QUEER(ING) SPACES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SAFE

SPACES FOR LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

DANIEL NATHAN GLASSMANN

(Under the Direction of Michelle M. Espino)

ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand physical and virtual safe spaces as experienced by

lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students and answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do LGB college students describe and locate physical and virtual safe spaces?

RQ2: How do LGB college students use physical and virtual safe spaces to resist and/or

reinforce dominant forms of sexual identity?

RQ3: How do physical and virtual safe spaces affect the sexual identity development of

LGB college students?

A sample of 12 self-identifying LGB college students participated in this study. Each

participant took 2-6 photographs to describe and represent their physical and virtual safe spaces.

Using these photographs, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the

participants. This data was analyzed using narrative methods to identify themes related to the

research questions. First, themes that illustrate how LGB college students described and located

safe and unsafe spaces included (a) definitions and descriptions of safe spaces, (b)

characterization of unsafe spaces, and (c) types of spaces. Second, themes that describe LGB

college students' use and behavior within safe and unsafe spaces included (a) queer(ing) spaces,

(b) creating spaces, (c) changing spaces, and (d) behaving in spaces. Third, themes that related

to the sexual identity development of LGB college students within safe and unsafe spaces

included (a) identity depends on people and place and (b) coming out through safe spaces.

Based upon the findings of this study, five conclusions emerged. These conclusions

included (1) moving from safe(r) spaces to queer(ing) spaces, (2) safe and unsafe spaces depends

on people and places, (3) safe and unsafe spaces affects identity development, (4) safe spaces are

places for coping and finding support, and (5) blurring the boundaries of safe and unsafe spaces.

Related to the findings and conclusions found in this study, implications for inclusive practice

include the following areas: (1) claiming and naming spaces, (2) missions and policies, (3)

developmentally appropriate safe spaces, (4) Safe Space Programs and LGB Services, (5)

campus environments, (6) safe spaces for coping and finding support, and (7) inclusive

classrooms and campus programs. Lastly, recommendations for further research are offered.

INDEX WORDS: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, College students, Safe spaces, Unsafe
                spaces, Queer spaces, Social constructivism, Queer theory, Sexual identity
                development, Photo elicitation, Narrative analysis

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DEDICATION

In honor of my mother, Melva Sue Irwin,

Who gave me *life*,

Who gave me *love*,

And who always gave me the freedom to be *happy*.

You taught me *strength*,

You taught me *dedication*,

And you always taught me the importance to be *myself*.

I respect your *heart*,

I respect your *spirit*,

And I always respect your beauty as,

A powerful *woman*,

A devoted *wife*,

And a loving *mother*.

Mom,

You make the saying true,

There is no place like home.

You always have been my safe space to come home to.

And for that, I love and thank you.

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It takes a village to raise a child. – African proverb

Or, in my case, it took a village to get a Ph.D. I have so many people to thank and appreciate for their support, love, and encouragement throughout my journey. First, I have to thank my family for always believing in me and letting me find my own way. I have my mother, Melva Sue Irwin, to thank for providing inspiration, motivation, and the right dose of motherly advice when I needed it to keep me pushing forward and moving ahead towards my goal. Mom, I share this accomplishment with you, because I know without you, it never would have been possible. I also want to thank the rest of my family for always checking in on me when it had been a while and some of you worried this dissertation may have killed me.

I want to thank all of my friends who have been such an important part of my support network. You are such a wonderful group of people who make me "better because I know you." I want to especially thank my best friend, Chad Marcus Lutrell. From the time we were young until now, you have always helped me grow into the person I am today. I have you to thank for helping me understand myself so I could better understand others. Although I moved away and it has been a number of years since we both lived in the same town, thanks for never losing touch and always staying connected. Your kind heart and listening ear has helped me so many times throughout this journey. Chad, I am so lucky to have you in my life and as my best friend.

I also have to thank my partner in crime, Daniel Officer, for being my biggest cheerleader throughout this time in our life. During my moments of doubting and periods of questioning my own abilities, you always had the right things to say or do to cheer me up and keep me positive.

We spent many nights apart and many others together studying, but throughout them all we laughed, we cried, and we always had fun. Thanks for listening to me talk about my research more times than you probably care to remember and never asking me to stop until I was done. I have been so fortunate to have such a caring, compassionate, and committed partner to share this experience with. Thanks, Daniel, for being the better half of D-squared!

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PROLOGUE

A RESEARCHER'S SEARCH FOR SAFE SPACES

In order to understand my relationship with physical and virtual safe spaces, one must

understand who I am and where I came from. Although born in Saint Louis, Missouri, the place

I call home and was raised for most of my life is in rural, Northeast Arkansas, an area of the

country that was and still is predominantly White, lower middle-class, and Christian-identified.

My mother, who had dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade in order to help raise her

other five brothers and sisters, moved my older half-brother and me to Arkansas to escape an

emotionally and, sometimes, physically abusive marriage to my father.   I imagine that for my

mother, who had been born in this area of Arkansas and still had grandparents and other family

who lived there, this was her safe place to raise her children and take care of herself.

We moved to the small towns of Biggers-Reyno, which are actually two tiny towns that

are connected by a winding road surrounded by farmland. I like to think of the hyphen between

the town names as representing the road that connects them. The total population of both towns

does not even equal one thousand people. When my mother, who was a single parent at the time,

lost her job as a waitress at the only restaurant in Reyno because it was shutting down, she

moved my brother and me again to the much larger, nearby city of Pocahontas for more

opportunities. Initially, we lived in a homeless shelter until my mother found work and a place

for us to live. We eventually moved out of the shelter to low-income housing when my mother

found work at a shoe factory. Although I was too young to know differently or understand the

difficulties of our situation, my mother's love, strength, and resilience somehow provided

enough for my brother and me to always feel safe and protected. She worked hard to support and better position us throughout my early childhood; she received her General Education Diploma and took several secretarial and social work classes at the community college.

When I was around the age of ten, my mother married my stepfather who had a son of his own. My mother is still married to him, the man I consider the only father I have ever known. My stepfather was raised in California and moved to Arkansas after graduating high school. My parents both worked blue-collar jobs throughout my childhood, which as my mother recalled provided "enough to get by, but not enough to have anything." Raising three boys on a lower middle-class income was difficult for my parents, but they managed to provide for us as best as they could. Looking back, I am amazed at how well my parents were able to make ends meet and support each of us. When it is all you know, it is hard to think of it any differently.

Despite my family's economic struggles, my parents did their best to allow each of us to have the space to be ourselves. From my mother buying me a Cabbage Patch doll for Christmas to my parents allowing me to become the first male cheerleader at my junior high school, they supported me in opportunities to explore and develop into who I was. As difficult as it was for me to grow up in rural Arkansas and realize I was gay, I know it also had to be hard for my family. My parents may not have always understood my personal struggle with my sexual identity, but they always loved and supported me where and when they could.

Outside of that support, the rural, Southern environment in which I grew up necessitated that I identify other people and places where I could feel safe. One such person was my best friend, Chad, who I met in ninth grade through our involvement in marching band. During my teenage years, we helped each other come to terms with our sexuality and develop meaningful connections to the greater LGB community. I spent countless hours and nights lying on the

kitchen floor talking, listening, and dreaming with Chad about our lives. Through the years, the telephone cord became as stretched out as our conversations. The safest I ever felt growing up was in my relationship with Chad and he continues to serve as a safe space for me today.

Finding an LGB-friendly place was not quite as easy. It required Chad and me to travel two hours back and forth to Memphis, Tennessee to attend Memphis Area Gay Youth (MAGY) meetings. MAGY is a support group for LGBT and questioning youth ages 13-20 in the Memphis area. Although it was difficult to regularly attend many of the meetings because of the distance, every time I was able to be there it felt like a family reunion, despite the fact that this "family" hardly knew each other. Sharing a space with people who were going through similar struggles provided the safety and security that helped Chad and me in our coming out processes. For most of us, this was the first time we were able to live openly and honestly as who we were without fear of what might happen to us if we did. These meetings were a stark contrast to the world to which we all had to return, where we had to step back into our closets. For those of us who could not be ourselves in our hometowns, MAGY provided us a safe haven to be the people we knew ourselves to be. Although I took a female classmate to my high school prom, it was through a MAGY-sponsored prom that I was able to have on my arm the person who made most sense: my best friend, Chad.

No matter where our destination, it was often inside Chad's 1993 Ford Probe that we felt the most safe to be ourselves; selves that were sometimes loud, sometimes quiet, and always searching for the right song, the right story, and the right space to express ourselves. It was in that car that we felt safe enough to first come out to each other—only to take it back the next day when we were on the phone together. I heard the musical RENT for the first time in his car, which we never stopped singing until we both knew all the words and understood all the

meaning. The music of choice, however, was usually dance or techno and to those beats we invented the "car dance" before there was such a thing. Unfortunately, our dance moves in the car were not always appreciated by others and on one occasion we were chased on the highway by a big truck of guys who we assumed wanted to gay bash us. Another time, after a friend's high school band concert, some other guys in another large truck with wheels as tall as me drove up to both of us in the parking lot and started calling us derogatory names. I immediately retreated to the car as fast as my heart was beating, while Chad proceeded to approach the truck and exchange choice words. Lucky for us (and them), they soon drove off and left us to ourselves. For us, Chad's car served the many purposes of transportation, protection, and exploration. From therapy to comedy, we shared many tears and even more laughs with each other while driving around in his car. In many respects, we drove ourselves into being who we were meant to become.

When I got to college, I quickly found spaces in which my sexual identity was affirmed and accepted. Whether on the cheerleading squad or PRISM, the campus gay-straight alliance, I continued to look for people and places where I could be out and open about my sexual identity. Near my university was a small, liberal arts college that was known for being more progressive and accepting of all types of people than the university I attended. It was there during a school dance my freshman year that I met my first boyfriend. Through building relationships with other LGB individuals on and off-campus, I was able to create a network of people that supported me. Together we would eat, go to programs and events, and even drink and socialize. For these reasons, this group of people served as my safe space throughout my college years.

In addition to people and physical spaces, I found safety and support for my sexual identity exploration in virtual spaces. As a person who grew up using the Internet from a very

young age and watching as the Internet has grown and developed from that time, I have been fascinated by how technology impacts our lives. I began using the Internet in the early 1990s when there was no Google or Facebook. Mostly, there were just text-based web pages and messaging programs. For a young man growing up in a conservative area of the country and questioning his sexuality, the Internet, even with its then limited features, was a way to learn more about what I was feeling and connect with other people who were going through similar experiences.

In the early 1990s, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) was one of the few real-time Internet text messaging programs that allowed people to communicate with one another both in groups and privately. I remember the mixed feelings of excitement and fright as I discovered the IRC chat channel #GayArkansas when I was still in high school. It took me some time before I would actually enter the room and even longer until I shared with others about myself. Eventually, through chatting with other gay men on the Internet and my close friendship with Chad, I was able to come to terms with my sexuality and begin forming friendships with other gay men both on and offline. I truly believe that through my teenage and college years the Internet served as a catalyst to my sexual identity development. In addition to chatting with other gay men, I kept an online journal throughout my high school and undergraduate years. I was able to discuss my sexuality freely online in ways that I was too afraid and too scared to share in person at that time.

It is from my own experiences and the many stories shared with me by others over the years that I am interested in studying how LGB individuals experience spaces of community and safety both on and offline. This is the story I bring; the rest is the story they share.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

College can provide hope for something better for many lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB)[1] youth who may experience harassment and bullying in their middle and high schools. Dan Savage's popular YouTube channel, which has inspired more than 5,000 user-created videos and over 15 million views, and other national campaigns have affirmed the message that "it gets better." Unfortunately, such well-intentioned declarations fall short of the reality facing many students at colleges and universities today. Campus Pride's *State of Higher Education for LGBT People* report, which is based on responses from over five thousand LGBT individuals, clearly demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of LGBT faculty, staff, and students report harassment, isolation, and fear on campuses around the country (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). The report further indicates that LGBT individuals are targeted with derogatory remarks, stared at, and singled out as experts regarding LGBT issues more often than their heterosexual peers.

Additional research finds that many LGBT individuals experience a challenging campus climate and often conceal their sexual identities as a result (Dolan, 1998; Noack, 2004; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). Other identities, such as gender, race, class, and others, can further compound the silencing of LGBT identities. For instance, LGBT students of color may not choose to disclose their sexual identity because of racism already experienced in their lives, whereas White, gay men may hide their sexual identity as to not reduce their White

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[1] Although the focus of this study is on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students, research that is referenced and includes transgender or queer populations will be identified by the acronym used in the original studies.

