started and you could find an escape to explore things and then delete the history and the cookies!

When Phil finally put the label “gay” to his feelings, he looked to popular culture for education on the subject. Phil vividly remembers watching the MTV™ show, “The Real World” and carefully studying the only gay character on the show:

I can remember watching “The Real World San Francisco” in middle school and Pedro was the first person with HIV on the show. And, he eventually died of AIDS. I remember my mom being like “you shouldn’t be watching this.” I knew he was gay, and “The Real World” was such a great way for me to somehow experience like what it might be like to be gay. Yeah, that was the only gay person or adult that I knew at that time. So, I remember loving watching “The Real World” because there were these out gay people and living their lives and talking about their struggles. But, then I worried before I came out to my parents that complications might come up. I mean, Pedro on TV was disowned by his family. I never thought my parents would disown me but it was a fear.

Like several other participants in this study, Phil decided to come out to his parents during high school. He recalled the emotional experience, which occurred one holiday:

I came out to my mom and dad on New Year’s Morning at like 1AM. And, I told them sobbing, “I’m not going to give you children” or something ridiculous like that. We didn’t talk about it for like six months. Over the course of those six months, it bothered me that they didn’t want to talk about it. I remember taking the ACT right after junior year and walking out in the middle of it, drove home and sat down with my mom and was like “we need to talk about things.” And, then we did. I had a flare for the dramatics.

Although Phil’s parents eventually came around regarding his same sex, sexual attraction, he recalled several other attitudes in his community and at a more macro level towards LGBTQ individuals that ran the gamut:

Family-wise, I did not grow up hearing people openly bash gay people or calling people “fags.” The only time I experienced hearing that was when kids would make fun of me or I’d hear other classmates making fun of other kids who might be gay. My brother and I have never really had a good relationship. He’s a couple years older and was given all the same opportunities but fell off the path into booze and drugs. And, I think I was upset with him for that. I still kind of don’t have the best relationship with him and he kind of made fun of me growing up even before I was out and that was hard. But, then he turned around and is now one of my strongest advocates. So, that was more from a family perspective. My extended family was the same – nobody said horrible things. I also remember Pedro from “The Real World” having HIV and automatically having that association with HIV and gay people. And, then, I don’t think I thought about marriage or gay rights until I was in college. I feel silly for keeping referring back to the Real World, but one of the guys was dating someone in the military and they had to blur his face

because it was an issue...”Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” I remember being afraid that because I felt this way and I felt gay that I would encounter lots of barriers when I left the safe nest that I came from.

Bright lights, big city. When it came time to select a college, Phil was determined to get out of his community and move to a major city:

I knew I wanted to leave home and be in a big city. College is great because you can reinvent yourself and become the person that you always wanted to be. I could be gay and out. I looked at the most random places –I knew I wanted to be in a big city and be able to disappear. I remember driving to visit Canon University with my dad and doing a tour. I remember just being in the city and staying at the hotel. We walked around and got pizza. I remember just walking around seeing all the people. I liked the idea of finally being a part of this community that I had no attachment or connection to.

Phil recalled knowing that Canon University was affiliated with the Catholic Church, but he didn’t feel any trepidation to joining the community for his degree:

The Catholic Church was a part of my upbringing. I remember coming up to Canon University and touring and there were gays everywhere. Canon University is a diverse group of people from all over the country – the city to the suburbs. It’s a huge commuter college. Every imaginable race or ethnicity or sexual orientation. I felt there were all these people that were different from me and while there were different people in high school, it was just a bunch of white people. Maybe it was because I felt different and being surrounded by different people was refreshing and exciting and refreshing.

When he arrived on campus in the fall of 2002, Phil was very excited to begin his studies at Canon University. Fortunately, he had help from home to assist in his transition:

I was excited and then overwhelmed. I remember one semester I only took three classes because there was just a lot going on. It was a huge adjustment. But, my best friend from high school came to Canon University with me for two years and that was wonderful having her. We hung out all the time.

In his first semester at Canon University, Phil was required to take an introduction to college experience course. Since Canon University was located in a large city, many of the courses were themed and involved interacting with organizations from around the community. Phil vividly remembered picking a class that appealed to him:

The first class I took was on HIV and AIDS in the city. My professor was a gay psychologist. He openly talked about his partner. We learned all about HIV and AIDS. We went to all these different LGBTQ organizations in the city. And, the fact that Canon University had a class like that was a very welcoming thing and thought it was absolutely amazing. I wanted to get out of my hometown and be gay, and the first thing I did at Canon University was gay.

Although Phil was thrilled by this opportunity so early on in his academic career, he recalled fear as the curriculum examined the stark reality of the HIV virus for many individuals:

I think the class scared me. We interacted with many organizations all throughout the city. They were great resources for people but part of the class was about the horrible disease that killed millions of people. So, that was pretty sobering.

New year, new Phil. On campus, Phil lived in the residence halls his first year. He remembered being very excited to move to Canon University, especially wanting to “start over” and meet new friends. However, his reality did not meet expectations:

My freshman year I lived with a guy from near my hometown. We lived together for one quarter and at the beginning of winter semester, he one day decided to move out to another dorm. So, I had a single suite for the rest of the year, which was great. It was one of the newer dorms. I didn't so much like my suite mates, because one was a big pot head and the other was a nerd. The dorm was like a hotel. It wasn't the dorm environment that I necessarily wanted. Everyone seemed very isolated in their rooms. Nobody left their doors open. I was disappointed in my dorm experience. I felt it was very isolated and I didn't meet as many people as I would have liked to. Sophomore year, I lived off campus with my good friend from Centralia and two of her roommates. So, it was four people in a two bedroom across the street from my old dorm. That was great.

In light of his lackluster experience in the residence halls, Phil decided to keep trying to meet other people and become involved in the LGBTQ community on campus. Luckily, Canon University had an organization for such students and Phil took to the opportunity to get involved. Besides meeting area men online through dating websites such as XY™, Phil decided to listen to his friends and join a campus group:

My sophomore year in the fall I joined “Rainbow”, the gay organization, and became treasurer. One of my good friends freshman year said “you need to go. You need to meet people.” I think it was initially me just checking everyone out thinking, “all right, who can I date?” Which I think I still find that I do. It was fun in the beginning and then I got

a boyfriend and I got bored with the organization. And, that organization just wanted to focus more on activism. I wasn't 100% behind that at the time so I quit.

Phil explained that when he arrived on campus, some of his mental and physical health concerns began to reappear and cloud his experience at Canon University. Moreover, although he started dating a guy in college, the relationship was not without its own share of difficulties:

Emotionally, I was scared, nervous, anxious and probably depressed and really didn't know it. Umm...I think ever since they diagnosed me with seizures starting in sophomore or junior year of high school, I would find comfort in binge eating – in food. And, that probably has many factors that contributed to that. But, then, sophomore, I started my first gay relationship and we were together for like 3.5 years but he cheated on me so many times. I see that as my first serious, long term relationship. I stayed with him and it was very emotionally exhausting. I never really was truly myself with him. I was intimidated by him because he was very smart. We had good sex, but yeah I think that a lot of my gay friends didn't like him because he cheated on me so much that it further isolated me from them.

In spite of Phil's challenges along the way, he found his stride in the classroom. Like in high school, Phil enjoyed being challenged by his professors and the work involved with college. He did change majors a few times, but ultimately found his passion in sociology and health sciences:

I started off as a biology major. And, then my first year I changed to English, then Spanish, then Psychology and then ultimately to Sociology. My aunt is a criminologist and I've always been very fascinated by culture and how people interact with each other. Finally, I wound up focusing more on health and human services in sociology. I took classes on health disparities and health throughout the world. I was always fascinated by epidemiology. Coming from a household where my parents were doctors, I never felt pressured to go to medical school. I thought about it, but it takes a very...you have to know at such a young age and it takes a certain personality and drive. One of my sociology health classes is a nurse and she encouraged me to think about nursing which is ultimately what I ended up doing for my career and my master's degree.

Thinking back on his Catholic upbringing, Phil acknowledged that he mostly stayed away from interacting with any on-campus spiritual experiences. However, he did note that the university and specifically the vowed-religious members of the community made him feel welcome in college:

I was in the honors program in the College of Liberal Arts. One of the classes we had to take was taught by a priest. I don't particularly remember him all that much. And, I think that was my only real interaction with any clergy. Yeah, I never went to Church once on campus. But, the fact that I can't remember anything bad and only positive things about the priests in college is a good thing.

Conclusion. In the end, Phil spoke very highly about his time in college at Canon University. In fact, he enjoyed the academics and culture so much that he decided to return and complete a graduate degree at the institution. When asked to provide advice to a gay man considering attending a Catholic institution of higher education, he explained:

Well, if you're gay, Canon University is a supportive, inclusive university that has LGBTQ friendly organizations that you could be active in during college. Since I did not have a very religious experience at Canon University, it would probably be different were I a gay Catholic who wants to go to a Catholic university because it's a Catholic university and they identify with the religion. I have nothing but wonderful to say about Canon University.

When asked if he'd attend Canon University over again as an undergraduate student, he quickly agreed and explained:

Yes, I would. I got a good education that cost a lot of money. I connected with most of my professors and established great relationships with friends. I took advantage of the study abroad program and the Rainbow group. I had a very comfortable, positive experience and I'm grateful for everything that Canon University offered and provided to me. I think that, you know, other people that were gay had similar experiences.

Jeff

The final participant in this study also attended Canon University, but from 2011 to 2015. As the youngest in the cohort of gay men, Jeff brought many unique perspectives to the study. However, despite his age and years on campus, many of positive and negative parts of his college experience were synonymous with the other five participants in the study. While attending Canon University as international studies major, Jeff was involved with athletics, held a student job and enjoyed learning about and interacting with the city. In the end, Jeff encountered several tense situations in his development, but always relied upon his drive to

succeed and his blunt, but warm personality. To understand Jeff's unique contributions to this study, it was important to learn about his tight-knit family and challenges encountered in school.

A mixed bag. In many ways, Jeff enjoyed a privileged upbringing in the suburbs outside of a large city. As the second oldest of four boys, Jeff's parents did the best they could to provide a stable, opportunity-filled upbringing. His parents were both college educated, and his mother stayed at home with her four boys, all born within a year of each other. Coincidentally, Jeff's older brother also identifies as a gay man. When asked to describe his childhood, Jeff eagerly noted:

Umm...I mean, we had a very privileged childhood. Like, you know, I grew up in a place where we went outside and play and we had children our age in the neighborhood. I have three brothers and two were close in age. I had a fairly nice childhood – we had a nice house, I had my own bedroom and we had food on the table. We went on vacations, I think I had a fairly happy, pleasant childhood. I can't think of anything to lament on. In terms of how I was raised, school was fine for the most part. I did face some bullying in school as a kid. So, I think I was quite hard on myself and had some struggles in school because I got frustrated with things. I remember that distinctly. I am very social but I would sometimes not like school because of stress stuff. I was happy on the whole, but like any child there were blips on the radar.