[2] Although gay, lesbian, and bisexual terms are used to describe different types of sexual identities in this study for

and male privilege. The awareness and acceptance of LGBT college student's sexual identity

and other intersecting identities are often left to the individuals to explore and understand

themselves. It is no surprise, then, that the LGBT community often feels "invisible and isolated

on their college campuses" (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002, p. 95). These challenges can

prevent LGBT students from participating fully in the curricular or co-curricular campus

environment, while these same prejudices can limit career aspirations for LGBT faculty and staff

(Rankin, 2005).   Greater attention needs to be given to how and where LGBT college students

feel affirmed and respected in order to better serve the needs of these students.

The campus environment plays a pivotal role in the learning and development of college

students (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Strange & Banning, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005). D'Augelli (1994) suggests that the larger environment, which includes social norms,

historical time, and geographical settings, are important variables in the sexual identity

development of LGB college students. For LGB college students to grow and develop, they

need a campus environment that supports and encourages them to be who they are and what they

want to be without fear or hostility, although this can be a difficult and complex process

(Salkever & Worthington, 1998). LGB college students must negotiate which spaces are safe in

order to avoid harassment, discrimination, and even violence. Negotiating and locating safe

spaces allows LGB college students to more fully express and represent their identities within the

collegiate environment. Environments that are not conducive to LGB identity expression,

however, can make it difficult for LGB college students to develop their sexual identities.

Many LGB college students, though, still find and create safe spaces on and off-campus

that are affirming and allow them to explore their identities. Sometimes referred to as "queer"

spaces (Betsky, 1997; Morris, 2000), safe spaces can be locations for sexual expression and

identity fluidity, whereas "queering" spaces is action taken to make locations more LGBT and queer-oriented (Doan, 2007). Several of these on-campus safe spaces are informal areas that include their peer group, residence hall community, and particular classroom settings. In addition, many campuses have LGBT and queer student organizations that provide opportunities for community building and advocacy. Some colleges and universities have institutionalized spaces that are supportive of LGBT identities. Safe Space programs are institutionalized spaces that exist on some college campuses to develop heterosexual allies and provide support for LGBT students (Poynter, 2000). These programs began in the early 1990s to provide institutional support and help create a positive campus climate for LGBT individuals (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). The primary goal of Safe Space programs is to provide support and awareness of LGB people and issues on campus (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). Almost two hundred colleges and universities now have LGBT Resource Centers that offer support services for LGBT students (Consortium, 2011).

Few studies have investigated the impact and influence of safe space initiatives on the campus environment for LGBT individuals (Evans, 2002) and there lacks research on understanding off-campus safe spaces, such as local coffee shops and bars. Additionally, how multiple identities are expressed and represented within these safe spaces has not been fully investigated. Criticisms of safe spaces that are specifically on-campus call into question the perceived and actual safety and freedom of such spaces (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998, 1997; Holley & Steiner, 2005). Consequently, many students feel safer and more open to explore and share their identities in online spaces (Hash & Spencer, 2008). According to a recent national survey, gay and lesbian adults are choosing to connect online through social networking sites more often than their heterosexual counterparts (Harris Interactive, 2010). Slightly more than

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half (55%) of gay and lesbian adults state they are members of Facebook and 43% report being members of MySpace, compared with 46% and just less than a third (30%) of heterosexual adults, respectively (Harris Interactive, 2010). To ensure representativeness in the survey data with regard to age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, and household income characteristics, it is important to note that Harris Interactive employed diverse panel recruitment, scientific sampling techniques, and demographic and propensity score weighting, although the specific demographic information was not provided (Krane, Witeck, Combs, 2011).

Some researchers have suggested that gay and bisexual men use the Internet as a tool to explore their sexual identity, specifically in the early stages of coming-out (Cooper, 2002; Haworth Features Submission, 2005; Ross & Kauth, 2002). Woodland (1999) has suggested that LGB individuals use Internet technology to "gain information, ask questions, explore their identity, and discern the shape of larger communities, while also maintaining a safe level of disclosure" (p. 76). Hash and Spencer (2008) echoed similar findings, stating "the Internet offers a vast and anonymous space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people to meet others for support, information, and romance, as well as the opportunity to access limitless information on a variety of LGBT issues" (p. 238). Though a growing number of researchers have been interested in the effects technology on college students (Arend, 2005; Flower, Pascarella, & Pierson, 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kuh & Vesper, 2001; Lloyd, Dean, & Cooper, 2007), little has been written about the online experiences of LGB people (Campbell, 2004; Woodland, 2000), and much less about those who are college-aged (Lucier, 1998). Additionally, some researchers have questioned the safety, anonymity, and lack of diversity in online spaces (Alexander & Banks, 2004; Woodland, 2000).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the weaving of physical and virtual safe spaces in the lives of LGB college students. "Offline contexts always permeate and influence online situations and online situations and experiences always feed back into offline experience…the best work recognizes that the Internet is woven into the fabric of the rest of life and seeks to better understand the weaving" (Baym, 2006, p. 86). Just as college students can have places to learn outside of the classroom environment, LGB college students can also have safe spaces that are outside of the campus environment. Therefore, an aim of this study was to conceptualize a broader definition of the various safe spaces for LGB college students, including on-campus, off-campus, and online environments. Furthermore, how these various safe space environments affected LGB identity development and challenged or maintained dominant forms of sexual identity within these spaces were of additional interest in this study.

It is my goal that this research will be useful and utilized by a number of groups. First, student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty will find this study useful in several ways. Student affairs administrators can utilize the findings of this study in creating and implementing programs and services that build more inclusive campus and online environments for LGB college students. Counselors and therapists who work with LGB college students can put into practice the findings from this study to help clients identify strategies for creating safe spaces to explore their identities. Faculty members can use the results of this study to assist LGB college students with creating safe classroom environments. Faculty who specifically work in higher education and student affairs master and doctoral programs can also use the findings in this study to teach about safe spaces for LGB college students and implications for practice.

Secondly, researchers and scholars who study sexual orientation, human development, and LGB studies also can find this study helpful in understanding definitions and locations of safe spaces for LGB college students. Additionally, those studying LGB students may build upon this work and study other areas of physical and virtual safe spaces. Although this study looks specifically at the lives of LGB college students, the significance of this research could be even broader on the field of research on safe spaces and technology, which may impact fields such as social work, psychology, and sociology.

Lastly, although this study is mainly geared towards assisting faculty and staff, LGB students and their families may also find this study helpful. LGB college students can use this research to offer them further understanding of how other LGB college students locate and create safe spaces both in physical and virtual environments. An LGB student organization may utilize the findings of this study in identifying strategies for assisting members with finding support and safety on-campus. Family members of LGB college students also can use the stories shared in this study to better support and assist their loved ones in finding physical and virtual safe spaces.

Research Questions

Considering the intended purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative exploration of this phenomenon:

RQ1: How do LGB college students describe and locate physical and virtual safe spaces?

RQ2: How do LGB college students use physical and virtual safe spaces to resist and/or reinforce dominant forms of sexual identity?

RQ3: How do physical and virtual safe spaces affect the sexual identity development of LGB college students?

Operational Definitions

For clarity and consistency purposes, the following definitions were used in this study:

- *College student* is defined as a currently enrolled full-time student at the time of the study and at an institution of higher education.

- *Heterosexual* is defined as a person who identifies as a man or woman and is physically and/or romantically attracted to individuals who identify with their opposite sex on the gender binary as assigned at birth.

- *Lesbian* is defined as someone who identifies as a woman and is physically and/or romantically attracted to other women.

- *Gay* is defined as someone who identifies as a man and is physically and/or romantically attracted to other men.

- *Bisexual* is defined as a person physically and/or romantically attracted to both other and same sex individuals.

- *Queer* is defined as "an identity category, albeit one that resists categorization" (Levy & Johnson, 2011, p. 132), and challenges dominant heterosexual norms.

Methodology

Guided by social constructivism and queer theoretical perspectives (Abes, 2009; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Gamson, 2000), this narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) utilized both photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews to gather insight and understanding of how and where safe spaces are created on-campus and online by LGB college students. The gathered data in this study was analyzed using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005, 2008). Specifically, Ruona's (2005) procedures for organizing the data analysis process and Keats' (2009) method of analysis of multiple texts in narrative research were employed. Twelve LGB-

identified college students contributed their stories toward developing a deeper understanding of what safe spaces are and the implications that safe spaces on-campus and online have on the development and expression of their LGB identities. This study adds to the growing literature on the impact of physical and virtual safe spaces on LGB college students and, more specifically, the influence these spaces have on their sexual identity development.

Findings and Conclusions

In this study, several findings and themes emerged in relation to each of the particular research questions. First, themes that demonstrated how LGB college students described and located safe and unsafe spaces included (a) definitions and descriptions of safe spaces, (b) characterization of unsafe spaces, and (c) types of spaces. Second, themes that described how LGB college students used and behaved within safe and unsafe spaces included (a) queer(ing) spaces, (b) creating spaces, (c) changing spaces, and (d) behaving in spaces. Third, themes that related to the sexual identity development of LGB college students within safe and unsafe spaces included (a) identity depends on people and place and (b) coming out through safe spaces.

Based upon the findings and themes identified in this study, five conclusions are offered and discussed. First, LGB college students described the negotiation of safe and unsafe spaces as moving from safe(r) spaces to queer(ing) spaces. Second, safe and unsafe spaces affect LGB identity development and performance within these spaces. Third, safe and unsafe spaces depend on a combination of people and locations. Fourth, safe spaces are places for coping and finding support within unsafe environments. Finally, the blurred boundaries of safe and unsafe spaces often challenge the binaries of safe/unsafe and dominant forms of sexual identity. When considered together, these findings and conclusions provide a greater understanding of how and where LGB college students experience both safe and unsafe spaces.

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Delimitations

There are several delimitations to consider that define the boundaries of this study. First, including only LGB college students limited the scope of this study and, therefore, is not meant to represent but may speak to the experiences of other sexual and gender identities. Secondly, the small number of the participants in this study does not reflect the range of identity development levels and experiences LGB students have with physical and virtual safe spaces. Shallenberger (1996) explained that:

> Gay men and lesbian women are often reluctant to volunteer for studies that require them to disclose, particularly if they are not yet comfortable with their [sexual identity]. This reluctance means that those who do take part are more open than the average, and hence, not completely representative of the gay and lesbian population, as a whole (p. 200).

Therefore, because of the small sample size and nonrandom sampling, the findings of this study are limited in generalizability. Thirdly, my identity as the researcher must be considered against the findings of this study. My insider role as a gay-identified male who worked at one institution and was enrolled in another should be noted. Participants may have shared more or less with me based on how they wanted to project or protect themselves. Fourthly, the self-reported nature of the participants' responses limits the nature of the collected data because the participants may have recalled their experiences with physical and virtual safe spaces differently due to the passage of time or emotional responses to certain memories. Because of the social constructivism and queer theory stances taken in this study, however, their individual and subjective experiences, remembrances, and narratives were of most importance. Lastly, the geographical region of the Southeast where the research was conducted may have generated different findings than other areas of the country.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into six areas: an introduction, a literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and a reflective analysis. The literature review discusses in detail the relevant research concerning on-campus and online safe spaces. Topics in this chapter include queer theory, queer spaces, historical overview of the concept of safe space, institutional safe spaces, technological safe spaces, sexual identity development, and the relation of institutional and technological safe spaces to sexual identity development. The methodology chapter includes a discussion of qualitative research, social constructivism, queer theory, narrative inquiry, sampling and recruitment techniques, data collection and analysis procedures, issues of confidentiality and quality of the data, and positionality statement. The findings chapter includes campus and participant profiles and themes generated from the collected data in the study. The discussion chapter explores the conclusions as they relate to the study's findings and research questions, as well as provides implications for inclusive practice and further research. The final chapter applies a queer theoretical lens to the findings and conclusions of this study and offers additional considerations for using queer theory in higher education and student affairs research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, a review of the relevant literature related to physical and virtual safe spaces is discussed. This literature serves to inform the study's purpose of understanding physical and virtual safe spaces for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students. This work is theoretically grounded in queer theory perspectives and informed by sexual identity development theories, which are the first two areas of literature reviewed. Three aspects of queer theory, heteronormativity (Warner, 1991), performativity (Butler, 1990), and liminality (Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1909/1960), are specifically discussed as they apply to this study. Queer theory is also used in this chapter to trouble the notions of space and sexual identity development theories. Whereas queer theory and sexual identity development theories serve as the theoretical framework of this study, literature concerning institutional and technological safe spaces speaks to the environmental roles of these spaces. Therefore, the third area of literature reviewed in this chapter focuses on the history, purpose, and implications of institutional safe spaces within the classroom and campus environment. The next area of the literature review defines and describes technological safe spaces within the online context. The final two areas of this chapter connect the environmental roles of institutional and technological safe spaces to how these physical and virtual spaces support and encourage sexual identity development.