Growing up, Catholicism played a large role in Jeff's life. When he described the role that religion played in his upbringing, Jeff was quick to describe memories of Mass and the influence of his grandmother's faith on the family:

I was baptized, communion and confirmation and an altar server through middle school and some high school. My parents were quite involved in the church as well. Umm...you know it was like quite a big thing. So, I guess in terms of my own participation – every Sunday you got dressed up and went to mass. In middle school they were trying to start the youth group in the church but it didn't particularly appeal to me. My grandmother is from Ireland, and she's quite religious, you know. If you needed anything, you called Grandma to pray the Rosary. In fact, she had a glow-in-the-dark novelty sized Rosary. My grandma was a big Catholic figure. We had a strict household – my mama didn't raise no fools. And, at Mass, you were to kneel in the pews correctly. I put my butt on the pew once and my mom said "sit up!" And, I was like "well it hurts!" And, she said, "well, I'm sure the Lord hurt on the cross, too!"

As a child, Jeff described himself as a sensitive individual that struggled with anxiety and faced bullying from members of his community:

So, I guess if you want to look at me up until high school, I think that I was more up-tight and hard on myself. College was when I came into myself. I was very socially anxious in high school. I was lucky that I had friends because I faced horrible bullying in high school as well. Kids knocked books out of my hands and grabbed me. I was a very anxious person before coming into college. I think that my gap year abroad before college really pushed me out of that to come into myself.

Academically, Jeff attended public schools and recalled that he did well academically, even taking part in a foreign exchange program during high school:

I've always been a fairly strong student...straight A's, with the exception of maybe math. Umm...I was a very strong student. I think when I was younger I had some social issues in school but as I got older those worked out. You just learn to navigate that. In terms of academics, I never really struggled except in math. Math was one really weak point. I went to good schools with quality teachers. I was at schools with a lot of opportunities. The first time I ever went on a plane was through high school. I did an exchange program in high school. That was a huge thing for me because I was never on a plane before and it was a 10-hour trip to Russia.

Outside of classes, Jeff found refuge from bullying in the arts, particularly in activities that allowed him to represent something else:

I was always a more theatrical person. I did speech or anything more performative in nature. I did plays all through middle school and high school. I wasn't much of a singer but more of a player. I wasn't one of those little kids that could sing and dance and stuff. I liked things that was more performative in nature. I did Model UN in high school. The whole point of that was to represent something other than yourself.

When it came to his sexuality, Jeff was always aware that he was different from other boys.

There was never much of a question to it – I was gay. It wasn't like I liked girls and then thought boys were interesting. I was like, "I like boys, but I guess I'm supposed to feel curious about girls though?" As soon as I had any inclination I was gay, I was like 10 or 11. Comfortable in the sense of knowing what it was and calling it what it was, was probably about 13 or 14. I never kissed a boy until I was over 18...I think I was 19. So, it wasn't until adulthood until I did anything. I never told anyone or was gay with anyone, not even best friends.

Within his family, Jeff luckily did not face any major issues. One evening, Jeff's mother decided to talk with him about the topic of sexuality. And, although she was non-confrontational, Jeff still struggled with opening up to her. This theme of anxiety would present many times throughout his childhood:

My mom point blank two or three different times in my life...I was 13...my mom was a nurse and she worked nights a lot...I couldn't sleep one night so I went down to the kitchen table and chatted with her. She asked me point blank at 13 years old. She was like, "we accept you and love you no matter what...but what's going on?" Of course, I didn't tell her, but I didn't tell her because I wasn't ready to handle it yet. All the bullying and harassment I faced at school was really a lot about my sexual identity. Even if I didn't date boys or girls, I was really trying to keep my head down. I just kind of focused and brooded on that. That's why I did so well in school. There was one girl I kinda sorta dated...I took her to dance...we went to homecoming and stuff. I went to prom...though I would never go prom with a boy. There was only one boy in high school that I knew was gay. Then, my senior year, one other guy came out. He was actually a close friend of mine. I had no gay-dar.

Jeff went on to explain that he had many feelings wrapped up in his sexual identity, many of which were driven by heteronormative messages he had received from society:

I do think there was a lot of guilt. I remember distinctly thinking that I wouldn't have a family of my own. I remember feeling guilty because I wanted a family and it was hard to think that because I was gay I wouldn't have a family. I was so upset with myself because I wanted to have a family. And, it was...just felt like...either you accept it's one or other. If I accepted being gay, I had to accept that I couldn't get married or have a kid. It wasn't that I was choosing not to get married or have a kid...it was by accepting being gay, you couldn't have them. I fought accepting it because being gay wasn't the problem it was that I couldn't have those other things. I think that's why I struggled a lot.

Within his surroundings, Jeff found varying reactions to same sex, sexual attraction. These differing messages fueled his anxiety on many levels:

Within my own family, extended and my immediate family, I knew they didn't care. I come from a very liberal family. My aunt's best friend is gay and I knew of him. You'd see him one year at the Pride Parade. It was fine in my immediate circle. I had fantastic friends which was fine. But, in terms of the greater social acceptance within society, my neighborhood is a bit more conservative. They're all white people, so they go more conservative at time. There was a park that I could walk to and get out of the house. I remember walking and people would drive down the street in a car and yell, "fag! Homo!" People were really wicked in middle and high school. They said really vicious

things. On the larger level, I don't remember Matthew Shepherd. I know the history of it, but I didn't live it. I'm too young for the 80's, because I was born in 1991. My cultural references for gay men were Jack from Will and Grace. My references were seen on TV because I didn't have anything in my immediate world. So much of my perceptions were based on what I could get access to – whether that was in my neighborhood or school. I only saw Jack and I felt like he was the archetype of the gay world he was portraying.

Retreat and Reboot. After high school, Jeff decided to take a gap year and delay his college selection process until 2011. However, once the time came to attend college, he was laser focused on keeping the cost of college to a minimum. As such, commuting to Canon University from the suburbs was the most logical choice:

I'm one of four sons. My mom had three sons in four years. So, that meant there was one year that three kids were in college at the same time. So, in college, it came down to where I could afford to go. It ultimately came down to a state school and Canon University. For Canon University, I could commute. The state university, I could not. So, it was cheaper for me to go to Canon University than a state school. Even if I could commute to the state university, it was still more expensive than Canon University. I mean, I came out of Canon University with very minimal debt. I had Pell Grants because there were three of us in college all at once.

Raised Catholic, Jeff was aware of Canon University's religious affiliation. However, this knowledge factored little into his eventual decision to enroll:

Umm...I mean, I knew it was a Catholic university. Beyond that, it was really just that they had a good academic program. Knowing that Canon University was Catholic played no bearing on my decision to attend or not attend. I knew it was in a large city, so it had to be fairly liberal. We could debate that now having attended and worked there, but at the time I knew it had to be a liberal school. I hate to make it sound crass, but in the end it was a numbers game and I wasn't burying myself under \$40K of debt for undergrad.

When Jeff arrived on campus in the fall of 2011, he immediately began to feel disconnected from the school. As a commuter, he felt that the institution was not doing enough to create a sense of community for such students:

I think my first year at Canon University was really bad. I applied to transfer to that semester. I was commuting and really hated it. I mentally just wasn't in a great place. I had just come back from living abroad a year and living at home with my parents where I didn't want to be. It was a 1.5 hour commute to and from school. I really, really was fighting with my parents a ton. I had a really hard time adjusting to Canon University

because I couldn't meet anyone. Even though it's a huge commuter school, they're not good at doing anything with them. So, I really made an effort to try and be in the city a bit more and build up a social life. It wasn't really until I moved into the city itself that I was able to gain a social life or gay life for that matter. I never did anything with boys until I was older because I didn't have a car in the suburbs – three brothers were sharing one car. So, you never had the car to yourself. You're juggling work schedule and those of three other people. So, mental health my first year was really bad.

As time went on, Jeff began to feel more connected to the campus. Mostly, this occurred because he left home and got an apartment in the city. Additionally, Jeff began to explore sports and joined the Canon University rugby team:

My second year when I moved to the city and really took advantage of it and found my groove, umm...I really came to enjoy Canon University, well at least my program. So, in terms of my physical health, I slept too little but I guess in your early 20's you can get away with that. So, physical health, I think I was fine. One shouldn't drink coffee or a ton of booze or play rugby. Rugby is fun because you're exercising, but terrible for your health because it's violent. But, in general, my mental health my first year was rough because I wasn't on campus. Everyone else got that "go away to college and live in the dorms" but I didn't. I even had an amazing scholarship, but I didn't get that my first year. I was really resentful about that. That's a lot more why it was rough.

Although he joined the rugby team to feel more connected to the campus community, his anxiety resurfaced, as he felt out of place as the only gay man on the team:

Umm...so, when I was in high school, I wasn't out to anyone. But, I started college as already out. It was easy just to start with a new beginning – start from square one as gay and not have to figure out. Even though I never did anything with a boy, I knew what it was. There was only one exception where I didn't feel out. I played for Canon University's rugby team for one semester my freshman year. It felt very, very uncomfortable. A lot of that comes from my new gay identity and then I went into a sport where I already felt out of place. It was a conglomerate of multiple uncomfortable places. I was newly gay, went into a place where it wasn't great to be gay. Though I didn't experience anything bad directly, it was the 800 pound gorilla in the room. I never said anything and vice versa, but we both knew what was going on. I'm not a very convincing straight man. I felt very uncomfortable that I didn't want to play anymore.

When asked to unpack what in particular made him feel uncomfortable about the experience on the Canon University rugby team, Jeff remembered:

It was a very hyper-masculine environment. Umm...I know people who played since then and it has changed. But, I felt very much like there was this straight culture at the

time. I was a commuter, so I always had to find a place to stay in the city. That was always rough because I couldn't just back out if I was staying with a player. I always felt attached to them. I was beholden to someone else's schedule. So, I felt uncomfortable by that. Yeah, the team...there were nice people but I just felt like no one was openly mean but I was out of place. I felt after a while I was in a pressure cooker because nobody tried to clear the air in an uncomfortable situation. I felt like I'd rather they'd just say they were uncomfortable than have it be like it wasn't an issue. I was so new to coming out that I felt everything they said was a slight.

In the classroom, Jeff did well academically and enjoyed his professors. Like Phil, Jeff was required to take an introduction to college experience course. He clearly remembered the positive experience of that class, lending it to his professor:

It was awesome that my first professor at Canon University was a transgender man. It was really interesting - he was super sassy, loud and such a cool professor. I came to a Catholic college and my first professor was a sassy transgender man. It just felt like - my parents both went to Catholic schools - I heard about the nuns. My aunts are nuns, uncle a priest, a monsignor in the family - lots of religious in the family. So, I show up at Canon University and was like...what? He made us do this whole transformative law project, his class was really cool. I don't feel like I could come out easily and openly in an environment different than that. I felt reassured to some level just because I had a professor that was this wildly open. If he can, I can too.

A question of policy. Jeff's experience in the introduction to college experience course was the first in a series of interactions with his faith that raised questions about the Catholic Church's teachings on same sex, sexual relationships:

There was that crazy pope? He stepped down when I was in college...Benedict? He wasn't a big fan of the gays. Even this Pope [Pope Francis] comes out with some commentary like...99% of the time he's good about it, but every now and then he says something that I'm like...uhh? During college, though, they [the Catholic Church] weren't particularly accepting of the gays, so. Honestly, though, like, I'm a buffet...a pick and choose Catholic. So, again, I grew up with family that was quite religious. I have two great aunts that are nuns, so I remember coming to grow up that you're not a slave to the Pope. You can have your own feelings and thoughts on religion. So, I thought "the pope says a lot of shit. The bible says a lot of shit." I have a problem with official doctrine with how the Church views the gays. But, in terms of my own coming to terms with religion, I don't have a problem.

When it came to Jeff's feelings about how Canon University stood about LGBTQ individuals, he offered interesting insights about the mixed messages that existed. Further, Jeff offered a unique take on this topic, as he worked in a prominent campus office as a student worker:

I think that Canon University very much is conscientious of its identity and its role with the Church. Being that way comes with some responsibility so lots of times they towed the party line in terms in what they said. I was familiar with rules and regulations for the university and I know what they say. So, I know they can't give out condoms and birth control because some old white man on the trustee board thinks that way. I think Canon University very much keeps up with the official identity as a Catholic university. In terms of the people at the university, I always felt very accepted and had no problem. There was a drag show on campus.

Jeff mentioned that he had several interactions with vowed religious members of the Canon University community. In particular, he had a very positive interaction with a priest professor that taught him the power of dialogue:

I had one professor who was a priest for one of my religious classes...Fr. Larry. He actually was really wonderful. He was really awesome and I had a fantastic time with him. And, I had him for my religious class. He was a great professor and I really liked him. He very much encouraged questioning and engaging in discourse. He made you support it through reason, but it wasn't an issue in his class. He wasn't like 'the bible said this!' He was also incredibly smart. Beyond that, I didn't have a whole lot of experience.

When it came to resources for LGBTQ individuals on campus, Jeff recalled several programs that were available. However, he felt more could have been done for this community, especially in light of its unique needs:

I remember there was a point in college right after I moved into the city. I was really struggling and I remember looking up counseling resources, I knew Canon University I had counseling but I don't know if it was LGBT specific. I know they had an LGBT office but what they exactly did I couldn't say. I remember sexual health at Canon University discussed stuff straight or gay. You know, they don't have a whole lot sexual health services. I do remember an HIV testing or STD clinic that I remember. Which is good, but the city had a lot of resources. I took care of my own health other ways off campus, but it was nice that it was offered on campus especially since sexual health was so taboo to the university. By allowing them to have STD clinic was like 'gasp! People actually have sex? Heaven forbid!' It just seemed a bit like...like I don't know. I'm very much like prevention...why would you allow an STD clinic but now allow people to hand out condoms? It's like you could have prevented it if you said 'put a rubber on it.'

Conclusion. Jeff's unique perspectives as a commuter student turned university athlete revealed many interesting thoughts about the culture of an America Catholic institution of higher education for gay men. Further, his student worker position exposed him to levels of administration that typical students do not encounter during college. With this in mind, Jeff was direct about what advice he would provide to a gay man considering attending a Catholic institution of higher education:

Umm...while I would definitely consider where the university is located. I think Catholic universities are inherently a bad place for the LGBT community. I would say that I was fortunate because the one I chose was in a big urban, liberal city with large access to an LGBT community and services already in place. If I went to school in the countryside with no gay side and no support through the university, I'd have a lot more problems. I would consider Catholic colleges only insofar that it provided comprehensive LGBT life or be in a city or area that has access to that. I think Canon University can do more perhaps.

After Jeff provided his pieces of advice, he paused momentarily and then spoke about how the Catholic Church needs to do more to care for LGBTQ individuals, particularly in the area of sex education:

I'm not sure they're [Catholic institutions of higher education] equipped to meet the challenges of what LGBT life looks like in this day and age. Most university allow more. I know people that went to universities that had much more access to health care. That's the biggest thing to me. I think so much of the LGBTQ identity is sexualized, which is a different discussion. But, because we deal so much more openly with sex because of the nature of the beast, I think the Catholic's aversion to address sex makes it very difficult for it to deal with a culture that deals with sex so much. So, a university that avoids talking about sex makes it difficult to interact in an open and inviting discussion.

Jeff went on to explain that the Catholic Church's overall approach to human sexuality is responsible for a lack of visibility and dialogue:

It just seems a bit like "shame" or "sex is dirty." Well, gay people have a lot of sex. Young people do too. But, gay people have a lot more and have access to it, frankly. I also feel that I'm very fortunate in my experience of religion and I know not everybody has that. Not sure if it's Catholicism or Christianity. I know some have terrible experiences with that and I think that there's not a whole lot done by Catholic institutions to kind of sort through that, like...I don't think that Canon University is unwelcoming. I

don't think Canon University didn't do anything for me that they wouldn't have done for anybody else. But, I also think that LGBT people have a much more complex relationship with religion's stance and I saw very little suppression by the administration or by anyone at Canon University to really bridge that gap or have dialogue. It never seemed like there was a whole lot of effort to say, "The Catholic Church hasn't been great to gay people. Let's talk about it." Even if there was no solution at the end of the day, dialogue would have helped. I think the lack of discourse is why Catholic universities are so ill equipped because they don't want to talk. There's so much guilt and secrecy...it doesn't encourage dialogue. Catholicism isn't sustained to that fate. But I do think that people that are running the religion are so out of touch. It hinders them from ever providing gay people an open, inviting forum where people can feel respected and engaged.

Conclusion

This substantial chapter summarized salient data collected from the six participants of this study. Through thick and rich description of participant experiences, a foundation was created to discuss the emerging themes that exist in this phenomenological study. By elucidating key elements of dialogue and highlighting important topics from the participant interviews, the true essence of the lived experiences of gay men that attended Catholic institutions of higher education started to emerge from the transcripts. Although each participant had unique backgrounds, traits and experiences, clear themes emerged in the data and will be explained the proceeding chapter of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

After summarizing key interview findings in the preceding chapter, the focus of this study now turns to the discussion of key themes that emerged from collected data. Methodologically, this study examined the lived experiences of six gay alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. For the sake of comparison, two individuals from each of three institutions were selected for participation, all with graduation dates between 2000 and 2015. Each participant was interviewed twice, with one interview focused on experiences before college and the other on the actual phenomenon itself, graduating from an American Catholic institution of higher education. Seidman (2013) explained one method of presenting and analyzing data is to categorize research data and search for connecting linkages called themes. Contained in twelve interviews and over 20 hours of interview data, four clear themes emerged and are discussed in this chapter. Although each participant brought unique backgrounds and experiences to the study, these four themes were common and obvious across the lived experiences of all study participants through a lengthy coding and theming process. Prior to discussing the four emergent themes, it is important to revisit the overarching research question and nested sub-questions in this study.

Review of Research Questions

In review, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of American Catholic institutions of higher education. Grounded in Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological System Theory, this study describes how gay men experienced a campus community sponsored by a religiously sponsored institution with teachings that provide mixed messages regarding their sexual identity and assigns moral judgements relating to their sexual behavior. Through interviewing six, gay, male alumni of

various American Catholic institutions of higher education, this study explores a central research question with multiple sub-questions:

1. How do gay, male alumni perceive their experiences of attending a Catholic institution of higher education?
 - a. What is the nature of their experiences within and outside the classroom setting?
 - b. How do these experiences intersect with the culture of the institution?
 - c. How do these experiences intersect with the Catholic identity of the institution?

With the research questions revisited, four major emergent themes are introduced for discussion. In order to show linkages back to the foundational research questions, each theme contains a direct reference to the applicable query. Further, where applicable, existing literature introduced in chapter two of this study is revisited to show similarities and differences based on the results of this research.

Theme One: Pre-college Negative Messages.

By utilizing a modified version of Seidman's (2005) approach to phenomenology, all six alumni described their life prior to encountering the phenomenon of this study – attending an American Catholic institution of higher education. The “pre-phenomenon” narratives provided rich and thick context for their lives prior to attending college, revealing factors or considerations that helped frame the alumni's experiences in college. Although the first theme of this study does not directly link to a posited research questions, it was important to acknowledge that each participant experienced negative messaging related to same sex, sexual attraction prior to

college. As each participant described elements of their life prior to college, it was abundantly clear that the negative messages regarding same sex, sexual relationships stuck with them as they matured and eventually went to college. In some cases, these messages caused trauma, which carried with them through college and into their adult lives.

First, all six of the alumni experienced varying degrees of negative messaging towards LGBTQ individuals growing up. Adam recalled hearing his father and brother using homophobic slurs while at home. He stated it was common to hear derogatory words such as “queer,” “fag,” “cocksucker,” “dickhead,” and “bottom feeder” from his father, brother, and other community members. He explained that at that time (the 1980’s and 1990’s) it was very common to hear such slurs in his rural community. In many ways, Adam made it clear it was painful to hear these words from his loved ones and wished the experiences were not a part of his history. When speaking about these experiences, Adam’s demeanor became angered and he emphatically vocalized each word with sarcasm and vitriol.

Further, Jackson remembered his father’s dissatisfaction with him watching “Will and Grace,” a popular TV show in the late 1990’s that had a gay lead character. He remembered when “Will and Grace” was on TV, his father made him change the channel. According to Jackson, it was clear the show’s content was not appropriate in the eyes of his father. When describing this memory, Jackson’s voice notably dropped, as he recalled the connection made between his father’s disapproval and his own sexuality. Jackson further struggled with this directive from his father, especially since he had very little exposure to LGBTQ culture growing up in his rural community. According to Jackson, “Will and Grace” was a glimpse into the gay community, one of the only opportunities to learn about his sexual orientation.

For Mateo and Travis, negative messaging predominantly emanated from their immediate community. In Mexico, Mateo clearly explained a machismo culture permeated his community. As a result, any indication of femininity amongst men, whether perceived or actual, was met with reactions ranging from being chided to possible violence. Mateo explained one of the reasons he left Mexico to attend high school in the United States was the opportunity to escape this culture and “be himself.” In high school, Travis remembered that only heterosexual relationships were discussed in sexual education classes. Although Travis admittedly lagged behind the other alumni in exploring his sexual orientation, he did recall how it was troublesome not to hear any mention of same sex, sexual relationships in the class. He truly felt this lack of education in high school kept him in the dark on the various types of intimate relationships in society. Further, it increased the invisibility of LGBTQ individuals in his community. This left him feeling as if other gay men did not exist, adding to a sense of isolation.

Additionally, Phil and Jeff both described physical and mental bullying from other classmates due to their perceived sexual orientation. Phil was called a “girl” and “pansy” in middle school because his voice was perceived as feminine. As he matured, other students labeled him as “gay” and went out of their way to make fun of him. As a result, Phil explained he became more reserved as an individual, and he realized there was “something not right” about him. For Jeff, a walk down his childhood street to the park ended in harassment by neighborhood kids. As a child, Jeff remembers hearing “fag” and “homo” yelled at him from cars. He also remembered bullying and “other vicious things” being done to him because of his perceived sexual orientation. In speaking with Jeff, his voice rapidly increased during the interview segment relating to this topic and it was clear he was still impacted by it today. Jeff also

disclosed that the harassment fueled his existing struggle with anxiety and caused him to internalize the feelings.

Connection to existing literature. The negative messages described by the six alumni were supported the findings of Cochran, Mays, and Sullivan (2003) and Przedworski et al. (2015) who described the mental health vulnerabilities of the LGBTQ community. As noted in the literature review of this study, LGBTQ individuals are more susceptible to mental health conditions ranging from anxiety/depression to suicide possibly due to distressing life events spawned by their sexuality. Although Phil was the only participant that disclosed having a diagnosed mental health condition, the other participants described feeling anxious or sad because of these experiences prior to college. Mostly, these feelings of fear and sadness for the alumni were rooted in knowing that some facet of their surroundings viewed their sexual orientation negatively. Further, several of the alumni heard these messages from their own family, which compounded to the negative feelings associated with the experience. In many ways, these alumni were meant to feel different, and in many cases directly told they were bad or made to feel unaccepted.