Queer Theory

Abes and Kasch (2007) call for greater attention paid to power structures, such as racism, classism, and heterosexism in student development literature. One way of doing this is through

the use of queer theory, which "critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). Queer theory is based upon the work of poststructural theorists Foucault (1976/1978), Derrida (1967/1978), and Lyotard (1984) and more recently, Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990). These queer theorists deconstructed and challenged the validity of heteronormative discourses and practices of gender and sexuality. In the 1990s, when gay and lesbian studies proliferated at many universities, the phrase *queer theory* emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the slow response given to the AIDS epidemic by state agencies and politicians (Morris, 2000). The purpose of queer theory was as "a reaction and resistance to this cold eye of do-nothing, see-nothing, hear-nothing" (Morris, 2000, p. 16).

The term *queer theory* was first invoked by Teresa de Lauretis (1991) in the introduction of an issue of the journal *differences*, entitled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," as a means of transgressing, transcending, and problematizing gay and lesbian studies. According to de Lauretis (1991), queer theory has two primary purposes: "conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences" (p. iv). At its core, queer theory resists and challenges mainstream and dominant discourses of sexual and gender identity and normative practices that marginalize, oppress, and silence the queer community (Plummer, 2005). Furthermore, "queer research invites discourse that challenges heteronormativity as well as binaries related to gender, sexual orientation, [and] religion…." (Levy & Johnson, 2011, p. 6).

Similar to Abes and Kasch's (2007) use of queer theory to understand lesbian college students' identities, three concepts of queer theory are important to consider in relation to this study, which are heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality. Taken together, these three

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tenets of queer theory provide a useful framework of understanding behavior, performance, and resistance of heteronormativity. First, heteronormativity challenges the use of heterosexuality as the norm to understand gender and sexuality (Warner, 1991) and calls for greater emphasis on gender and sexual fluidity. For example, heteronormativity categorizes sexuality and gender into two distinct groups, heterosexual/homosexual and male/female, and positions these two sexualities and genders as opposite and different from one another. Queer theory argues against essentializing sexuality or gender into distinct and fixed categories because identities consist of multiple components that are in constant flux (Foucault, 1991).

Second, queer theory contends that sexual and gender identity is socially constructed and that the expression or performance of identity is unstable and ever changing (Butler, 1990). Queer theory focuses more on incongruence, than congruence, between sex, gender, and desire (Jagose, 1996) and works to "disrupt discourses that enclose selves, pin down desires" (Morris, 2000, p. 23). According to Foucault (1976/1978), normative discourses of identities are used to maintain heteronormativity through regulatory spaces in which identities are formed, reinforced, and reproduced. Butler (1990) contends that individuals construct their sexual and gender identities through everyday behaviors or performatives (Butler, 1990) that are dependent upon "the time and place in which they exist and the individuals who enact them" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 621). Morris (2000) explained, "Ultimately, queer identities are performances…and these performances are radically unstable since the queer self is not bound by any particular label or desire" (p. 21). There is a distinction between performance and performativity: performance presupposes a preexisting subject, whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject (Osborne & Segal, 1994). Gender and sexual expression are changed both at the individual and societal level and a person's gender and sexuality are influenced both within and outside of

oneself. Therefore, sexual and gender identity are always being created and changed through

individual actions, rather than actions representing an already determined or static identity

(Butler, 1990). Since actions are never repeated in exactly the same fashion, individual identity

is always shifting because of how identity is uniquely expressed. Built upon the identity

formation theories of Foucault and Butler, queer theory counters the normative discourse of

fixed, stable identities and articulates a view that identity based on categorizes is meaningless

since identities are fluid and always in flux.

Lastly, the concept of liminality is useful in understanding binaries between sexuality,

gender, and space and forms of resistance. Liminality was first discussed by Arnold van Gennep

(1909/1960) and later further explored by Victor Turner (1967) in characterizing rites of passage

in various cultures. Liminality comes from the Latin word *limen*, meaning "threshold," which

implies a transitional state or space between two distinct and stable states or spaces (Abes &

Kasch, 2007). In terms of heteronormativity, "liminality is a resistance strategy in which

elements of heterosexuality and nonheterosexuality are incorporated into one identity that rejects

normalized definitions of either heterosexuality or nonheterosexuality" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p.

621). Therefore, within an individual state or space, persons can perform their sexuality or

gender in combination or in contradictory ways to heteronormativity. These strategies of

resistance are related to the opposition of power structures (Foucault, 1976/1978; Torres, Jones,

& Renn, 2009) that work to maintain heteronormativity.

Using queer theory in educational research, specifically in this study, is useful in a

number of ways. First, queer theory can be a useful tool to help educators understand students

(Abes & Kasch, 2007), as well as teach their students about the complexities of identities

(Morris, 2000). Using queer theory assists educators to "move outside of linear models to

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consider the influence that students are having on their environment to reshape their contexts"

(Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 633). Queer theory's emphasis on identity fluidity and complexity is

helpful in considering against linear models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979, 1996;

McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Additionally, the emphasis of queer theory on identity performance

and movement can be beneficial for educators who fight against the labeling of identity. Often,

labeling of identity has been done in damaging ways and "queer theory teaches that naming

kills" (Morris, 2000, p. 27). Instead of labeling particular identities, educators can use queer

theory to give voice in research and practice to the multiplicity of evolving and shifting

identities.[2] Unlike student affairs and higher education research on college student development,

queer theory articulates a very different view of development as always evolving and never

"arriving" at a stage of development (Abes & Kasch, 2007). From a queer theory perspective,

college students are not in a linear trajectory of developing, they are always in a state of

constantly becoming (Turner, 1967).

Queer theory is not without its criticisms and some theorists question its efficacy (Jogose,

1996). The very strengths of queer theory are sometimes referenced as its weaknesses. Some

question if queer theory is simply another way of articulating earlier tenants of the gay and

lesbian movement, such as the politics of identity and activism. Queer theory has been said to be

complementary to poststructural, postmodern, and feminist theories, which also challenge

"binary constructions of identities, the unitary nature of subjectivity, liberal ideas of the

autonomous individuals, and community as predicted on sameness" (Talburt & Steinberg, 2000,

p. 3). In addition, queer theory draws upon political practices of such groups as Queer Nation,

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[2] Although gay, lesbian, and bisexual terms are used to describe different types of sexual identities in this study for
the purpose of using a common language, how identity is expressed and performed is understood through the lens of
queer theory as fluid and multiple in nature. Therefore, even though particular identifiers are used to classify gays,
lesbians, and bisexuals in this study, movement within and outside these categories is both recognized and respected.

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ACT UP, and the Lesbian Avengers, which were political organizations involved in the gay and lesbian movement. Others take issue with the lack of definition and, therefore, an almost unlimited scope of queer theory (Jogose, 1996).

Despite these criticisms, the use of queer theory in this study as a critical theoretical lens helps challenge the complexities and fluidity of how gender and sexual identity are expressed by LGB college students in physical and virtual safe spaces. According to Ruffolo (2006), "the use of queer theory as a critical research lens can resist normalization and reject assimilationist politics [promotes acceptance of dominate behavior and culture] in order to bring about an equitable and democratic society where binary discourses are reworked" (p. 4). Tenets of queer theory, specifically heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality, provide a framework of understanding and deconstructing heteronormative discourses around sexual and gender identities in this study. Whether referring to "LGB identity" or "safe spaces," the concept of heteronormativity is useful in acknowledging the fluidity and multiplicity of participants' identities and normative discourses that resist or reinforce dominant forms of sexual and gender identities within safe spaces. Performativity is also helpful in understanding how sexual and gender identities are uniquely expressed through actions within these spaces. Lastly, liminality provides a critical means of recognizing how heteronormativity is both maintained and resisted through power structures (Foucault, 1976/1978), sometimes at the same time, within safe spaces.

Queer Spaces

Queer theory suggests that within particular spaces and throughout one's life, identities will move and shift in different ways. "Movements [queer sexualities] in queer spaces are not…progressive or linear. They are jagged, backward, upside down, discontinuous" (Morris, 2000, p. 23). Considering the notion that identity is nonlinear, Betsky (1997) explained "queer

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space" as a "misuse or deformation of a place, an appropriation of the buildings and codes of the city for [queer] purposes" (p. 5). To "queer" a space, overt action is taken to create a safe place for people to identify as they choose (Doan, 2007). Some researchers believe that queer spaces are often influenced by heterosexual and gender conformity. Castells (1983) asserted that in relation to space, gays and lesbians behave in ways that are first and foremost as men and women. Men seek to dominate space, whereas women place more emphasis on their relationships and networks within a given space. For gay men, they create physical spaces where they can congregate. In these spaces, there is often little to no visible gender variation and gay men are often masculinized (short hair, developed muscles, and tight clothes) (Doan, 2007). Lesbians, on the other hand, create less physical spaces where they can connect with one another (Castells, 1983). Instead of physical spaces, lesbian identity is represented more on the bodies of lesbians through clothing choice, hairstyle, or other accessories (Peace, 2001). Considering this, queer space for lesbians may exist and be represented in more subtle ways, such as through the use of symbols like jewelry, rainbows, or even an overt gaze (Valentine, 1996).

Adler and Brenner (1992) disagree with such a distinct difference between gay men and lesbians in their use of space and suggest that certain aspects of life necessitate differences in spaces for gay men and lesbians. Lesbians are sometimes primary caregivers and therefore choose spaces that are conducive to raising children, often suburbs and residential areas. In addition, lesbians share with other women the possibility of physical and sexual violence that may limit their interest in overt physical places, unlike gay men who often create such physical places. The authors further describe the different uses of space for lesbians than gay men as places for lesbians to be both lesbian and oppressed women. As a result, lesbian politics and their cultural spaces reflect this "double vision" collectively fighting both homophobia and

sexism (Adler & Brenner, 1992, p. 17). For bisexuals, queer spaces are often unaccommodating (Hemmings, 2002) and leave these individuals vulnerable and invisible in such spaces (Namaste, 2000). Queer spaces, like safe spaces, offer the opportunity for LGB individuals to define and use space in ways that affirm and support their sexual identity development, although this may look different depending on the person and the place. Considering the research on queer theory and space, this study specifically explored how LGB college students expressed sexual identity in safe spaces. Furthermore, understandings of how LGB college students located, used, and expressed their ever changing identities in safe spaces was informed by notions of queer theory and space in this study. In order to understand sexual identity development of LGB college students more specifically, the next section of this chapter reviews theories that apply to how LGB individuals develop in their understanding of their sexuality.

Sexual Identity Development

The literature concerning sexual identity development for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (LGB) focuses on how a person learns to accept his/her sexual orientation. While some sexual identity development models are stage processes (Cass, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), others present an alternative view of the developmental process as a lifespan or nonlinear process (D'Augelli, 1994; Rhoads, 1997; Stevens, 2004). The stage models of sexual identity development describe a linear progression from lack of awareness of sexual orientation to integration of identity. The lifespan models of sexual identity development go further to consider cultural and contextual influences within a lifespan context on development, including social norms, historical time, and geographical settings (D'Augelli, 1994). Most notable of the developmental theories of sexual identity development are Cass's (1979, 1996) model of sexual orientation identity formation, Fassinger and her colleagues' (Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn

& Fassinger, 1996) model of lesbian and gay identity formation, and D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development. Although all of these models of sexual identity development inform this work by providing a framework for understanding how LGB individuals progress in understanding their sexuality; the lifespan model of LGB identity development most closely aligned with queer theory and was of greatest use in understanding how sexual identity development may be shaped by safe spaces in this study.

Stage Models

Cass's (1979, 1996) social psychological model of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity formation (originally called homosexual identity formation) was based on her clinical work with gays and lesbians in Australia. Cass identified six stages that include a cognitive and affective component. The cognitive component indicates how individuals see themselves, whereas the affective component reflects how they feel about their own and others' perceptions of their sexual identities (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). In the *pre-stage*, individuals view themselves as heterosexual and recognize the stigma of being nonheterosexual (Cass, 1996). As self-perceptions change for the individual regarding one's views of homosexuality, conflict can increase within the person and result in either movement to a new stage or identity foreclosure (Cass, 1996).