In summary, all of the alumni were impacted by these negative messages and portrayed levels of discomfort in describing the situations. Further, each of the alumni were aware to some degree that they were attracted to members of the same sex before arriving on campus. This combination created a unique situation where they arrived on campus aware of their differences having already heard negative messaging about same sex, sexual attraction or worse having directly experienced bullying or harassment. In some interviews, the physical demeanor of the participant changed when describing the memories, ranging from drops in voice to physical reactions such as increasing rate of speech to movement in the chair. Even a decade or more

removed, it was evident these experiences were at least disturbing if not traumatizing to some degree and must be acknowledged as an important theme in this study. In many cases, the alumni were still coming to terms with their sexual orientation while receiving these negative messages. As discussed in the implications of this study, administrators at all institutions of higher education must be aware that gay men are likely to have endured such experiences prior to college based on the findings of this study. This notion adds to the mounting evidence pointing to the importance of visibility and support for the LGBTQ community on college and university campuses.

Theme Two: The Importance of Visibility and Support

Another salient theme that emerged from the interview data was the importance of visibility and support for individuals with same sex, sexual attraction on American Catholic college and university campuses. Across all six alumni, it was apparent that each man was looking to find connections and develop a sense of community at their particular Catholic college or university. From Adam, the oldest participant, to Jeff, the youngest participant, each of the six alumni indicated they were seeking to feel as though their presence on campus as a gay individual was welcomed and supported by the campus community. Mostly, the alumni described campus environments where some level of support and visibility were present. However, when visibility and support was lacking, the applicable alumni felt a negative impact on their development because of the situation. In this theme, importance of visibility and support within the classroom and in campus support structures are discussed in depth.

Sub-theme: Classroom visibility and support. For Jeff and Phil, both of whom attended Canon University, visibility and support for the LGBTQ community was evident in the classroom. Both alumni were quick to point out they were immediately exposed to openly gay or

transgender members of the faculty at the university. For Jeff, his first experience with a faculty member at Canon University was in his *Introduction to College Experience* course during freshman year. He detailed how his professor was a transgender man and the experience opened his eyes to several injustices in the world. This class was the first time he'd ever met a transgender person, and he recalled excitement knowing it was a safe environment to learn and explore issues of sexuality. Further, Jeff noted he felt comfort and confidence in knowing that faculty members at Canon University were allowed to be their true selves in the classroom, explaining "If he can be open here, I can too." Phil was also fortunate to have a gay psychologist as his first professor at Canon University. He remembered feeling welcomed himself as a gay man and feeling it was "absolutely amazing" that his first faculty member at a Catholic university was a gay man. Phil recalled learning many important lessons about human sexuality, particularly in the area of sexually transmitted diseases, the course focus. Working in the medical field today, Phil underscored how he appreciated the class and the ability to speak openly about sexuality in an educational environment.

Although he did not have any openly LGBTQ professors, Jackson explained that freely discussing topics of sexuality in class made him feel validated and looked to as a subject matter expert. In several of his general education courses, Jackson's faculty members at University of Santa Monica engaged students to respectfully debate topics such as same sex marriage and equality. Jackson also explained how he learned about differing points of view, discovering that a majority of the students at the University of Santa Monica were supportive of the LGBTQ community. These liberal arts courses were much different in content from his business courses, but a good opportunity to discuss salient topics related to the LGBTQ community.

Overwhelming, Jackson explained these experiences in his gender and sexuality class were a highlight of this time at the university.

However, when negative messages towards LGBTQ students arose in the classroom, the outcome was troubling on many levels. For Adam, the only alumni who directly experienced marginality in the classroom, feelings of anger and disappointment arose when his senior capstone professor attempted to skip past the topic of marketing to the LGBTQ community. Adam explained he was very excited as a gay man to discuss the topic “marketing to the gay community,” but his professor, Dr. Taylor said, “I don’t believe in that. It doesn’t have a place in marketing.” Having experienced marginality in the classroom by a high school teacher, Adam explained he was not about to let Dr. Taylor move past the topic without being confronted. In the end, Dr. Taylor doubled down on her actions stating, “It’s my class and my topic so we’re going to move on.” Although other students came to his defense, his relationship with Dr. Taylor changed after the incident. As a result, Adam explained he did the bare minimum in the course after the incident, wanting to simply be done with Dr. Taylor and her classroom. Although she did not retaliate against him for the comments, Adam recalled that he looked at her differently as a professional due to the incident. Adam angrily explained that in his four years of attending Carman College, he had never once felt as alienated as he did in that moment.

Connection to existing literature. The experiences described by Phil, Jeff, Jackson and Adam both supported and conflicted the existing literature on LGBTQ visibility and discussions in the classroom. By having “out” professors in the classroom, Phil and Jeff’s experiences directly supported Furrow’s (2012) findings that LBGT students found their connection with faculty members crucial for their overall success in college. Through interacting with their *Introduction to College Experience* faculty members, Jeff and Phil had visible LGBTQ role

models and were able to develop as individuals. Both of the alumni recalled positive feelings around the experiences and explained how the visibility of LGBTQ professionals in the classroom made them feel connected to the Canon University community and confident that gay men could be successful in the real world.

Unpacking Adam's negative experiences resulting from Dr. Taylor's unwillingness to discuss marketing to LGBTQ individuals, the situation was congruent with Lopez and Chism (1993) who noted gay and lesbian students felt faculty members avoided discussing or addressing same-sex sexual attraction in class in an effort to avoid awkward or messy conversations, often leading to a feeling of *heterosexism*. Further, the situation supported Renn's (2000) findings, which explained that faculty members must be cognizant of introducing sexual orientation topics into curriculum. Renn (2000) further explained the introduction of these topics not only can create a welcoming environment for all students, but can contribute to a positive self-identity for sexual minority individuals in the classroom. By not addressing the topic of LGBTQ marketing, Dr. Taylor not only cheated Adam's class out of learning, but she caused Adam to feel as if he was invisible and not a respected member of the community.

However, Jackson's excitement around serving as a subject matter expert for gay matters contradicts Furrow's (2012) findings that LGBT individuals do not want to be singled out as the "queer voice in the classroom," and treated as the token representative of the gay community. Mostly, Furrow's (2012) findings explain that LGBT individuals often feel the burden of having to educate other students and even faculty members, adding to the pressure they already experience on campus. Jackson admitted that some of his desire to be treated as a subject matter expert had to do with his personality and confidence at the time of the experience. He also enjoyed a civil debate in classes, and saw speaking out as an opportunity to express his feelings.

Regardless, Jackson's experience raises a possibility for future studies to explore the how LGBTQ individuals interact in the classroom, specifically their desire to engage in topics related to sexuality.

Connection to research questions. Overall, the alumni made it clear the presence or lack of visibility and support in the classroom had a large impact on their lived experiences in college. This finding connects directly to the research question that probes about the nature of alumni experience within the classroom. As such, it is vital to acknowledge that faculty members at all institutions of higher education have impact on their students, both to the degree they are willing to share elements of their personal lives and also how curricular content is presented to the students in their classroom. This influence possessed by faculty members, as displayed by the positive and negative recollections of the participants, cannot be overlooked and must be made known to raise awareness of the inherent power possessed by these individuals. Another area of visibility and support that was thematic across several of the participants as the presence of LGBTQ programming on campus.

Sub-theme: Programmatic Visibility and Support. Each of the three American Catholic institutions of higher education described in this study approached providing support for LGBTQ individuals in different ways. For some institutions, officially recognized student groups were visible on campus and provided community members with a university-sponsored outlet to discuss issues ranging from advocacy to self-care and relationships. Yet, some institutions did not allow such groups to be officially recognized, leaving students with no formally sanctioned outlet for gathering on campus. In the end, the alumni made it clear that having visible campus programming geared towards the LGBTQ community was important and had an impact their development in college.

Of the three institutions, Canon University was the only institution that had a reliable campus programming presence for LGBTQ individuals in terms of student groups. At Carman College, the degree to which these programmatic initiatives were present depended on the time discussed by the particular alumni. However, University of Santa Monica consistently lacked an officially recognized LGBTQ student group. As a result, each of the alumni reported varying experiences in this portion of their historical recollection of college, showing how important it is for such programs and services to be readily available to students.

At Canon University, Phil found a sense of belonging when he participated in the LGBTQ group, "Rainbow." Although his interest in the group faded over time, he enjoyed the organization and even became the Treasurer during his sophomore year. Phil admits he initially used "Rainbow" as an opportunity to date other gay men but made many friends along the way. Overall, he was thankful that a Catholic institution of higher education would even offer such an organization. During his time at Carman College, Adam was an active participant in "Community," the LGBTQ group. His participation in the organization was important, as he made connections with several LGBTQ individuals on campus and built a sense of community. Many of the individuals he interacted with through the organization were his friends throughout college carried over into his adult life. Adam made it clear this organization was important to him and provided a sense of belonging at Carman College.

On the other hand, Mateo and Jackson both explained how the lack of an LGBTQ student organization on campus led to a negative experience for gay men. Mateo ran up against numerous barriers when he tried to form an LGBTQ student organization at Carman College with his friend Andy. Mateo explained how the administration of the college denied their application numerous times, citing the teachings of the Catholic Church. Ironically, Mateo's

experiences with the unwilling campus administration were a mere three years after Adam left Carman College. When Mateo was informed about the existence of “Community” just a few years prior, he was angered and explained how it further explained how the administration of Carman College did not create an inclusive community during his time on campus. He explained feeling cheated by the college and being blocked from interacting with other individuals in a safe environment. Mateo’s descriptions of the unsupportive administration clearly bothered him to this day.

At the University of Santa Monica, Jackson explained how the administration of the university also did not allow an LGBTQ student group to be formally recognized by the institution. He explained that interested individuals applied ever year, but were denied recognition like Mateo’s attempt at Carman College due to the Catholic Church’s teachings on same sex, sexual relationships. Jackson explained the campus administration eventually gave into the requests for formal recognition after he graduated, but faculty and staff at the university still closely monitor the group to ensure that their activities do not completely defy Catholic teachings. Jackson explained the formation of “Outreach Santa Monica,” the unsanctioned student group, was born out of frustration with the administration of the university for not officially recognizing an LGBTQ student group. Ultimately, he explained that LGBTQ students and alumni felt the need for a support group was too great and formed the unsanctioned group in defiance of the campus administration.

Connection to existing literature. Regarding recognized student organizations, the stories told by the alumni are congruent with existing literature. Kane (2013) explained an indicator for a positive campus climate towards LGBT students is the existence of a recognized student organization supported by the institution. In the case of Mateo and Jackson, the lack of

recognized student groups and the subsequent resistance from campus administration suggests Carman College and the University of Santa Monica did not display adequate support towards LGBTQ students during those times. Further, Ivory's (2005) indication that campus administrators play a key role in helping LGBT students develop is evident through the lack of support found at Carman College. Specifically, Mateo felt the administration did not support the formation of an LGBTQ student group and thus he questioned their overall commitment to inclusion for such students at the university. By denying recognition, the administration of Carman College did not foster Mateo's development as a student and thus contributed to his isolation and lack of visibility.