Identity confusion is the first stage and begins with individuals becoming aware that their behaviors or feelings may be gay or lesbian. In the second stage, *identity comparison*, an individual develops a capacity to manage feelings about being lesbian or gay and being different from others in his/her life. The third stage of the model, *identity tolerance*, is characterized by the acknowledgement that one is most likely gay or lesbian and he or she begins to reach out to other members of the lesbian or gay community. During this stage, individuals may still see

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their identity as temporary and it is not until they fully accept their lesbian or gay identity that they can move to the fourth stage, *identity acceptance*. In the fourth stage, contacts within the lesbian or gay community are frequent and friendships begin to develop. By further immersing oneself into the lesbian and gay community, an individual moves into the fifth stage, *identity pride*. In the fifth stage, individuals may minimize contact with heterosexuals and focus on lesbian and gay culture, friends, and activism. In the sixth and final stage, *identity synthesis*, an individual is able to view the lesbian and gay and heterosexual communities as less of a dichotomy, and sexual identity is seen as just one aspect of the self rather than one's entire identity.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) took issue with Cass and other stage theorists (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Coleman, 1982; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Sophie, 1985/1986) who equated identity disclosure and activism with higher stages of identity development and specifically studied lesbian identity development to address their concerns. They theorized development as occurring in two areas: individual sexual identity and group membership identity. For both individual and group membership identities, the individual progresses through phases from non-awareness to (a) awareness, (b) exploration, (c) deepening and commitment, and (d) internalization and synthesis. Later, their work was validated for men (Fassinger & Miller, 1997).

Regarding the development of individual identity, *awareness* involves the individual perceiving oneself as different from heterosexual norms. During the *exploration* phase, an individual has strong sexual feelings for individuals (or a particular person) of the same sex, though sexual behavior may not be explored. At the third phase, *deepening and commitment*, the individual develops greater self-knowledge and fulfillment with one's sexual identity. In the

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final phase, *internalization and synthesis*, one's sexual identity becomes a part of one's total identity.

The group membership identity process focuses on interactions with other gay and lesbian people (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The first phase involves a person becoming aware that people have sexual orientations other than heterosexual and that there are gay and lesbian communities. In phase two, individuals explore greater knowledge about gay and lesbian people and communities. In the deepening and commitment phase, individuals make a personal commitment to be involved with the lesbian and gay community and accept the consequences of such a decision. The final stage of the group membership identity process, internalization and synthesis, involves openly accepting being a member of the gay and lesbian community. McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) model of lesbian and gay identity development allows for individuals to be at different phases of development regarding individual and group membership identity, as well as the two processes could influence and interact with development of the other.

The benefits of stage models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979, 1996; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996) include "offer[ing] parallel theories of human development in progression from less to more complex ways of understanding self and society" and "conceptualiz[ing] development in a way that can be understood and applied in campus settings" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 35). Bilodeau & Renn (2005) cite a number of criticisms of these models, however. Stage models have been criticized for prescribing a universal linear development trajectory and suggesting that there is an endpoint, which is reportedly the healthiest outcome. Queer theory also troubles the conceptualization of stage models of sexual identity as linear and static, instead arguing that that identity is fluid and always in flux (Abes & Kasch, 2007). In addition, these models ignore individual differences of gender, race, class,

culture, and so on. Many of these stage models are also not specific to college environments or

experiences and were developed with small empirical samples. Furthermore, "many of the

models were developed based on the experiences of gay men and then generalized to include

lesbians" (Fassinger, 1998, p. 15). In light of these criticisms, D'Augelli (1994) proposed a

lifespan model of sexual identity development.

Lifespan Model

D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development

emphasizes the importance of a person functioning within environmental contexts. According to

D'Augelli, three sets of variables are important: (a) the individual's actions and subjective

interpretations of experiences, (b) interactions with important people in one's life, and (c) the

larger environment, which includes social norms, historical time, and geographical settings.

D'Augelli believed that no two individuals develop in the same way, because people change and

develop differently across their entire lifespan in response to different environmental conditions

and physical and biological changes that affect them. For these reasons, D'Augelli's (1994)

model seems most appropriate to understanding how sexual identity development occurs in safe

spaces both on campus and online and is chosen as the primary theory of sexual identity

development to inform this study.

D'Augelli (1994) identified six interactive processes involved in lesbian, gay, and

bisexual identity development. In the first process, *exiting heterosexual identity*, one recognizes

that feelings and attractions are not heterosexual and begins to tell others about his/her sexual

identity. *Developing a personal lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity status* is the second process

and involves a person interpreting what gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity means in his/her life.

The third process of *developing a lesbian, gay, or bisexual social identity* is characterized by

creating a support group of people who are aware of and accept one's sexual identity. The fourth

process, *becoming a lesbian, gay, or bisexual offspring*, involves revealing sexual identity to

parents and handling parents' reactions after such a disclosure. *Developing a lesbian, gay, or*

bisexual intimacy status is the process by which a person learns how to relate intimately to a

significant same-sex partner, which can be especially difficult in achieving due to a lack of

positive, open lesbian and gay couples in society. Lastly, *entering a lesbian, gay, or bisexual*

community involves making a decision about how involved one is in larger lesbian and gay

communities.

The strengths for the lifespan and other nonlinear models of sexual identity development

are that these models "account for context of identity" and "illuminate processes as well as

outcomes of identity development" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 35). In support of a lifespan

perspective, researchers have documented the variety of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity

development and provided evidence that such development occurs over a wide age range

(D'Augelli, 1991; Evans & Broido, 1999; Evans & Herriott, 2004; Kahn, 1991; Rhoads, 1994;

Savin-Williams, 1995; Sears, 1991; Stevens, 2004). Some limitations of lifespan models of

sexual identity development are that "many were developed with small empirical samples or

were not based on empirical data" and "many are not specific to college environment or

experience" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 35).

Models within the College Environment

In response to criticisms around sexual identity development models being normalized

outside the context of campus environments, Stevens (2004) and Rhoads (1997) explored gay

identity development in male college students and Abes and Jones (2004) investigated identity

development in lesbian college students. Stevens's study resulted in a conceptual lifespan model

of gay male college student identity development. Alternately, Rhoads's (1997) study did not attempt to develop a theoretical model, rather sought "localized understandings…to offset limitations of developmental stage models" (p. 461). Likewise, Abes and Jones (2004) study did not result in a theoretical model, but provided "a process of lesbian identity construction that relied on the integration of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development" (p. 618) and a deeper understanding of the relationship between sexual orientation and other identity dimensions, such as race, social class, and religion.

Stevens's (2007) model of gay college student identity development builds upon two foundational assumptions: gay identity development often occurs during the college years and gay identity development often occurs simultaneously with the development of other identities, such as race and gender. Noting the gap in the literature regarding the important roles of other identities and environmental contexts, Stevens sought to understand (a) which critical incidents contributed to gay identity development, (b) the meaning attached to those critical incidents, (c) how the college environment influenced identity development, and (d) how other dimensions of identity intersected with gay identity. Using a qualitative, grounded theory approach, Stevens followed the traditions of D'Augelli (1994) and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) in developing a lifespan model of gay identity development for male college students. The model is based on the experiences of eleven undergraduate gay male students who attended a large, mid-Atlantic university near a major metropolitan area. Three individual interviews were held with each participant that built upon and clarified the themes discovered throughout the process. An optional focus group was also conducted with the participants to confirm the conceptual model.

Stevens found that although the process of gay identity development varied by participant, individual comfort with one's sexual identity assisted with integration of gay identity

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within the college environment, including classrooms, residence halls, and dining halls. Participants evaluated the campus environment in relation to their sexual identity based on past experiences, perceptions, and sense of empowerment. Stevens's model of gay identity development comprised of five integrative categories that influence one central category. Similar to other lifespan models, individuals continuously encounter each of these categories as they continuously evolve in their identities. Each of the integrative categories are intertwined, and all work together to construct the central category.

The five integrative categories of Stevens's model include (a) self-acceptance, (b) disclosure to others, (c) individual factors, (d) environmental influences, and (e) exploration of multiple identities. *Self-acceptance* is the entry point to the model and is the process of coming to terms with one's gay identity and coming out to oneself. This category does not occur independently of the category of *disclosure to others*. The most significant disclosures of sexual identity include first disclosure, disclosure to parents, and disclosure to supportive others. First disclosures were often to close friends, other sexual minorities, or a combination of both. When disclosing to supportive others, individuals develop support networks. These perceived support networks, combined with confidence and self-assurance, personally held stereotypes, feelings of rejection and isolation, and internalized homophobia, comprise the category of *individual factors*. The context for individual factors is set and manipulated by *environmental factors*, which include settings internal and external to the college campus, including various relationships, locations, signs, symbols, resources, discriminatory incidents, and stereotypes. Finally, *exploration of other identities* occurs as a consequence of experiencing the central category of *finding empowerment*. Within the central category of finding empowerment, individuals move from accepting to embracing their gay identity, and shift from a contextual to a

solid and internal definition of gay identity. Once individuals have a sense of empowerment, they are able to explore how their sexual orientation intersects with other dimensions of their identity, such as gender, race, and religion.

While Stevens's model adds to the literature regarding gay identity development for college students, its application must be employed cautiously based on limitations to the study. The small sample size at one institution vastly limits the findings. Additionally, the proximity of the institution to a major metropolitan area may have influenced the climate of acceptance in the area, thereby influencing the students' processes of self-acceptance and finding empowerment (Stevens, 2007). Although it may be tempting to broadly apply Stevens's model to all gay male college students, it is critical to balance the concepts of the model with the individual experiences of students since the exploration of gay identity is a complex and evolving process.

Rhoads's (1997) study attempted to address this balance by shifting from a traditional research approach that seeks to identify universal models to a postmodern perspective that illustrates the unique and lived experiences of individuals. Rhoads contended that stage and lifespan models of identity development promote overgeneralization and risk further marginalizing individuals who do not reach the pinnacle of development. Furthermore, he cautioned that generalized models initially serve to reflect a phenomenon, but can inevitably shape a culture in unintended ways. "The challenge is to be as knowledgeable as possible of the connections that cut across the identity processes of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, and yet recognize the actual and potential differences inherent in such a mutable process" (Rhoads, 1997, p. 479). By focusing on the complexity of students' identities through localized rather than generalized understandings, Rhoads argued that colleges and universities are more likely to build diverse learning environments for students.

Designed to fill a gap in the literature regarding gay and bisexual identity development for male college students, the study was built upon the idea that culture and identity are intricately connected and interactive. Rhoads contended that while college campuses tend to be more liberal than mainstream society, the campus culture still values heteronormative behaviors and identities. Because of this, students seek a subculture of similar students living outside cultural norms to work toward a positive gay or bisexual identity.

Rhoads conducted a three-year ethnographic study at a large, research university in the eastern United States and collected multiple forms of data, including participant observation, formal and informal interviews, key informants, and document analysis. Snowball sampling resulted in 40 male participants who identified as gay or bisexual. The majority of participants were upperclassmen and graduate students, and most were White.

The data collected revealed commonalities and significant differences in how the students navigated their gay or bisexual identity development process. Rhoads termed the common connections, *webs of connection*. The webs of connection include space, style, and substance. *Space* refers to the sites of social interaction in which individuals explore and express their gay or bisexual identities. Often gay and bisexual students "hang out" in public spaces as a way to build community and demonstrate to both heterosexuals and the gay community that they exist. The nature of these interactions is referred to as *style*. Camping, or acting in an effeminate and flamboyant manner, was the most commonly addressed style. While many of the participants did not participate in camping, the style was referenced as a common way to build community and create an identity that could not be accessed by heterosexuals. Finally, *substance* refers to the content of social interactions. Most participants noted a marked increase in the explicit topics and political nature of conversations when talking with fellow gay or bisexual students, as

opposed to interacting with their heterosexual peers. It is important to note that these webs were

not suggested to generalize the experience, instead they were offered as points of reference.

Rhoads found three significant differences, or *points of tension*, in the development

process of gay and bisexual college males: gay politics, racial differences, and issues of

bisexuality. Participants noted two opposing points of view regarding gay politics. Some

students chose to adhere to an activist mindset in which one was expected to fully embrace his

gay or bisexual identity, make it known to those around them, and work toward equal

recognition and rights for that identity. Other students chose a social constructionist view by

refusing to acknowledge labels and encouraging individuals to seek their own meanings of

identity. Rhoads also found significant differences in how White students and those from

marginalized races came to terms with and expressed their gay or bisexual identities. Those

from marginalized groups were less likely to express their identity, and felt compelled to choose

between their sexual and racial identities. Lastly, Rhoads discovered two primary ways in which

individuals defined sexual orientation and viewed bisexuality: a binary of straight and gay and a

continuum of sexuality.

Like previously discussed research studies, a major limitation of Rhoads's study is the

sample demographics. The most notable of these demographics is that the majority of the

participants were upperclassmen and graduate students. Rhoads attributes this to a tendency for

individuals to accept their gay or bisexual identity later in the college years. As a result, this

sample neglects the important perspectives of those students still navigating the beginning phases

of their identity development process. Furthermore, the small number of students from

underrepresented minority backgrounds also limits the scope of this research study.

In another study looking at sexual identity development within the collegiate environment, Abes and Jones (2004) explored several areas of lesbian college students' sexual identity, including: (1) perceptions of their sexual orientation identity, (2) how dimensions of identity, such as religion, race, gender, and social class, interacted with perceptions, and (3) how meaning-making capacity shaped perceptions. Abes and Jones (2004) grounded their study in a constructivist theoretical framework and used methods of narrative inquiry to uncover the complexity of the stories told by participants. Using purposeful sampling, 8 traditional-age (18-24) lesbian undergraduate college students that all attended a large public research university in the Midwest were included in this study. Three, in-depth interviews were completed with each participant, which included open-ended interview questions that were designed to elicit stories.

From stories that the participants shared, Abes and Jones (2004) found two key findings. First, the authors found extensive variation between and among participant's sexual orientation and other identity dimensions. Second, the authors found that the process of "lesbian identity construction relied on the integration of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development" (Abes & Jones, 2004, p. 618). The results of this study indicate that meaning-making structures, which are organizational assumptions that are externally or internally generated (Kegan, 1994), "act as filters between contextual influences and self-perceptions of the content of lesbian identity" (Abes & Jones, 2004). *Contextual* influences include family background, peer group, social norms, and stereotypes (Jones, 1997), whereas *content* describes how one understands their identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). "This relationship between contextual influences, meaning-making capacity, and college students' perceptions of their identity illuminates how multiple dimensions of identity are thought to interact and extends existing theories of sexual orientation identity development in a more integrated direction" (Abes & Jones, 2004, p. 624).

The authors recommend that this integration of contextual influences, meaning-making, and content of students' perceptions is necessary for lesbian students to internally construct their sexual orientation identity and its relationship with other dimensions of identity.

In comparing the findings of this study to previous models of sexual identity development, Abes and Jones (2004) found that "each individual story was richly and exquisitely unique, thus defying the neatness of stage theories" (p. 630). The complexities of the findings of this study are especially important to consider in regards to how lesbian identity development is impacted by contextual influences, which may include contexts such as safe physical and virtual spaces, and how other identity dimensions interact and intersect with sexual identity. It should be noted, however, that this study and its findings are most limited in the sampling strategies that were employed, which included participants from only one institution and likely did not reach women who may be uncomfortable with their sexual identity.

Summary of Sexual Identity Development Models

Each of the models of sexual identity development discussed in this section provides understanding of how LGB individuals grow and change in their awareness of their sexuality. As evidenced in these models, supportive environments and contexts are important elements to whether a person does or does not develop in their sexual identity. For this reason, informal and formal spaces where individuals can feel safe enough and supported enough to be themselves are valuable. In this next section, the notion of "safe spaces" is considered within different contexts and how these locations play a role in the sexual identity development of LGB college students.

<div align="center">

Institutional and Technological Safe Spaces

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The metaphor of "safe space" has become a part of the lexicon of higher education, especially as it relates to classrooms and diversity programs. Redmond (2010) stated that, "the

creation of safe space is invoked as a goal toward which educators should strive" (p. 4). Some

faculty members and staff try to create "safe spaces" in their classrooms and programs to

facilitate open dialogue and sharing of their students. Unfortunately, there are few common

understandings about the meaning of safe spaces and effective creation of safe spaces in

classrooms and on-campus (Holley & Steiner, 2005) and even less understanding of such places

online. To provide some historical perspective, the concept of safe space was developed through

the women's movement. During this time, safe spaces "implie[d] a certain freedom to speak and

act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance" (Kenney, 2001, p. 24).

Furthermore, safe spaces were not only a physical space, but also a space for women to come

together and build community (Kenney, 2001). Although some of the first safe spaces were gay

bars and feminist consciousness raising groups during the 1960s, many LGB students today

continue to look for safety and support on their college campuses.

In a qualitative study of the college decision-making process and retention of Black gay

men (BGM), Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVitas (2008) found that the students in their study

stressed the fact that they went to college to "come out" and therefore looked for and chose a

college that provided space to come out and live freely. In another study, Gortmaker and Brown

(2006) found differences between closeted or out lesbian and gay students about their

perceptions of the campus climate and experiences. Students who were out perceived the

climate more negatively than students who were closeted, whereas closeted students felt more of

a need to hide their identities from students, faculty, and healthcare providers. Both groups

reported hearing the most anti-gay remarks, receiving unfair treatment, and needing to hide their

identities from other students. As these studies demonstrate, the existence or inexistence of safe

spaces does play a role in how out and open LGB students feel they can be on their campuses.

Institutional Safe Spaces

On many college campuses, LGBT centers and offices, as well as student organizations, programs, services, and even some classrooms, serve as *institutional safe spaces* where students, faculty, and staff can feel a greater sense of belonging and community (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). In this section, I will discuss research that looks closely at the positive and negative aspects of two different types of institutional safe spaces (e.g., classrooms and Safe Space programs) to offer a deeper understanding of the impact these spaces in particular and other on-campus spaces in general have on college students.

Classrooms as safe spaces. Safe spaces within the classroom environment have been described in various disciplines, including earth science (Toynton, 2006), drama (Hunter, 2008), nursing (Rieck & Crouch, 2007), urban and regional planning (Frusciante, 2008), and social work (Cain, 1996; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Hyde & Ruth, 2002). In a review of literature on safe classrooms, Barrett (2010) found similar elements of comfort, expression of identity, and risk taking. A common definition of the safe classroom is that it is "a metaphorical space in which students are sufficiently comfortable to take social and psychological risks by expressing their individuality (particularly their thoughts, beliefs, opinions, experiences, and creativity)" (Barrett, 2010, p. 3). Working from this definition, the creation of safety in the classroom allows students to freely and openly express their ideas and identities. For LGB students, this might include sharing about their sexuality within classroom discussions and through their papers and projects.

A safe classroom space does not necessarily refer to an environment without discomfort, struggle, or pain, however (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Being safe is not the same as being comfortable. To grow and learn, students often must confront issues that make them uncomfortable and force them to struggle with who they are and what they believe (Boostrom,

1998; Holman & Freed, 1987; Van Soest, 1996). However, if students are to risk self-disclosure, the rewards (e.g., personal growth and becoming a better student) must outweigh the penalties (e.g., possible embarrassment or ridicule or fear of receiving a lower grade).

Some authors have raised concern that safe classrooms might result in a nonacademic environment that stifles student learning (Boostrom, 1998; Weissglass, 1997). When trying to create a safe space, instructors may err on the side of trying to make the classroom stress-free by making it conflict-free. Boostrom (1997) argued that the metaphor of "safe space" is an emerging metaphor for classroom life, according to which: (1) each person is isolated, (2) this isolation is both physical and psychic, (3) each person can become less isolated by expressing his/her diverse individuality, and (4) students thrive in a classroom in which individuality is freely expressed. Although Boostrom (1997) found that "the metaphor offers a hopeful response to pervasive concerns about individual isolation in an increasingly stressful world it also may unintentionally prohibit critically assessing someone else's work or even expressing the belief that some people's achievements might be better" (p. 1). Put another way, "when everyone's voice is accepted, no one's voice can be criticized" (Boostrom, 1997, p. 22). Boostrom (1998) suggested that the construction of the classroom as a safe space for students may run counter to the traditional mission of higher education, which is to promote student critical thinking and intellectual development. The author argued that creating safe spaces in classrooms could unintentionally undermine critical thinking. Boostrom (1998) recommended for students to be vulnerable and exposed, even sometimes requiring them to be unsafe and uncomfortable.

Barrett (2010) also offers four critiques of the safe classroom, including (a) the impact on safety on student intellectual development; (b) the impossibility of safety for students in marginalized and oppressed populations, indeed, for all students; (c) the challenges of assessing

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student learning in safe environments; and (d) ambiguity in defining safety for students. To provide a safe environment for students to freely express their thoughts, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes that further their own positions of power and privilege (as is the case when students are granted the safety to express homophobic, racist, sexist, or other derogatory remarks without challenge) is to, simultaneously, further the marginalization and oppression of those who are targets of such remarks. On the other hand, to contest such expressions contributes to a lack of safety for students making such comments, who are now the objects of judgment and censure. For Barrett (2010), the question becomes for whom and from whom is the classroom or campus intended to be a safe space?

To understand how safe the classroom is for lesbian and gay undergraduates, DeSurra and Church (1994) conducted a study to investigate students' sense of marginalization or alienation within the college classroom. The researchers created two continuums to represent their findings. The first continuum is called *marginalizing-centralizing*. On one end of the continuum, *marginalizing*, explicit homophobia on the part of instructors and students in class and implicit avoidance of issues of sexual identity when they arose in the classroom existed. On the other end of the continuum, *centralizing*, planned and unplanned inclusion of gay and lesbian views were displayed. The second set of continuums, *self-assured to self-conscious*, describe the variety of strategies gay and lesbian students use to cope with classroom situations. These responses ranged from direct confirmation or announcement of sexual orientation in the classroom to remaining closeted, not responding, or dropping out of school. For sexual minorities, the classroom can provide both a closeting and comforting space that both denies and affirms their identities. One intervention for creating more inclusive environments in the

classrooms and on-campus for LGB students is Safe Space programming, which will be discussed in the next section.

Safe Space programs. Toward the late 1980s, LGBT and queer (LGBTQ) faculty, staff, and students became more visible and demanding of their rights and academic freedoms on college campuses (Dilley, 2002). As a result of this increased visibility, inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity or gender expression to equal opportunity statements and nondiscrimination policies were added by some institutions (Zemsky, 2004). Robison (1998) explained that "non-discrimination policies, if enforced and implemented, provide substantial protections for LGBTQ students and symbolically express that LGBTQ participation and contribution to the campus community are valued and affirmed" (p. 58). Creating a policy, though, was one thing; actually establishing a sense of equality on campus was another. Therefore, in the early 1990s, Safe Space programs began appearing on several college campuses to demonstrate institutional support and create a more positive climate for LGBT people (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002).

Although it is unclear where the idea for Safe Space programs originated (Poynter & Tubbs, 2007), the earliest reference is a Ball State University program called SAFE On Campus (Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Student Association, 1992). Today, many college campuses have Safe Space programs that have been documented throughout the literature (Evans, 2002; Henquinet, Phibbs, &, Skoglund, 2000; Hothem & Keen, 1998; Poynter & Schroer, 1999; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). Institutions call these programs by different names, including such titles as *Safe Space*, *Safe Zone*, *Safe Harbor*, *SAFE on Campus*, and *Allies*. Regardless of the name of the Safe Space programs, the concept of safe spaces generates from the need to identify, educate, and support campus members who are

concerned about the well-being of LGBTQ students (Hothem & Keane, 1998). The overarching

goal of Safe Space programs is to increase visibility, support, and awareness of LGBTQ people

and issues on campus (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg,

2002). Other outcomes of these programs include "improving the campus climate, increasing

awareness, enhancing conversations around LGBTQ issues, providing safe space, educating and

providing skills to members to confront homophobia, transphobia, biphobia or heterosexism"

(Poynter & Tubbs, 2007, pp. 122-123).

Just as the names of Safe Space programs differ, the structure of these programs can look

very different on various campuses. On some campuses, Safe Space participants must attend a

training session of varying lengths before receiving a safe space marker. On other campuses,

people receive a Safe Space marker simply by requesting one (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg,

2002). Safe Space markers are a hallmark of these programs and are often stickers, buttons, or

signs that incorporate a pink triangle, rainbow, or the word "ally," or a combination of all three,

which are displayed on office doors or within living spaces (Poynter & Tubbs, 2007). These

markers signify that a faculty or staff member, as well as a student, is knowledgeable and

supportive of LGBTQ issues. Poynter and Tubbs (2007) list other components of Safe Space

programs, which may include listservs, advisory board/committee, web page resources,

assessment, periodic socials, and identifiable objects such as key chains and pens.

Theoretically, Safe Space programs are important declarations of inclusion and

acceptance for LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students on college campus (Sanlo, Rankin, &

Schoenberg, 2002). Poynter and Tubbs (2007) suggested that because of the lack of research and

comprehensive information about Safe Space programs, "these programs can still be based on

little shared knowledge or experience" (p. 123). In one of the few studies of Safe Space

programs on college campuses, Evans (2002) conducted a critical ethnographic evaluation of a Safe Zone project and found that the project had a positive impact on the visibility and support of LGBTQ people and issues on campus. As a visibility program, Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg (2002) agreed that, "safe zone programs appear to be extremely successful" (p. 99). When an LGBTQ student sees a Safe Space sign or poster displayed on campus, they become aware that they are welcomed in that area. Evans (2002) found that not only LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students were positively affected by campus safe spaces, but so were heterosexual allies. Washington and Evans (1991) define an ally as "a person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population" (p. 195). Heterosexual participants spoke of "increased personal awareness, desire to further educate themselves, and struggle to combat personal biases related to sexual orientation in order to be effective allies" (Evans, 2002, p. 537).