For Phil, the presence of a recognized LGBTQ student organization at Catholic College positively contributed to his development as a college student. After becoming a member of "Rainbow" during his sophomore year, he continued on as an officer of the group. Although this student organization experience was not the penultimate contribution to his overall development, he followed the leadership and development trajectory described by Renn (2007) through progressing from member, to leader to an individual that becomes more visibly out on campus. According to Phil, his membership in "Rainbow" was a positive experience in college and contributed to his overall positivity towards Canon University.

Connection to research questions. Overall, this second theme describing the importance of visibility and support directly links to the research questions that probe the overall experiences of the alumni on campus and in extracurricular experiences. The existence of an officially recognized LGBTQ student group and the attitudes of campus administration have influence on the experiences of gay men at Catholic institutions of higher education based on the findings of this study. This finding further links to the study research question that seeks to understand how

the climate of the campus influences the experience of gay men. When a LGBTQ student group was present on campus, the individual had a positive experience that furthered their development as an individual. However, when such a group was not present or unsupported by administration, the gay man felt negativity and invisibility. As supported by existing literature, the presence of LGBTQ student groups and supportive administration at Catholic institutions of higher education is important for the development of sexual minority students based on the findings of this study.

Theme Three: Technology's Role in Connecting.

Throughout the fifteen-year span of time covered in this study, each alumnus described how they evolved as gay men from experiences in childhood through college graduation. However, one factor that emerged for a majority of the alumni was technology's role in how they made connections with other gay men in college. Specifically, five of the participants spoke to how technology enabled them to either meet other individuals for social or sexual encounters during their time on campus. Mostly, the alumni utilized technology such as internet chatrooms and websites geared towards the gay community to meet other LGBTQ individuals for sexual purposes. However, some participants used technology in an effort to make friends due to a lack of visibility amongst the LGBTQ community on campus or in the surrounding community. Regardless of intention, the role of technology was evident as a common theme amongst a majority of the alumni in this study.

For Adam, the use of technology was primarily an adjunct to his participation in the student group, "Community" at Carman College. Attending college in the late 1990's, Adam spoke of how he used to spend time in a university computer lab in the basement of the main academic building on campus due to a lack of internet connection in his residence hall room. Through visiting online chat rooms and websites geared towards the gay community, Adam

would meet individuals from both inside and outside the Carman College community to have sex. Interestingly, Adam explained that he knew there were other gay students at Carman College, but admitted they were probably unwilling to interact with him because it would “out them” in return. However, Adam admitted via technology, there was a degree of discretion that could make it easier to locate other gay men on and around campus.

For Mateo, also a Carman College alum, he took to the internet on a quest to meet other gay men because he felt they had to be present on campus even though they seemed invisible to him. Mateo explained how one day he was on Gay.com, a LGBTQ themed dating website, and came across two other Carman College students. Instead of using an actual self-portrait as a profile picture on the website, one gay man actually used the Carman College mascot instead. Mateo was struck by this bold move, as he explained this individual was clearly looking to make connections as well, but was afraid to show his face. Mateo eventually met this other gay man in person, who in turn introduced him to other gay men on campus. As evident through this experience, the use of technology provided an avenue for making connections that did not involve other public mediums. This scenario was clearly indicative of the culture surrounding being openly gay at Carman College during that time.

At the University of Santa Monica, Jackson explained how he immediately took to the internet upon starting college to meet other gay men. He detailed that college was his first opportunity to be “free” and have the latitude to explore his sexuality. Although he was openly gay to most individuals immediately upon arriving at the University of Santa Monica, Jackson clarified that using the internet to meet other gay men was convenient and allowed him to better control the encounters. Similarly, Travis also ventured onto the internet to interact with other gay men at the University of Santa Monica. However, his motives were slightly different from the

other participants. As the only alumni not openly gay in college, Travis used the website Craigslist, primarily geared towards posting classified advertisements, to explore his sexuality with other men. Travis explained that he solicited sexual encounters by posting in the adult section of Craigslist because he was too nervous to go to the town's only gay bar and assumed individuals who answered his advertisement were likely in the same situation – closeted and exploring. Travis explained this approach to exploring his sexuality was not ideal, but it was the only viable option he had at the time. Travis explained there was simultaneous thrill and anxiety that ran through placing the personal ads, but it was the only way to explore his sexuality at that time. He also recalled seeing his sexual partners at campus bars during college, but neither man acknowledged the situation.

Connection to existing literature. For each of the participants, the use of technology served a different purpose. Nevertheless, at the core, technology was used to make connections with other like individuals for social or sexual purposes. When asked to expand upon the reasons why the alumni used technology to meet other individuals, it was overwhelmingly due to a lack of visible LGBTQ individuals on campus or out of convenience. These findings are congruent with Liao, Millett and Marks (2006) who noted the use of technology via the internet has become increasingly prevalent for meeting sexual partners through forums such as personal advertisements, chat rooms, discussion boards, and instant messaging systems. Moreover, the participant use of technology to for sexual purposes was further supported by Leiblum (1997) who explained that men who have sex with men might find using the internet for meeting sexual partners as advantageous to stay anonymous, increase privacy and safety, and because of the relative amount of ease the forum provides.

Upon further examination, technology's role in the experiences of the alumni in this study helps explain elements of institutional culture towards LGBTQ community members. Adam, Mateo and Travis all described how their particular institutions, Carman College and the University of Santa Monica, did not have an abundance of out, visible LGBTQ individuals on campus. Mateo described how other gay students were disguised on Gay.com, using the Carman College mascot as their profile pictures. When asked to expand on his feelings, Mateo elucidated he was not surprised the other gay men were hiding behind the college mascot because he felt the campus environment was not overly welcoming of gay men at that time. By mentioning that he felt other gay men were afraid of "outing themselves" by associating with him, Adam underscored Mateo's description of Carman College's culture towards LGBTQ individuals. Although these are only two stories, it is very likely that something within the culture of Carman College was causing LGBTQ individuals to use technological means to meet individuals.

Further, Travis commented numerous times during his interviews that he felt the University of Santa Monica lacked visible, specific support structures for individuals that may be struggling with their sexuality. Additionally, he felt the University of Santa Monica did not have an abundance of out LGBTQ individuals in the community. As such, he lacked knowledge and a support structure to assist in processing his feelings and turned to other outlets within his environment. Based on his description of using technology to have sex with other men, Travis's risks factors for common LGBTQ sexual issues increased as a result. This connection is indicative of Benostch, Kalichman and Cage's (2002) findings which explained that men who have sex with other men (MSM) via the internet report higher usages of increased quantities of sexual partners and greater instances of unprotected sexual activity than those who did not. Thus,

a lack of visibility in both “out” community members and support structures can contribute in driving gay men to seek out sexual and social interactions online.

Connection to research questions. In essence, the participants of this study were seeking to develop or reconcile their sexuality and needed support to varying levels to make this happen. As such, they took to technology as a means of meeting other men, whether as their only option given the culture of the campus community or as an adjunct to existing structures. This study theme again underscores the importance of visibility, both for LGBTQ community members and campus support structures in assisting with the healthy development of gay men. Further, this particular theme reveals more descriptions of the campus culture encountered by the gay alumni that attended the applicable college or university throughout history. Although technology is not necessarily an evil relating to forming community, various risk factors are evident through empirical research especially in the area of using such tools for sexual relationship and must be recognized by campus administration when making decisions about programming and support. As such, this theme links directly back to the research question that queries the impact of campus culture on the lived experiences of gay men that attended American Catholic institutions of higher education.

Theme Four: Gray Areas and Hard Lines: The Catholic Church, the University and the Student.

Arguably the most complex theme that emerged from the data in this study is the intersection of the Catholic Church, the institution and the alumni. Since all three of the Catholic colleges or universities in this study granted admission to the alumni, it is vital to discuss the role the institution had in their development and success, especially in light of the Catholic Church’s teachings on same sex, sexual behavior. Having already discussed how the alumni in this study

experienced marginality before college, craved visibility and support, and used technology to make connections, this theme shifts the focus to how these particular institutions of higher education sponsored by the Catholic Church contributed to or detracted from the healthy development and educational success of the six individuals in this study.

Gray Areas. Throughout the study interviews, it was obvious that several of the alumni experienced situations in college that were not congruent with their understandings of Catholic Church teachings towards same sex, sexual attraction. Although the selection criteria of this study did not specifically seek gay men who were raised Catholic, it so happened that all of the alumni were active to some degree with the Church during their childhood. This coincidence helped add an additional layer of discussion to the interview discussions, as all of the alumni were familiar with the basic teachings of the Catholic Church regarding sexuality. As such, several of the alumni spoke about how some of their lived experiences in college were contrary to their understanding of the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality. In most cases, these actions were confusing and caused a feeling of conflict. However, once those initial feelings settled, each alumni began to see the Catholic Church in a more matured, nuanced way.

At Carman College in the late 1990's, Adam was a prominent member of "Community," the LGBTQ student organization that met as a group in the campus chapel. He clearly remembered feeling conflicted knowing the college allowed an LGBTQ group to exist despite his understanding of Church teachings. Adam explained the campus climate mimicked the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding openly gay service individuals in the military at that time. Further, he remembered that Pope John Paul II was also speaking out against same sex, sexual activity quite vocally during his time in college. As a result, Adam initially could not believe that a university sanctioned LGBTQ group was not only in existence, but allowed to hold

meetings in the living room of the chapel. Adam further detailed that he felt the situation was “very schizophrenic” and was contrary to everything he was taught by the Catholic Church as a child about same sex, sexual attraction. However, Adam was clear that he was overjoyed by the situation and it helped him see the Catholic Church in a less draconian manner. These gray areas allowed him to see that some communities have differing interpretation of Church teachings, leading to his comfort in attending Carman College as a gay man.

At the University of Santa Monica, Jackson experienced contradictions of his own through the behavior of several priests within the community. He explained that each residence hall had a live-in chaplain that helped form community and enforce policy. While he admitted not having proof, Jackson was certain his hall chaplain was gay. However, even if he was wrong, he explained that the priest’s vocal support of LGBTQ individuals indicated leadership in the Catholic Church had differing opinions on human sexuality. This was evident when the hall chaplain openly supported a gay resident assistant at a floor meeting, telling the students he was welcome and “there was nothing wrong with him.” However, Jackson was shocked and confused when he ran into a different hall chaplain dancing one evening at the only gay bar in town. Jackson explained he playfully confronted the street-clothed priest on the situation, who attempted to explain, “he was just there for the music.” Jackson stated he initially felt the priest was hypocritical being in a gay bar, but eventually found humor in the situation. He further detailed the situation showed him that priests were human and that there were “cracks in the cloth.” The situation showed him that there was a separation between Rome and Church leaders, especially regarding sexuality.

During his time at Canon University, Jeff remembered that his religion professor, a Catholic priest, encouraged the class to challenge the teachings of the Church, especially as it

related to social issues such as sexuality. Jeff remembered appreciating this dialogic engagement, which was a change from the top-down approach to Catholic Church teachings from his childhood. He explained that the classroom environment was a stark contrast from his earlier experiences of how the Church conveyed teachings. As a result, Jeff felt comforted in knowing that there were members of the clergy that fostered debate and allowed for questioning of doctrine. To Jeff, this positive experience was congruent with his interpretation of what college should be and ultimately softened his feelings towards members of the clergy.