Although there are demonstrated successes of Safe Space programs (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007), the practice of putting the theory of safe space programs into practice does not always hold up to its promise. Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg (2002) offered several practical and ethical issues that may prevent these programs from being effective. Safe Space programs tend to be labor and knowledge intensive, often facilitated entirely by volunteers. There have been some incidents where anti-LGBTQ people have become Safe Space participants and furthered the victimization of the LGBTQ community. For offices that house multiple faculty and staff, there can be confusion about where and who is the safe space within an office that is marked by a sticker. Gaumnitz (1996) noted that Safe Space markers may inadvertently suggest to others that a person is a trained counselor about sexual orientation issues. An

additional concern is that by offering support for one group of students, another group may feel

discouraged to seek services. Harassment directed at faculty, staff, and students is often feared

and has even been experienced because of having a Safe Space marker displayed. Some markers

are defaced through acts of vandalism. It has been argued that these programs can single out a

specific population for "special" treatment (Poynter, 2000). It has been also questioned whether

some heterosexual participants only participate because it has become the "politically correct"

thing to do. Finally, some administrators may point to campus Safe Space programs as

demonstration that LGB issues are being addressed while more significant underlying issues

facing the community may be ignored (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002).

Technological Safe Spaces

As demonstrated in the previous discussion of institutional safe spaces, constructing safe

spaces on-campus can be a "difficult and complex process" (Salkever & Worthington, 1998, p.

193). Similarly, virtual safe spaces present their own challenges and opportunities for the LGBT

community, as well as for those who research and work with these students on college campuses.

In this section, a definition and discussion of technological safe spaces, as well as implications

for student affairs research and practice, are provided.

Oldenburg (1989) introduced the community building concept of a "third place" that is

separate from home and work. In this informal space, individuals are able to feel a greater sense

of connection and interaction with others. Gay bars, which were mentioned earlier, have

historically served as a "third place" for both community formation, as well as access points into

the broader LGB community (Campbell, 2004). Other sites, such as New York City's

boardinghouses, bathhouses, cafeterias, public parks, and even street corners, have also been

documented as locations for gay men to express and explore their gay identities (Chauncey,

1994). Gay bars emerged as "important sites for people interested in same-sex sexual relationships to meet and to develop a sense of shared experience" (Beemyn, 1997, p. 3). To be gay or lesbian in these settings represented more than simply engaging in particular sexual practices, it also meant membership in a larger community (Campbell, 2004).

Making the comparison to these physical-world gay bars, Campbell (2004) described online LGBTQ communities as "safe spaces for queer-identified individuals to congregate, fashion friendships, affirm their sexual identities, locate (cyber)sexual partners, and build supportive communities" (p. 53). Although Campbell (2004) provided a description of online safe spaces, technological safe spaces need to be defined in broader terms than just online communities. *Technological safe spaces* are virtual sites of information and communities that support the exploration, formation, and/or (re)production of identity. Technological safe spaces are as diverse as the people who access them. These sites may include websites, bulletin boards, chat rooms, social networking sites, pornography, among others. The virtual location of these spaces may be of less importance than the individual's perceptions and feelings of being safe in those spaces.

Some scholars have undertaken a critique of the relative safety of online spaces, which must be considered before discussing the implications of these spaces in student affairs research and practice. In a review of current literature on computer-assessed writing pedagogies that wrestle with issues of sexuality, Alexander and Banks (2004) troubled the notion of online safe spaces in a number of ways. First, they note serious concerns about "the representation of difference, particularly race and ethnicity, on the Internet, including one's desire to hide his or her (or *hir*) ethnic or racial background, or the inability to make a dent in the invariably White space" (p. 280). Further, "the safe spaces of the Internet seem limited to those with basic access

and technical know-how, creating sites for those who are privileged enough to afford them"
(Alexander & Banks, 2004, p. 280). Although most colleges and universities now offer Internet
access to students, this raises questions about who is participating and publishing in online safe
spaces.

The question of how "safe" safe spaces are must also be asked. Woodland (1999) argued
that, "users concerned about confidentiality should understand that almost any electronic system
is subject to eavesdropping and that any communal norms are subject to individual digression"
(p. 427). In other words, in online spaces, confidentiality can never truly be guaranteed and
agreed upon standards of online behavior are always open to individual interpretation. In
considering the safety of online spaces, Alexander and Banks (2004) drew the analogy between
sex educators moving from saying "safe sex" to saying "safer sex" and, therefore, recommended
that online spaces should more appropriately be called safer spaces—not safe. They went further
to argue that online spaces may also run the risk of being too safe and then isolate the LGBTQ
community from the larger online world. Woodland (2000) similarly suggested that, like in the
real world, the LGBT community runs the risk of being ghettoized online. Alexander and Banks
(2004) explained this idea further in stating that "the power that LGBTQ voices carry is
diminished as they are relegated to a corner of the cyberworld—you know, the gay part of the
virtual town" (p. 281). This results in the larger online world missing out on "the distinctive
vision, insight, and critique that many queers have to offer about intimacy, communication,
sexuality, and gender" (Alexander & Banks, 2004, p. 282). Despite these critiques, Alexander
and Banks (2004) concluded that online spaces are "safer spaces for the discussion of LGBT
issues in particular and sexuality in general" (p. 282). LGBT individuals can experiment with

their identities and gain further insight and appreciation for difference in online spaces (Alexander & Banks, 2004).

As discussed previously, Safe Space programs do exist to create supportive and inclusive campus communities at many colleges and universities today. However, the question of how educators are helping LGB students, as well as other college students, build safe(r) and more supportive communities online remains unanswered. A growing number of researchers have been interested in the effects technology is having on college students (Arend, 2005; Flower, Pascarella, & Pierson, 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kuh & Vesper, 2001; Lloyd, Dean, & Cooper, 2007), but little has been written about the online experiences of LGB people (Campbell, 2004; Woodland, 2000), and much less about those who are college-aged (Lucier, 1998). Much of the research that has been conducted often looks at the sexual behaviors of men who have sex with men (Chaney & Dew, 2003; Rhodes, McCoy, Wilkin, & Wolfson, 2009). Lucier (1998) claimed that, "the Internet can be an ally for LGBT students and student organizations" (p. 401). Further research is needed to understand the extent to which the Internet serves the needs and functions as a safe space for LGB college students. Hash and Spencer (2008) encouraged researchers to also use online technologies to reach out to and study the lives of LGB people. In the next section, physical and virtual safe spaces will be discussed in relation to their possible roles in sexual identity development.

Safe Spaces in Relation to Sexual Identity Development

Research demonstrates that LGBTQ students often find campus environments to be unwelcoming and unfriendly (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). Without the right amount of support and encouragement, it can be difficult for LGBTQ college students to develop healthy identities, which can compromise their academic performance (Slater, 1993). In this

section, the institutional and technological safe spaces are connected to how they support and encourage the sexual identity development of LGB college students.

Institutional

"Students in the early stages of homosexual identity formation are searching to find what it means to be homosexual and whether such knowledge applies to them directly" (Engelken, 1998, p. 24). As evidenced in both the stage and lifespan models of sexual identity, information and knowledge about LGB identity are important aspects to facilitate growth and development during the coming out process. This information allows a person to consider whether it aligns with one's personal identity. Institutional safe spaces often provide this information and resources to those who enter the spaces. The availability of information can assist LGB college students with their sexual identity development as they compare and make sense of their identities in contrast to what they learn.

Safe spaces on-campus often facilitates opportunities for meaningful relationships to take place and quality interaction to occur, which are important to the sexual identity development of LGBTQ college students (Engelken, 1998). Faculty and staff can assist LGB students in creating positive curricular and co-curricular environments that allow for intimate sharing and bonding with each other. Some examples include providing course materials and discussions about LGBTQ life and culture, as well as reflection activities in Alternative Spring Break programs, and facilitating interfaith dialogues around sexuality and faith (Engelken, 1998).

Furthermore, it is important for LGB college students to see themselves represented in campus life and faculty and staff can serve as role models for these students. Engelken (1998) explained that, "these role models testify to the possibility of the positive integration of sexuality with the rest of one's life" (p. 28). For LGB college students, these role models can be

invaluable in their growth and understanding of their own sexual identity development. The same hostile and oppressive environment that exists for the student also exists for the LGB professional, though, and this can inhibit some faculty and staff from being open about their sexual identities (Engelken, 1998). Therefore, a safe environment must be present for faculty and staff, as well as students, to encourage and support being out about one's sexual identity.

Technological

In considering the different models of sexual identity development of LGBT individuals (Bilodeau, 2005; Cass, 1979, 1996; D'Augelli, 1994; Rhoads, 1997; Stevens, 2004), there are several potential influences that technological safe spaces may have on the coming out and sexual identity development of LGBT individuals. For example, during the second stage, *identity comparison*, of Cass's (1979) social psychological model of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity formation, gathering information and making contact with other LGBT people is very important (Lucier, 2000). Technological safe spaces can serve as a very useful tool in gathering more information and resources about LGBT issues that may not be readily accessible to students, especially if their college or university is small or located in a rural area.

Most of the information online can be accessed anonymously, which can provide a level of anonymity that functions as a safe haven to students exploring their sexual identities (Lucier, 1998). Woodland (1999) similarly explained that for many LGB individuals "the distance that computer-mediated communication allows the kind of 'safe space' where people can live a virtual life apparently free from many of the oppressive forces that threaten jobs, friendships, personal safety, and even lives in the physical communities in which they live" (p. 79). The performance of an identity online can serve as a rehearsal for acting out that identity offline (Woodland, 1999), which can be helpful for individuals coming to terms with their sexual

identity. For some LGB students, identities they practice and information they gather and explore online may help them in their coming out process.

In Stevens's (2004) model of gay college student identity development, the category of *disclosure to others* includes first disclosure, disclosure to parents, and disclosure to supportive others. When disclosing to supportive others, individuals develop support networks. Gay college men, as well as lesbians and bisexuals, may be sharing for the first time or practicing how to disclose their sexual identities through the use of online chats and bulletin boards. These forms of communication over the Internet may also serve as spaces that are sites of social interaction in which students are able to explore and express their LGBT identities, as Rhoads's (1997) *webs of connection* theory might suggest. The webs of connection include space, style, and substance. *Space* refers to the sites of social interaction in which individuals explore and express their identities. The nature of these interactions is referred to as *style*. Camping, or acting in an effeminate and flamboyant manner, was the most commonly addressed style. Finally, *substance* refers to the content of social interactions. Most participants in Rhoads's (1997) study noted a marked increase in the explicit topics and political nature of conversations when talking with fellow LGBT students, as opposed to interacting with their heterosexual peers. Technological safe spaces appear to be spaces where style and substance can be developed.

Woodland (1999) found that in online spaces, LGBT students can "ask questions, form hypotheses, test evidence, develop a personal voice and discourse style, see themselves as members of a community, and form themselves into thinking, writing, acting selves that they may (or may not) transfer to their lives offline" (p. 77). Through their use of technological safe spaces, it may also "speed up the identity development process" (Woodland, 1999, p. 79). Several additional roles that online technologies may play in the construction of identity for

LGBT individuals are offered by Alexander and Banks (2004). First, they found that "online spaces provide options for LGBT people or those questioning the rigidity of sexual and gender roles in our culture to rehearse and role-play identity with some limited degree of safety" (p. 284). They also suggest that heterosexuality and heternormativity play an interactive role in online spaces, whether queer or otherwise. Lastly, the way that a person performs queer identity online may look distinctly different than one's offline identity.

Chapter Summary

As explained in this chapter, queer theory serves as the theoretical position by which to understand the complexities of identity within physical and virtual spaces in this study. Researching these spaces through a queer theory lens provides a critical perspective for understanding and challenging how gender and sexual identity are expressed and represented by LGB college students in this study. Furthermore, sexual identity development theories provide a theoretical framework for conceptualizing how sexual identity development occurs and how physical and virtual safe spaces may play a role in facilitating movement for LGB college students in their sexual identity development.

In this review of literature, institutional and technological safe spaces were also considered in relation to sexual identity development. Although some institutions do have programs and services for LGB college students, little research was located in this review that has assessed the effectiveness of these initiatives. Evans (2002) study of an LGBTQ Safe Zone project was one of the few studies that studied the outcomes of a single Safe Space program. A number of studies have studied safe spaces in the classroom (Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998; DeSurra & Church, 1994; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Weissglass, 1997). Most of these authors studied perceptions of the classroom climate from the educator's perspective, while few describe

and define what is meant by safe space or investigate how students perceive their environment to be safe or unsafe (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Even fewer studies specifically address LGB college students. Similarly, the research on safe spaces online is also limited (Campell, 2004). This review serves as the basis for this study and demonstrates the need for further research on how and where LGB college students create safe spaces in the campus and online environments.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how and where lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students create physical and virtual safe spaces. The research questions in this study were:

RQ1: How do LGB college students describe and locate physical and virtual safe spaces?

RQ2: How do LGB college students use physical and virtual safe spaces to resist and/or reinforce dominant forms of sexual identity?

RQ3: How do physical and virtual safe spaces affect the sexual identity development of LGB college students?

Social constructivism and queer theory perspectives were used in this study (Abes, 2009; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Gamson, 2000) and qualitative methods were employed to collect and analyze participant narratives (Riessman, 2008). In this chapter, various topics that apply to the research design of this study are covered, including (1) social constructivism and queer theory, (2) qualitative research and narrative inquiry, (4) participant sampling and recruitment, (5) data collection procedures, (6) confidentiality and reciprocity, (7) assessing the quality of data, (8) data analysis, and (9) researcher positionality.

Constructivism and Queer Theory

This study is epistemologically grounded in social constructivism, which is the view that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and

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development and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Social constructivism holds that there is no objective truth and that meaning is not discovered, but constructed through the interaction of subject and object. From the social constructivist viewpoint, the meaning attributed to safe spaces for LGB college students was through their unique and individual experiences and understanding of these spaces. Considering the emphasis of social constructivism on subjective and individual truth, the researcher is challenged to "approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new and richer meaning" (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). Social constructivism's invitation to researchers of freeing themselves of conventional meanings they have associated with an object is similar to queer theory's challenge to traditional ways of thinking about identity.

Social constructivism is the epistemology that guides how reality is understood in this study, whereas queer theory serves as the conceptual framework through which identity is understood. Queer theory, which is rooted in a constructivism epistemology, argues that identity is socially constructed. Unlike constructivism, which explains development toward complex ways of understanding identity, queer theory critically examines the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender (Abes & Kasch, 2007). In their study of the experiences of lesbian college students, Abes and Kasch (2007) suggested that critical approaches, such as critical race theory and queer theory, lend themselves to telling resistance narratives that address power structures. Queer theory can be used to analyze how dominant forms of identity are represented and resisted within particular spaces. This allows for participant stories to be understood outside of dominant, privileged, and heteronormative conceptualizations (Ruffolo, 2006). The benefit of using queer theory as a critical theoretical lens in this study was to help to further understand and

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challenge how gender and sexual identity are (re)presented by LGB college students in physical and virtual safe spaces.

In one of the few studies that have partnered constructivism and queer theory, Abes (2009) suggested that, "partnering queer theory and constructivism pushes the boundaries of traditional research because the two perspectives are significantly different with regard to ontology, epistemology, and methodology" (p. 144). In contrast to one another, constructivism allows a researcher to explore how participants make meaning of their identities, whereas queer theory challenges the very notion of identity all together (Abes, 2009). Where constructivism focuses on the meaning of socially constructed identities, queer theory deconstructs categories of identities. Gamson (2000) explains that queer theory combines social constructionist insights of identity as socially constructed and post-structuralist critiques of the unified, autonomous self. Gamson (2000) adds that queer theory is "a deconstructive enterprise, taking apart the view of a self defined by something at its core, be it sexual desire, race, gender, nation, or class" (p. 348).

In this study, social constructivism and queer theory were useful in answering all three of the research questions, which would have been difficult to do with just one or the other. Since social constructivism focuses on individual rather than universal meaning and experience, it provided a way for me to understand the self-perceptions and meanings of how and where LGB college students experience and use physical and virtual safe spaces, which are the first and third research questions in this study. The focus of queer theory on societal and heteronormative assumptions, on the other hand, allowed me to challenge and deconstruct how identity is (re)presented in safe spaces, which is the second research question in this study. Through the use of social constructivism and queer theory, the research questions in this study were able to be more fully answered and understood.

Qualitative Research and Narrative Inquiry

In order to understand how and where LGB college students create physical and virtual safe spaces, a qualitative research design was chosen intentionally because of the nature of the subjects and research questions. According to Glesne (2006), qualitative methods are used to understand social phenomena by gaining access to multiple perspectives of individuals and interpreting how participants construct and make meaning of the world around them. Through one's role as the primary investigator, "the researcher becomes the main research instrument as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants" (Glense, 2006, p. 5). Once the data has been collected, researchers then look for patterns and write descriptive accounts of what is found. In this study, qualitative research methods provided a way of describing in detail and depth the meaning and experiences of how and where LGB college students create physical and virtual safe spaces.

There are different approaches to qualitative research. Creswell (2007) suggests five basic qualitative approaches, which include narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study. Of these, the narrative approach is used in this study because of the focus it has on personal meanings and stories, which affords participants the opportunity to describe their understanding and experiences of physical and virtual safe spaces. Patton (2002) explains that, "the central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings" (p. 116). Riessman (2008) adds that, "stories reveal truths about human experience" (p. 10). In order to look through my participants' windows and see their "truths," which social constructivism would emphasis are *their* truths rather than universal truths, narrative methods were chosen in this qualitative study.

Narrative inquiry is a broad family of methods for interpreting many kinds of texts—oral, written, or visual. The defining characteristic of using narrative methods on any type of text is the focus it places on the sequences of actions and events, including the people, the place, and the time (Riessman, 2008). Unlike other forms of qualitative analysis that emphasize thematic categories, narrative analysis treats larger stories as the unit of analysis and is interested in the details of individual stories. In order to fully capture the details of participants' stories, the focus of narrative analysis is on the particular, not the general (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Rather than generalizing about a phenomenon, narrative inquiry revolves "around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the ones who live them" (Chase, 2005, p. 651).

Narrative analysis has been traced back to the early 20th century when it was used in sociological studies conducted by the Chicago School and in anthropological studies that recorded personal life histories (Chase, 2005). Narratives were used in the late 1960s and 1970s in feminist work "to bring the previously silenced stories of women from the margins to the centre, and the questions and issues that arose as a result around voice, power, interpretation, and representation" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 62). Narrative methods were also used to gather the collective stories of incidents of discrimination in the Civil Rights and gay and lesbian movements, which brought about action for progressive social change (Riessman, 2008). The focus of narrative analysis on the human and subjective nature of life stories and history of mobilizing identity groups aligns well with tenets of social constructivism and queer theory.

Narrative analysis also includes two other areas that will be useful in this study, which are thematic and visual narrative analysis. Thematic narrative analysis provides a way to theorize between a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements that are shared across participants, events, and actions (Riessman, 2008). Visual narrative analysis is useful in

that it provides a method of analyzing images and texts for meaning related to research questions and theories (Riessman, 2008). Utilizing these two forms of narrative analysis were beneficial in studying the textual and visual narrative data of the participants in this study.

Participant Sampling and Recruitment Techniques

In this study, purposeful sampling was used because it yields information-rich cases that are able to provide insights and in-depth understanding rather than generalization (Patton, 2002). The particular strategy I used to select information-rich cases was maximum heterogeneity sampling strategy. This form of sampling "aims at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation" (Patton, 2002, p. 235). In using such a diverse form of sampling, two different types of findings are possible: (1) descriptions of each unique case, and (2) shared patterns across all of the participants. This allowed me to look both at the individual narratives of my participants, as well as the common themes that were present in their stories. I tried to locate at least three participants for each category who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, respectively, although I was aware that this would depend on who showed interest in participating in the study. The target range for the total number of participants in this study was between eight and twelve. The sample criterion for this study was as follows:

1. Must be a college student at a college or university.

2. Must be between the ages of 18-24.

3. Must self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

4. Must use Internet technology.

5. Must have a physical and/or virtual safe space.

To recruit participants, I used multiple strategies, including word-of-mouth, flyers, emails, and listservs (Appendixes A and B). Referrals from colleagues who knew of individuals

who fit the criteria for this study were also requested. Advertisement of this study was both on-campus, including LGBT Resource Centers and student organizations, and online, which included e-mail, listservs, and Facebook. Once someone contacted me through one of these mediums, I scheduled an initial phone screening with them to discuss the project and determine if the person met the study criteria (Appendix C). As an incentive, each participant received two $5 VISA gift cards. One gift card was offered for the photo portion and the other for the interview. Participants were informed that they would receive the incentive whether or not they fully completed the research study. The sampling and recruitment techniques resulted in the selection of twelve participants who identified as lesbian, gay, and bisexual with four participants from each group. Participant demographic information is provided in Table 1 (Appendix D).

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative research has multiple methods of gathering data. Of these, three data-gathering techniques are most common in qualitative inquiry: participant observation, interviewing, and document collection (Glesne, 2006). The use of more than one data-collection method, commonly referred to as triangulation, "allow[s] different facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re)interpretation" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). For this study, I used a combination of methods to collect data, specifically photo elicitation and interviewing. I did not, however, limit myself to traditional sources of data. In my view, what I think, feel, read, write, or even dream are each forms of data that are relevant in the data collection and analysis of this study. As St. Pierre pointed out, "thought happened in the writing" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970). Therefore, I kept a

detailed researcher's journal throughout the research process and both data collection and data analysis occurred concurrently.

Interviews

The primary way of collecting data in this study was through conducting individual interviews with participants based on the criteria listed above. Working within social constructivism and queer theory perspectives, several aspects of interviewing were of concern and had to be considered. Traditionally, the nature of interviewing gays and lesbians has been "subject as object, sometimes coercive, and [gays and lesbians] seen as other" (Kong, Mahoney, & Plummer, 2001, p. 93). In an interview with gays and lesbians, mutuality of the interviewer and interviewee is an important goal.

In order to address power relations of the interview interaction, I prepared the participants for the interviews by providing them each with copies of the consent form, photo prompt sheet, and the interview guide to be discussed in the interview. Additionally, I asked the participants before the interviews if they would like to choose where we met, possibly somewhere that they considered one of their safe spaces, or if they would like for me to set-up a private meeting space for us. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted in different conference rooms and offices that were private settings and convenient for the participant and the researcher. Interviews lasted from 55 to 82 minutes and were completed over a 5-week period, from January 29, 2012 until February 27, 2012. Although participants had the option of interviewing via Google Voice or Skype, all participants were accessible to meet in person and no interviews were conducted online. Before the interview started, I asked each participant to complete a participant consent form (Appendix E). During the interviews, I took field notes to document my observations and thoughts. Participants were asked a series of questions to learn more about

how and where they created physical and virtual safe spaces (Appendix F). The interviews were

digitally recorded and transcribed soon after the interviews.

Photo Elicitation

In order to learn more about safe spaces on-campus and online for LGB college students,

participants were asked to take photographs and/or screenshots of what they thought would be

helpful in understanding the subject of this research. This information was used to supplement

the interview data. Glesne (2006) suggested that document data "supports or challenges

interview data," provides "thick description," and "generates hunches or hypotheses" (p. 69).

Therefore, I looked to the photographic data to both challenge and support the findings of my

interviews and provide me with a much richer description of the phenomenon.

Relatively few researchers in education, especially student affairs, utilize photo elicitation

(Dempsey & Tucker, 1994). Photo elicitation is the use of photographs in an interviewing

setting. Photo elicitation can be defined as "the use of photographs to provoke a response"

(Hurworth, 2003, p. 2). According to Harper (2002), "images evoke deeper elements of human

consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity

than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (p. 13). John

Collier (1957) was the first to name photo elicitation in a paper published by the photographer

and researcher. In the mid-1950s, he was a member of Cornell University's multi-disciplinary

research team examining mental health in changing communities in Maritime Provinces in

Canada. Within his research team, they had difficulty agreeing on categories of the quality of

housing in the research area. Using photographs, Collier made it possible for researchers to

agree on their categories. The researchers further found the images helped sharpen their

participants' memories. Through using photo elicitation, my participants may have been able to provide a richer and more detailed description of their physical and virtual safe spaces.

After verbal consent had been obtained through the phone screening, participants were provided with instructions to take 2-6 photographs or screenshots of physical and virtual safe spaces (Appendix G). One to three of those photos were of objects or places that they identify as safe spaces. The other one to three consisted of photos that describe how these safe spaces contribute to their LGB identities. These photos could be taken by participants with camera phones or digital cameras that they already had or one that was made available from the researcher. All of the participants used their own camera phones and digital cameras to take the photographs of physical and virtual safe spaces. During the semi-structured interview, these photographs and screenshots were discussed with the participant in order to learn more about their safe spaces and the role they play in their lives.