Through these three examples, it was apparent that childhood memories of Church teachings towards sexuality conflicted several times with the higher education experiences of several alumni. Although initially confusing and sometimes aggravating, these “gray areas” allowed the alumni to have internal and external dialogue, examining pre-conceived notions about the Catholic Church and its teachings. Overwhelmingly, the alumni explained the situations “softened” them a bit towards the Catholic Church and matured their relationship with religion on many levels. As a result, these “gray areas” resulted in personal growth and had a positive impact on their time in college.

Hard lines. However, there were other times in college when participants in the study experienced situations where teachings of the Catholic Church related to same sex, sexual attraction were upheld, thus creating policies and actions which detracted from their overall experience on campus. To the alumni, these situations were simultaneously frustrating and confusing, showing an apparent lack of acceptance of LGBTQ individuals by campus administrators. Further, these situations created policies and procedures that felt detached from the modern needs of college students. In all three of the situations, two related to recognizing LGBTQ student groups and one related to the distribution of condoms, the alumni impacted felt

the situations were created by an enforcement of the Catholic Church's teachings towards the appropriate expression of human sexuality.

For Mateo, an encounter with student affairs professionals at Carman College made him feel as if LGBTQ individuals were not accepted to the institution. When he arrived, there was no formally recognized LGBTQ student group at the college. Recognizing the benefit from such a group due to his membership in a high school group for such students, Mateo joined forces with the only other openly gay student he knew to form an organization. However, Mateo recalled that student affairs professionals at Carman College told both of them, "you shouldn't do it – it's a religious school." Mateo admits that he and his friend tried a few more times for formal recognition, but experienced the same barriers from the administration. Eventually giving up, Mateo explained that he was hurt and frustrated by the lack of recognition from the university. Further, he questioned how the administration would respond if incidents such as hate crimes were to occur on the campus. To Mateo, using Catholic Church teaching to not allow an LGBTQ student group to form on campus detracted from his growth in college. Further, Mateo worried that other gay students missed the opportunity to network and grow with each other because a group did not exist on campus.

At University of Santa Monica, Jackson experienced a similar situation to Mateo regarding the formal recognition of an LGBTQ group on campus. Although the University of Santa Monica had a non-sanctioned, off-campus group founded by alumni called "Outreach Santa Monica," the university itself did not have such a group recognized by campus administrators. Knowing that such an official group would greatly benefit the institution, Jackson worked with several of his "Outreach Santa Monica" cohorts to force the university to start a group. However, Jackson made it clear those student affairs administrators did not want such a

group to form, citing that recognition would be a conflict with Catholic values. Further, Jackson remembers one of the administrators citing the phrase “intrinsically disordered,” used in a 1986 document by the Catholic Church to describe homosexuality, during a discussion on formal recognition. Although frustrated by the lack of an officially recognized student group, Jackson admits the existence of “Outreach Santa Monica” was better than nothing at all. By having such a group, Jackson was more fortunate than Mateo, as he could rely upon other individuals outside the institution to learn about his sexuality and grow as an individual.

Although Canon University had a formally recognized LGBTQ student organization, Jeff was very troubled by a university policy that prohibited the distribution of contraceptives on campus. Jeff quickly realized that the institution did not allow campus offices to distribute condoms to students who chose to engage in sexual intercourse. Jeff explained the policy existed due to the Catholic Church’s teachings that sexual intercourse is to occur between a married man and woman. To him, he felt that the Catholic Church had an overall aversion to sexual activity and relied upon “shame” to get followers to comply with the policy. Further, he was very confused by the directive because the university had an office that promoted health and wellness, but could not distribute condoms. Within this office, Jeff remembered staff members were promoting safe sex and educating students on facts related to sexually transmitted diseases. To Jeff, he felt the office could not fulfill its mission because the logical outcome of this education would be to provide contraceptives. By taking this approach, he felt that the university, as an extension of the Catholic Church, was adding to the risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases in gay men by not facing reality and providing contraceptives. To him, this approach was dangerous and rooted in teachings that were not based in modern reality.

Connection to existing literature. Through these situations faced by the alumni, both positive and negative, feelings ranging from confusion to frustration resulted when actions by campus administrators either conflicted with or supported their understanding of Catholic Church teachings. In the situations where the institution enforced Catholic Church teachings, the three men all admitted these decisions made by campus administration appeared detached from the realities faced by certain student populations on campus, such as LGBTQ individuals. Although unpopular to the impacted alumni, the decisions of the three institutions were in agreement with Catholic Church teachings, which stated same sex, sexual behavior is intrinsically disordered (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986; Catholic Church, 2000). Further, the alumni did explain they were treated with respect and dignity by campus administration even though their applications for recognition or questions of contraceptive distribution were met with citations of Catholic Church teachings. These actions are also congruent with Catholic Church directives which state that individuals with same-sex sexual attractions must be treated with respect, compassion and sensitivity by the community and every effort to avoid unjust discrimination towards members with same-sex sexual attractions must be avoided (Catholic Church, 2000).

In the end, these three alumni experienced the direct impacts of Catholic Church teachings enforced on their individual campuses. By remaining linked to the teachings of the Catholic Church, the three colleges and universities were following the directives of Pope John Paul II's, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which called upon all Catholic colleges and universities to revisit the philosophies and actions that undergirded their day-to-day operations (Dosen, 2012). However, a larger issue is presented through denying official recognition of an LGBTQ student group or not allowing the distribution of contraceptive devices – the struggle to balance Catholic

Church teachings with providing student support. This delicate issue is described by Hughes (2008) who noted that many Catholic campuses are struggling to balance their need to provide support networks and services for sexual minority students while attempting to maintain policies grounded in the teachings of the Church. As evident by the data in this study, the decisions made by campus administration to “tow the line” relating to Catholic Church teachings had a negative impact on the experiences of the alumni in question.

Connection to research questions. The findings of this theme have a direct connection to the research question that explores how the lived experiences of the alumni intersected with the Catholic identity of the institution. In many ways, the answer to this research question depended on the institution and how individual members of that community decided to interpret the concept of Catholic identity. For Carman College, Catholic Church teachings had an impact depending on the time in question. During Adam’s tenure, an LGBTQ student group was recognized and allowed to meet in the chapel. However, Mateo faced opposition by campus administration when he and friend decided to revive the group that existed during Adam’s time on campus. This interesting scenario showed that Carman College had differing approaches to the situation depending on the timeframe in question.

Further, the University of Santa Monica relied upon Catholic Church teachings to deny the formal recognition of an LGBTQ student group during Jackson’s time on campus. However, the university did nothing to stop the unofficial “Outreach Santa Monica” group from having a presence at the university, such as when other official student groups created bogus conference room bookings to allow the group to meet on campus. To Jackson, this approach allowed the university remain publically in accordance with the Catholic Church’s teachings by denying the official group but to “look the other way” when an outside group provided support to students. A

similar approach was taken by Canon University in sponsoring a health promotion and wellness department that discussed healthy sexual behavior but having a policy that did not allow the distribution of contraceptives. In both circumstances, the institutions upheld Catholic Church teachings in some instances but allowed modernity to enter in others. The existence of gray areas and hard lines discussed in this theme showed Catholic institutions of higher education that allowed latitude towards certain issues surrounding the space of LGBTQ affairs, but drew a line on others.

In the end, the three colleges and universities in this study took various approaches in portraying their Catholic identity to students in the space of LGBTQ affairs. These approaches had both positive and negative impacts on how the alumni experienced their time in college, as evident in their recollections of the situations. As such, faculty and staff at Catholic institutions of higher education must be aware that their interpretations of Church teachings and subsequent actions have direct impact on the lived experiences of gay men as indicated by the participants in this study. Further, the data collected by this study and discussed in this theme show how the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding human sexuality can often times be on a collision course with the needs of the LGBTQ students admitted to study at institutions of higher education sponsored by the Church.

Application of Theoretical Framework

With the four salient themes of this study established, the final portion of this chapter focuses on how the alumni described several instances where multiple environmental factors had an impact on their lived experiences as gay men that attended Catholic institutions of higher education. Through thick and rich descriptions of these influences, the theoretical framework of this study, Urie Bronfenrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) is evident throughout

this study and is useful in explaining how micro and macro level components affect the lives of LGBTQ college students. As such, this final section unpacks how the various system levels described by Bronfenbrenner had impact on the lives of the six alumni, adding to the depth of each experience and linking back directly to the central research question of this study. Similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, this discussion begins at the center, with the "self," describing microsystem level influences discussed by the participants.

Microsystem Influences. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the microsystem is "the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with a particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22). In application to higher education, Renn and Arnold (2003) explained a traditional college student's microsystem may include the residence hall, classroom, a student organization, fraternity/sorority or an on-campus job. Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) description of these influences, several important experiences were salient in the lived experiences of the six alumni and helped to explain how their immediate environments had impact on their time in college.

For Adam, he recalled hearing slurs in the residence halls, experienced marginality in the classroom, but felt supported through his membership in an LGBTQ group and in his affiliation with campus ministry. Mateo recalled enjoying classes, but experienced an unwelcoming residence hall environment and faced resistance from campus administration when trying to form a student group. Jackson enjoyed the opportunity to discuss LGBTQ topics in his classes and relished in his membership with an off-campus group. However, he was annoyed by the university's hard line approach to recognizing an LGBTQ group on campus and noticed hypocrisy in the actions of various priests in leadership roles.

Travis loved the camaraderie he had with fellow classmates in the residence halls and the challenge of his courses. Nevertheless, he also felt isolated by the lack of visible LGBTQ students on campus and wondered if visible support for students struggling with sexuality might have helped him develop as a gay man. For Phil, he appreciated having an openly gay professor and loved his leadership opportunity in the officially recognized student organization. Although, he struggled with physical and mental health and often felt overwhelmed by classes. Finally, Jeff enjoyed his professors and made community as a commuter student despite initial problems. However, he felt anxiety and distance through college athletics and had moral concerns in updating campus policies related to condoms through his student worker position.

In all these examples, the alumni described microsystem influences that had a both positive and negative impact on their experiences in college. As such, each of these influences did not live in isolation and added together to show a hodgepodge of experiences that resulted varying degrees of impact on their development as college students. As described in the themes of this study, the greatest impact of the microsystem influences for the participants occurred in environments such as the classroom and student organizations. Although, other places such as residence halls and experiences in student worker positions cannot be overlooked as having direct impact on the development and satisfaction of LGBTQ students at Catholic institutions of higher education. As such, faculty and staff at Catholic institutions of higher education must be aware that these microsystem influences have great impact on gay men and understand the unique needs presented in each of these environments.

Exosystem Influences. The next layer of the EST applicable to the findings of this study is the exosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the exosystem as, “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect,

or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (p. 25). Renn and Arnold (2013) note a developing college student’s exosystem may include elements such as family economics, federal government regulations and other outside influences that may impact the individual. For LGBTQ students at Catholic institutions of higher education, the exosystem includes the Catholic Church and decisions imposed by the leadership. Through each of the interviews, exosystem influences were evident in the lived experiences of the alumni and showed the impact of these elements on their time in college.

Attending college during the administration of President Bill Clinton, Adam and Jackson both described how the military policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” permeated the culture of the Carman College and University of Santa Monica campuses. According to Klapper (2013) President Bill Clinton announced a military policy on July 19, 1993, that allowed closeted members of the military to serve so long as they did not disclose their sexual orientation. This controversial policy essentially allowed LGBTQ individuals to serve in the military but created a public image of invisibility amongst such individuals in the armed forces. As described by both Adam and Jackson, the campuses of both institutions were comfortable with admitting gay men to study at the institution, but preferred that the individuals did not overtly display their sexual orientation. For Adam, this was evident through the actions of Dr. Taylor, the professor that chose to not allow the subject of LGBTQ marketing to be discussed in class. Further, Jackson felt this policy was evident through the decision not to allow a formal LGBTQ student group at the University of Santa Monica. Both individuals directly cited the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy as an explanation for the various cultural elements of their institution. Further, both explained how they were not only bothered by the policy at the national level but angered how it

permeated into campus culture. These two examples show how exosystem influences can have an impact on cultural elements of Catholic institutions of higher education.

Another exosystem influence that was present in the findings of this study was the tone portrayed by the leadership of the Catholic Church towards individuals with same sex, sexual attraction. When speaking of “Community,” the LGBTQ student group at Carman College, Adam clearly remembered how he was nervous that the Catholic Church leadership might take issue with the existence of the group and that the students met in the campus chapel. When discussing the fear, he directly mentioned Pope John Paul II and remarks the Pope had given about the sinful nature of same sex, sexual attraction. Phil also recalled negative messages provided by Pope Benedict who was the leader of the Catholic Church while he was in college. Finally, Jeff, the youngest of the alumni, spoke of the relatively softer tone of Pope Francis towards LGBTQ individuals, the leader of the Catholic Church while he was in college. Both Phil and Jeff acknowledged the Pope and Catholic Church leadership ultimately had influence over the actions of campus administration and institutional policies at Canon University, their alma mater.

As such, each of these examples show how the applicable alumni were aware of and affected by influences that existed far beyond the boundaries of their individual campuses. These findings indicate the exosystem influences such as governmental policy in the form of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” were salient in the minds of the applicable alumni. Further, the tone of Catholic Church leadership was influential through messages about the LGBTQ community and affected the lives of gay men that attend Catholic institutions of higher education. As the last layer of the EST, the findings of this study also indicated how macrosystem elements such as cultural influences and civil rights had an impact on the lived experiences of the gay alumni.

Macrosystem Influences. The final layer of the EST that applies to this study is the macrosystem. By definition, Bronfenbrenner (1979) notes the macrosystem, “refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (p. 26). At the macrosystem level, Renn and Arnold (2013) describe the United States and the various cultural understandings that exist regarding gender, race and ethnicity. These influences provide structural influences on the inner rings of the EST, and cannot be ignored when examining the development of the individual. For LGBTQ students, macrosystem level influences include the state of civil rights and acceptance in the cultural fabric of the United States.

Throughout all of the interviews, the six alumni described various elements of American culture that had impact on them personally both prior and during college. For Adam, he vividly recalled hearing about the AIDS crisis growing up, wondering if he would succumb to the disease later in life. While in college, he remembered the debut of “Will and Grace,” the first prime time situation comedy to have a gay male lead character. For Mateo, he remembered taking comfort in the fact that gay pride prides were becoming large events in major cities during his time in college. However, he also recalled several states still having laws against sodomy and gay men being arrested for lewd conduct in public. Jackson, like Adam, also remembered the cultural impact of “Will and Grace,” but was troubled by how a supporting character, Jack, was portrayed by the show as flamboyant and stereotypical. Travis also remembered cultural moments such as Ellen DeGeneres “coming out” on her TV show and Rosie O’Donnell declaring she was a lesbian. Phil was heavily influenced by the show “The Real World” and their portrayal of a gay character with HIV and Jeff recalled the gradual movement towards marriage equality in

America during his time in college. In essence, each of the individuals recalled salient moments at the macrosystem level and how they impacted their time in college.

By watching the unraveling of a newly “out” TV star’s career due to negative backlash or hearing about gay men being arrested for having sexual intercourse, several cultural and political factors caused feelings of anger, anxiety and uncertainty in lived experiences of some of the alumni. However, by seeing gay characters on TV, witnessing pride parades or learning about the dangers of unprotected sex, the participants in this study also leveraged macrosystem influences to develop during their college careers. Each of the participants noted how these macrosystem factors ultimately played out on their campuses, whether through campus programming or discussions with other students. Regardless of the institution in question, the influence of macrosystem elements cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion

Throughout this fifth chapter, emergent themes related to the lived experience of gay men that attended Catholic institutions of higher education were discussed, linked to existing literature and connected to the applicable reach questions of this study. Further, the theoretical framework of this study, the EST, was applied to numerous situations and influences that emerged from the participant interviews. As evident throughout this chapter, themes such as marginality, visibility, technology, and the Catholic Church were evident throughout the lived experiences of these alumni and must be examined in depth to portray their importance. The focus of this study now turns to a final chapter, which discusses implications, limitations and opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

Throughout this study, the lived experiences of gay men that attended Catholic institutions of higher education were examined in such a way that practitioners in higher education leadership could utilize salient findings to create or alter policies and/or support structures on college campuses. As such, this final chapter focuses on the implications of this study and provides opportunities for future research to extend the scope of this important body of work. Further, this chapter outlines the limitations of this particular study and provides an opportunity for the researcher to reflect upon his own journey as a gay man that attended a Catholic institution of higher education. This individual reflection also provides insight into the research process for this study, identifying areas of strength and opportunities for growth throughout the entire process.

Summary of Research Findings

After collecting and analyzing all study data, four emergent themes surfaced from the data with applicability to higher education leadership. First, each alumni experienced some degree of negative messaging about their sexual orientation prior to college. Further, the alumni spoke to the importance of LGBTQ visibility and support on campus in areas such as student involvement and in the classroom. In addition, certain alumni discussed leveraging technology such as gay themed websites to meet other individuals and further develop in their sexual identity. Finally, each alumni experienced mixed messages in college when their sexual orientation intersected with the teachings of the Catholic Church and the decisions of campus administration. All of these themes were impactful to the alumni and were unpacked in the context of applicable scholarly evidence found in both the literature review of this study through the theoretical lens of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST). By using

the EST as a theoretical framework, it was evident that micro-, exo- and macro- system influences impacted the lived experiences of the gay alumni during their time in college at American Catholic institutions of higher education.

Implications of Research Findings.

By collecting thick and rich interview data and the applying qualitative analytical techniques, multiple salient implications emerged as applicable to faculty and administration at Catholic colleges and universities and the broader field of higher education leadership. Mostly, these implications relate to awareness and training opportunities for faculty and administration so the developmental needs of gay men and the greater LGBTQ community can be better served during a very important and formative time of their lives. Additionally, several implications could have direct impact on institutional policy management, fostering dialogue surrounding the role of Catholic Church teachings when they directly affect sexual minority students. As the first known study to examine the lived experiences of gay men across multiple Catholic institutions of higher education, the findings and implications of this study provide a glimpse into common themes that appeared throughout history.

Based on the findings of this study, faculty and administrators at colleges and universities must be aware that gay students likely experienced some degree of negative messaging regarding their sexuality prior to arriving on campus. Although the sample size of this particular study is small, all six alumni experienced negative messaging prior to college based on their sexual orientation. Moreover, each of the alumni disclosed awareness of their sexual orientation prior to starting college, explaining the feelings were not a choice. The intersection of their sexual orientation and negative messages from their childhoods created vigilance for each of the participants as they arrived on campus for college. As such, higher education administrators can

assist gay students by ensuring that orientation programs and welcoming activities are presented through a lens of inclusion. Further, residence hall staff must be selected carefully and also trained to offer programming that is welcoming and accepting of the LGBTQ community. Further, these same environments must be governed by policies that do not tolerate the marginalization of sexual minorities.

Within the classroom and in student affairs programming spaces, visibility and support had a great impact on the lived experiences of the alumni. As evident through the negative experiences of Adam, and the positive experiences of Jackson, Phil and Jeff, the tone that a faculty member establishes in their classroom has wide reaching implications. Faculty members must ensure their pedagogy contains inclusive language and opportunities to explore diversity in topics of sexuality. Further, student affairs professionals must be aware of the importance of LGBTQ student groups as an avenue for interested students to meet and develop as individuals. As seen through the positive experiences of Adam and Phil and the lost opportunities described by Mateo and Jackson, LGBTQ student groups are a space for students to connect with each other and advocate for their needs. The power of these groups to impact student development must not be overlooked, but rather seen as a priority and a commitment to the inclusion of sexual minority students.

Another salient implication of this study is the power of technology as a means for gay men to connect with each other for social and sexual means. As described by several of the alumni, gay websites and chat rooms were used to meet other individuals both on and off campus to form networks and explore their sexuality. While the use of technology by gay men may only be to make friends, existing literature and the actions of several alumni show it can also be used for meeting sexual partners. As such, faculty and administration of colleges and universities must

be aware of the inherent risk factors of using these platforms and provide requisite education for students. Further, faculty and administration must work to foster campus cultures where LGBTQ individuals are visible, so gay men are not solely reliant on using technology as a means to make connections. In our technological environment, campus administrators can also offer programming regarding the inherent risks of utilizing these tools to meet individuals, offering examples of safety issues, both physically and mentally.

Finally, and arguably most complex, are the implications of Catholic Church teachings as they intersect with institutional policies and the LGBTQ community. As seen through existing literature, the Catholic Church has had a tenuous relationship with sexual minorities throughout history. However, the findings of this study in tandem with existing research indicates that LGBTQ individuals are susceptible to a whole range of vulnerabilities and are also impacted by the ramifications of Catholic teachings on the policies of institutions sponsored by the Church. Leadership at Catholic institutions of higher education must be aware of the impacts of their policies and procedures such as not allowing condom distribution or denying official recognition for LGBTQ student groups. Further, the findings of this study can be used to foster dialogue on how Catholic institutions of higher education can effectively minister to and develop sexual minority students. This dialogue is vitally important moving forward if Catholic institutions of higher education are to continue to knowingly admit gay men into their communities.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of this study, there are multiple possibilities for future research. Future studies could examine how other identities within the LGBTQ community, such as lesbian or transgender, influence the lived experiences of such individuals. These future studies could focus on single or multiple campuses and could also leverage multiple periods in history as seen

through the selection criteria of this study. These future studies could be used to compare and contrast other elements of identity, such as but not limited to: gender identity, sex, masculinity and femininity and other similar social constructs.

Also, future studies could examine the lives of vowed religious members of Catholic college and university communities to understand how their roles on campus influence culture. By conducting research with priests, sisters, brothers or other such vowed religious members of campus communities, insight could be gained into how these church leaders interpret Catholic teachings and apply them to their work with college students. This current study merely scratches the surface of possible research studies in the field of Catholic higher education, and future opportunities could greatly expand the amount of scholarly literature in the field of student affairs and educational leadership.

Researcher Reflection

In many ways, I struggled to come up with a title for this study, as I was seeking the “perfect” way to capture the essence of these men’s lived experiences in a way that would not only do their stories justice, but also show the world their unique histories and journeys. After scrapping my original study title, I settled on “Intersecting Identities: The Lived Experiences of Gay, Male Alumni of American Catholic Institutions of Higher Education. In my eyes, this title not only captured the essence of their experiences, a true nod to phenomenology, but also showed how three components – the Church, the university and the student – all met in a unique space - college. Additional intersections beyond those described above, such as race, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation, only further enriched the narratives that emerged from this phenomenological study.

As a gay alumnus of an American Catholic university, it was simultaneously nostalgic and heartbreaking to hear some of the stories recanted by the participants of this study. In many ways, I shared similar experiences with the participants and could relate intimately to their stories. Like Adam, I remember my time as a resident assistant and how my students initially reacted negatively to my sexual orientation. Further, I sympathized with Travis, as I too was struggling with my sexuality and was not sure where to turn on campus for help. Also, I remember venturing out onto the internet to meet other gay men, mostly hoping to make friends but also to hopefully find a romantic connection. While some of the stories were warmly nostalgic, I was also very troubled to hear how my fellow gay alumni experienced terrible marginality in classrooms or were denied opportunities by campus administrators to form a student group. It also broke my heart to know these loving, wonderful individuals were called a “faggot” or were bullied for being themselves. Clearly, these memories were still quite painful for the alumni – a fact nobody reading this study should ever forget.

It goes without saying that each of the alumni recalled positive aspects of their time in college and overwhelmingly explained they would attend the college or university again if given the opportunity. However, it would be naïve for me to portray their journeys as typical, as it must be acknowledged many of the issues they faced were a direct result of heterosexism, homophobia, or an overall lack of dialogue. As I am well aware, the intersection of religion, sexuality and higher education is a tricky space for any faculty or administrator to navigate. Understandably, politics, donors, Church leadership and marketing all have their complex places in how strategies are formulated and executed at American Catholic institutions of higher education. However, as administrators, we must take a step back and always be cognizant that children of God who happen to be gay are in our presence and are impacted by words and

actions. This is a heavy but necessary weight for us to carry, and the results of this study hopefully help contribute to dialogue and understanding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the lived experiences of six gay alumni of a multiple Catholic institutions of higher education. As a result, multiple salient themes emerged and the theoretical framework, Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological System Theory helped to provide a lens for examining the lived experiences of the alumni. Findings of this study are significant, as they better inform practitioners at Catholic institutions of higher education of the unique challenges and situations that face sexual minority students within their communities. Knowledge of such challenges and situations can better inform how to help students develop and flourish on campus to meet their overall goals in higher education.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY



Office of Research Services
 Institutional Review Board
 1 East Jackson Boulevard
 Chicago, Illinois: 60604-2201
 312-362-7593
 Fax: 312-362-7574

Research Involving Human Subjects NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

To: Todd Kleine, MS, Graduate Student, College of Education

Date: July 20, 2017 (revised 7/20/2017)

Re: Research Protocol # TK062917EDU
 "The Lived Experiences of Gay, Male College & University Alumni"

Please review the following important information about the review of your proposed research activity.

Review Details

This submission is an initial submission. Your research project meets the criteria for Expedited review under 45 CFR 45 CFR 46.110 under the following categories:

"(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes."

"(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies."

Approval Details

Your research was reviewed and approved on July 20, 2017.

Approval Period: July 20, 2017- July 19, 2018

Approved Consent, Parent/Guardian Permission, or Assent Materials:

- 1) Adult Consent-Intake Survey, version 6/29/2017 (attached)
 - a. Waiver of documentation of consent granted under 45 CFR 46.117 (c) 2
- 2) Adult Consent-Interviews, version 6/29/2017 (attached)

Other approved study documents:

- 1) Email template for participant recruitment to professionals, version 6/29/2017 (attached)
- 2) Study Advertisement, version 6/29/2017 (attached)
- 3) Email template to schedule first interview with participant, version 6/29/2017 (attached)
- 4) Email template for after first interview to participant, version 6/29/2017 (attached)
- 5) Email after second interview, version 6/29/2017 (attached)
- 6) Debrief documentation for interviews, version 6/29/2017 (attached)

Number of approved participants: 30 Total (to allow for screen failure)

You should not exceed this total number of subjects without prospectively submitting an amendment to the IRB requesting an increase in subject number.

Funding Source: 1) None

Approved Performance sites: 1) DePaul University; 2) various community locations depending upon decision of the participants

Reminders

- Only the most recent IRB-approved versions of consent, parent/legal guardian permission, or assent forms may be used in association with this project.
- Any changes to the funding source or funding status must be sent to the IRB as an amendment.
- Prior to implementing revisions to project materials or procedures, you must submit an amendment application detailing the changes to the IRB for review and receive notification of approval.
- You must promptly report any problems that have occurred involving research participants to the IRB in writing.
- If your project will continue beyond the approval period indicated above, you are responsible for submitting a continuing review report at least 3 weeks prior to the expiration date. The continuing review form can be downloaded from the IRB web page.
- **Once the research is completed, you must send a final closure report for the research to the IRB.**

The Board would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation and wishes you the best of luck on your research. If you have any questions, please contact me by telephone at (312) 362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

For the Board,



Susan Loess-Perez, MS, CIP, CCRC
 Director of Research Compliance
 Office of Research Services

Cc: Rev. Anthony J. Dosen, CM, PhD, Faculty Sponsor, College of Education

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH INTAKE SURVEY FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study, “The Lived Experiences of Gay Alumni of Catholic Institutions of Higher Education.” Prior to participating in this study, please provide the information below. All responses to this survey and data collected from interviews will be confidential throughout this research study. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at tkleine@depaul.edu or (708) 334-5850.

Sincerely,
 Todd Kleine
 Principal Investigator

Intake Survey

-
1. Name: (your name will not appear in the manuscript) _____
 2. Pseudonym (please select a first name that you’d like to use in this study):

 3. How old are you: _____
 4. What is your race/ethnicity: _____
 5. What is your current religious affiliation: _____
 6. Did you identify as cisgender in college?
 - Yes
 - No
 7. Do you currently identify as cisgender?
 - Yes
 - No
 8. What term best identifies your sexual orientation in college?
 - Asexual
 - Bisexual
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Pansexual
 - Queer
 - Questioning
 - Same Gender Loving
 - Straight/Heterosexual
 - Another identity (please specify): _____

9. What term best describes your current sexual orientation?

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning
- Same Gender Loving
- Straight/Heterosexual
- Another identity (please specify): _____

10. What college/university did you attend? _____

11. Did you graduate?

- Yes, in _____ (year)
- No. If no, how long did you attend the institution? _____

12. What was your college major? _____

13. What was your religious/spiritual affiliation during college: _____

***Several of these survey questions were adapted from the American College Health Association National College Health Assessment questionnaire.*

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE – FIRST INTERVIEW

Opening: Thank you for taking the time to have an interview with me. The data collected from this first of two interviews will help me understand the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education. Together with the data collected from your intake form, this set of information will help formulate a manuscript that attempts to fill gaps in current scholarly literature related to this phenomenon. I ask you please be as descriptive as possible I responding to these questions so I may fully understand your lived experiences in college.

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. After the interview, the recorded conversation will be transcribed verbatim. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. Please remember, you may ask the recording to be stopped at any time. Please know that your identity and the identities of anyone you may mention will be kept confidential with the use of pseudonyms.

This first interview focuses on elements of your life and experiences prior to attending college. Before we begin, I have two important questions:

- Do you consent to participating in this study?
- Do I have your permission to audio record this conversation?

Are there any questions I can answer about this study or process before we begin?

| Primary Question | Guides |
|---|--|
| Describe the environment in which you grew up? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were you raised by family members? Other care takers? • What was this experience like for you? |
| How did the following elements influence your life prior to college? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Ethnicity • Socio-economic status • Religion • Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were these experiences like for you? • How did these experiences impact you? |
| What words would you use to describe yourself prior to college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did these vary throughout time (childhood vs high school) |
| Describe your hobbies/interest/involvements prior to attending college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did these vary throughout time (childhood vs high school) • How did these experiences impact you? |

| | |
|---|--|
| What was school like for you prior to attending college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of student were you? • How did these experiences impact you? |
| How did you know that you were gay? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was this experience like for you? • Was it a single event, multiple events over time, etc.? |
| Describe your decision to disclose/not disclose your sexual orientation prior to college. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors contributed to that decision? • What was this experience like for you? |
| What was your perception of the atmosphere towards LGBTQ community prior to college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your immediate environment? • On a regional or national scale? |
| Walk me through your college selection process. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you arrive at picking the institution you attended? • What was your awareness level of the institution's Catholic affiliation during your application and subsequent enrollment decision period? • What was that experience like for you? • What emotions were involved in this experience? |

Is there anything else about your life prior to college that might be important to this study?

Perform a check to ensure all questions were asked

Closing: Thank you for spending time with me today. Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to add?

Schedule next interview

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE – SECOND INTERVIEW

Opening: Thank you for taking the time to have an interview with me. As you may recall, the data collected from this second of two interviews will help me understand the lived experiences of gay, male alumni of Catholic institutions of higher education. Together with the data collected from your intake and first interview, this set of information will help formulate a manuscript that attempts to fill gaps in current scholarly literature related to this phenomenon. I ask you please be as descriptive as possible I responding to these questions so I may fully understand your lived experiences in college.

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. After the interview, the recorded conversation will be transcribed verbatim. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. Please remember, you may ask the recording to be stopped at any time. Please know that your identity and the identities of anyone you may mention will be kept confidential with the use of pseudonyms.

This second interview focuses on elements of your life and experiences while attending college. Before we begin, I have two important questions:

- Do you consent to participating in this study?
- Do I have your permission to audio record this conversation?

Are there any questions I can answer before we begin?

| Primary Question | Guides |
|--|---|
| To what degree were you out during college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If fully or partially out, how was your sexual orientation received by members of the campus community? • If not out, describe the reasons you decided not to disclose your sexual orientation to members of the campus community. |
| Describe the campus climate towards LGBTQ students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How were LGBTQ students viewed/treated on campus? • What was this experience like for you? |
| What was your perception of the atmosphere towards LGBTQ community during college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did this impact your campus environment? • What was this experience like for you? |
| Describe your physical and emotional well-being during college? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the extent to which your sexual orientation impacted these experiences. • Did other factors beyond sexual orientation impact these experiences? |

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| What was your perception of the Catholic Church's views towards the LGBTQ community during your college experience? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the philosophies and policies of the university agree with this perception? How did they differ? |
| Describe your interactions with vowed religious members of the campus community, if present. These may include priests, brothers, sisters, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were they aware of your sexual orientation? If so, describe their interactions with you. • Did their actions agree or conflict with your perceptions of Catholic Church teachings regarding same-sex sexual attraction? |
| Describe your in-classroom experiences during college. This may include traditional lectures, laboratories, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the extent to which your sexual orientation impacted these experiences. • Did other factors beyond sexual orientation impact these experiences? |
| Describe your extra-curricular experiences as a student on campus. These may include clubs, organizations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the extent to which your sexual orientation impacted these experiences. • Did other factors beyond sexual orientation impact these experiences? |
| Describe the on-campus social/emotional support structures available to you as during college. These structures include counseling services, queer student groups, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the extent to which your sexual orientation impacted these experiences. • Did other factors beyond sexual orientation impact these experiences? |
| Describe your living arrangements during college (on campus/off campus). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the extent to which your sexual orientation impacted these experiences. • Did other factors beyond sexual orientation impact these experiences? |
| What advice would you give to a LGBTQ person considering attending a Catholic college or university? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you attend your alma mater again? Why or why not? |
| Is there anything else about your college experience that might be salient to this study? | |

Perform a check to ensure all questions were asked

Closing: Thank you for spending time with me today. Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to add?

Schedule time for follow up interview (if necessary)