Confidentiality and Reciprocity

Ensuring confidentiality and reciprocity are important aspects of this study and several measures were taken to account for these. To protect the confidentiality of participants, they were allowed to choose pseudonyms by which they are identified and referred in the transcripts and subsequent descriptions in the study. If a participant did not choose a pseudonym, then the researcher created one for them. A list of participant names and pseudonyms was kept in an electronic file on a password-protected computer only accessible to the researcher. All names and places referred to by the participant were changed or given generic descriptors to further protect against identification. All documents, such as photographs and brochures, obtained during this study were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the personal home of the researcher, which only the researcher had access. Any electronic documents, such as scanned photographs

and screenshots, were also saved on a password-protected computer only accessible to the researcher. Participation in this study was on a strictly volunteer basis and participants could leave the study at any point without the loss of any incentive, which includes the gift cards.

Considering the issue of reciprocity in this study, it was my hope that taking photographs and the interview process was collaborative and mutually beneficial. According to Glense (2006), the interviewing process can provide an occasion for reciprocity. Participants can feel a sense of reciprocity through the interviewer listening, allowing their voices to be heard, and asking questions that identify issues of importance. Through actively listening to participants and acknowledging, as well as striving to lessen, the power differential between interviewer and interviewee, it was my goal to strive for reciprocity between the participants and me.

Quality of Data

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that assessing the trustworthiness and quality of the data generated in a study must be involve establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Several techniques were used to achieve credibility in this study, which included triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. The technique of including different sources of data is known as triangulation and by combining methods it strengthens a study (Patton, 2002), which occurred in this study by the use of documents, photographs, and interviews. Peer debriefing was also used in this study by engaging with classmates in a research seminar throughout the duration of the study in order to build further credibility. "[Peer debriefing] is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Furthermore, member checking occurred in this study by providing participants with copies of their interview

transcripts and data analysis to ensure I represented them and their ideas as accurately as possible (Glesne, 2006).

In order to establish transferability in this study, "thick, rich description" was gathered through open-ended, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002, p. 437). By providing sufficient detail in describing the findings of the study, it becomes more possible to determine how applicable drawing conclusions that are transferable to other settings or groups from these findings. Even though an external audit was not be used in this study to establish dependability, an audit trail detailing what was done in the development and reporting of the investigation was maintained throughout the study for the sack of confirmability. Confirmability ensures that the data supports the conclusions and interpretations made in the study. The technique of reflexivity was also used to establish confirmability. "Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those on interviews and those to whom one reports" (Patton, 2002, p. 65). Through the application of these various data quality strategies, the trustworthiness of my data and findings was increased.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data in this study, I employed thematic narrative analysis. As stated earlier, thematic narrative analysis provides a way to theorize between a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements that are shared across participants, events, and actions (Riessman, 2008). In this form of narrative analysis, stories that are collected are ordered in conceptual groupings and represented as a typology of narratives organized by theme with case studies or vignettes providing illustration (Riessman, 2005). Since this study includes both text and visual data, I utilized Keats (2009) model for using multiple texts in narrative research to

assist me in the analysis of the data in this study. Analysis of multiple texts in narrative research allows the researcher to learn more about and have a greater understanding of the participants' experiences than only using one form of data (Keats, 2009). Furthermore, to organize the multiple texts and data analysis process, procedures developed by Ruona (2005) were employed.

The first step in analyzing the data was documenting all forms of data collected for each participant in order to "to see what type of texts participants used and where their priorities were in terms of constructing the story of their experiences" (Keats, 2009, p. 189). After conducting all of the interviews, I organized the data by creating a separate file folder on my computer for each participant with all of their documents stored in this folder. All participants had a digital audio recording, typed transcript, and multiple photographs in their individual folder. As outlined by Ruona (2005), I utilized the tabling feature in Microsoft Word to format each typed transcript into a table divided by rows for when I spoke and when the participant spoke during the interview. Six columns were also created for thematic codes, participant identification information, research question number, line number, narrative data, and any notes.

Following organizing and documenting the data for each participant, a general reading of the interview and visual texts was conducted in order for the overall meaning of the texts to arise (Keats, 2009). During this general reading, initial themes and patterns arose. First, I did a general reading of six participant interviews and photographs, which included two gay-identified men, two lesbian-identified women, and two bisexual-identified women. I coded every item in the data and created an initial list of codes (Appendix H), which included 25 main themes and 64 subthemes that emerged from the coding of the participants' narratives. Next, I used this initial code list to code all 12 participant interviews.

A specific reading of the texts followed the general reading. This is a more targeted reading that focuses "on distinct aspects of the narratives that are relevant to the research question" (Keats, 2009, p. 190). At this stage of my analysis, I reread through all 12 initially coded interviews for descriptions of locations of safe spaces, positive and negative contributions of safe spaces, and resistance and/or reinforcement of dominate sexual identity within these spaces. These areas of analytical focus were directly related to the research questions in this study, as well as informed by the literature review, most notably research on safe spaces and queer theory. Based on the general and specific readings of the data, nine of the initial main themes were found to relate to the three individual research questions. For instance, "types of spaces" was coded as a main theme in the general reading and was significant in the specific reading, since it relates to one of the research questions in this study. Lastly, I organized all of the supporting data of the nine main themes in a Word document to easily access and reproduce.

Researcher Positionality

In light of my own personal experiences exploring my sexuality through the use of physical and virtual safe spaces, as well as being a practitioner, researcher, and graduate student working with college students, I am aware that I came to this research as an insider in many respects. It is from my own personal and professional experiences as a White, gay-identified man who grew up lower middle-class in rural Arkansas and as a student affairs professional working in higher education that shaped the design of this study. From the interview questions to the analysis of the data itself, I showed up in every step of the process, despite being aware and conscious of my own subjectivity in relation to the research.

Unlike many LGB youth, I was fortunate to have an accepting family who provided a safe place for me to feel protected while I was growing up, even when I sometimes faced

discrimination and harassment outside of my home and family. I think about the derogatory

remarks I overheard as a male cheerleader in junior high school or the risk of my identity being

figured out online while I was coming out. Growing up in a supportive family environment

allowed me to explore safe spaces less out of necessity and more out of choice, which is not the

case for many LGB individuals. Furthermore, I also acknowledge the privileges associated with

my racial and gender identities as White and male in these spaces. Other LGB-identified

individuals who do not share these identities might not regard the same spaces as safe for them.

Through my personal experiences and this research journey, I have come to believe that certain

spaces can be safer, but rarely, if ever, are they always safe.

Although I am an insider in a number of ways, I am also an outsider to the current

experiences of LGB college students. Many of these students have more access to resources in

terms of physical and virtual safe spaces than I had while growing up or in college. Furthermore,

I am an outsider to the experiences of participants who share different identity groups than

myself, such as lesbian women and African American bisexuals. I think that both my insider and

outsider roles could have caused me to see or not see certain aspects of the interviews and

documents. For example, the privilege of my gender and ethnic identities were aspects of myself

that may have impacted my interpretations of the research findings. Considering this, I tried to

find a balance between the roles of insider and outsider by asking questions about what I noticed

and why I noticed particular things. I was able to do this through memoing, journaling, and

talking with the participants and others about what I was finding. I maintained both a physical

notebook and a virtual document where I reflectively took notes of my thoughts and feelings in

regards to the research. Whether in formalized research seminars or casual conversations, I also

discussed and solicited feedback on the findings and conclusions in this study from LGB-

identified college students, faculty, and other student affairs administrators. These various ways allowed me to distance myself as much as possible in order to increase my outsider perspective and take the standpoint of the Other (Delamont, Atkinson, & Pugsley, 2009).

Patton (2002) offered the idea of empathetic neutrality, which "suggests that there is a middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding" (p. 50). Patton explained further that neutrality means "that the person being interviewed can tell me anything without engendering either my favor or disfavor with regard to the content of her or his response" (p. 365). In this study, I practiced empathetic neutrality in my role as the researcher. In my interview introduction or during the interview, I shared with the participants about myself and disclosed my sexual identity when the subject arose in hopes of building trust. During the interviews, though, I focused on respecting the participants' experiences rather than sharing about my own in order to build rapport, which is "the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment" (Patton, 2002, p. 366). It was through memoing, distancing myself, and empathetic neutrality that I balanced my insider and outsider perspectives as best I could throughout the research study.

Chapter Summary

In order to understand how and where LGB college students create physical and virtual safe spaces, I collected documents, including photographs and screenshots, and interviews from 12 LGB-identified college students. To make meaning of the data that I gathered, I utilized narrative analysis methods and represented the data through participant narratives and photographs. The data that was collected and analyzed allowed me to respond to and answer the research questions posed in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand physical and virtual safe spaces as experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do LGB college students describe and locate physical and virtual safe spaces?

RQ2: How do LGB college students use physical and virtual safe spaces to resist and/or reinforce dominant forms of sexual identity?

RQ3: How do physical and virtual safe spaces affect the sexual identity development of LGB college students?

In this chapter, the participant descriptions and findings are presented. This chapter begins with a description of the campuses and participants included in this study. Next, the emergent themes that respond to the research questions in this study are described in detail. The themes are categorized in relation to the particular research question in which they support. First, themes that illustrate how LGB college students described and located safe and unsafe spaces include (a) definitions and descriptions of safe spaces, (b) characterization of unsafe spaces, and (c) types of spaces. Second, themes that describe LGB college students' use and behavior within safe and unsafe spaces include (a) queer(ing) spaces, (b) creating spaces, (c) changing spaces by others, and (d) behaving in spaces. Third, themes that emerged related to the sexual identity development of LGB college students within safe and unsafe spaces included (a) identity depends on place and (b) coming out through safe spaces. Participant narratives are

provided to describe and support each theme. Additionally, participant photographs are used to

further illustrate quotations and findings in this study. Photographs do not accompany all

quotations and findings because not all comments related to photographs. The chapter concludes

with a summary of the findings.

Campus Profiles

Although participant recruitment for this study utilized multiple recruitment strategies

and participants could be interviewed face-to-face or online, all participants in this study were

from four colleges and universities within the Southeast. Due to the close proximity of the

participants to the researcher, all interviews were conducted face-to-face on the respective

campuses. To better understand the context of each campus, a description is provided below.

Central University

Central University is a private institution classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a

Doctoral/Research institution. The university enrolls approximately 13,000 students (7,000

undergraduate and 6,000 graduate and professional) in a vast array of undergraduate, graduate,

and professional programs that include liberal arts, business, law, medicine, theology, nursing,

public health, and humanities. A number of LGBT programs and services are available for

students, faculty, and staff, including an LGBT Resource Center. The institution is situated in a

suburban neighborhood of a major metropolitan city in the Southeast.

Founder University

Founder University is a private institution classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a

Baccalaureate College and enrolls approximately 1,100 students. Popular majors include

business administration, psychology, and communication and rhetoric. An LGBT organization is

active on-campus for students. Founder University is located in a suburban neighborhood of a major metropolitan city in the Southeast.

Southeast College

Southeast College is a satellite campus of South College, which is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as an Associate's Dominant College and is a four-year public institution that awards primarily associate's degrees and some bachelor's degrees. South College enrolls approximately 8,500 students (5,200 full-time, 3,300 part-time), whereas Southeast College enrolls approximately 2,300 of those students. The college focuses on business, health professions, education, psychology, and sciences. The main campus has a weekly LGBT discussion group for students, whereas no formal programs and services specifically target LGBT students on the satellite campus. Southeast College is located near a suburban town of approximately 3,000 people and in a county of 32,000 people.

State University

State University, which is a public institution that enrolls approximately 35,000 students (26,000 undergraduates, 9,000 graduate and professional) and is classified as a Doctoral/Research institution by the Carnegie Foundation. Students enroll in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, including arts, sciences, journalism, education, law, and agricultural sciences. The campus has an LGBT Resource Center that offers a number of programs and services to students. The campus is located in a county of 116,000 people.

Participant Profiles

A sample of 12 self-identifying LGB college students were recruited and participated in this study. Table 1 (Appendix D) provides demographic information about these participants, including their pseudonyms, and follows the order in which they were interviewed. The

participant ages ranged from 18-23 and 8 identified as women and 4 identified as men. In terms of sexual identity, lesbian, gay, and bisexual were represented equally with 4 participants identifying with each group. Three participants additionally described their sexual identity as queer. The majority of participants identified as White in this study, whereas one identified as Hispanic and another identified as Asian. Five participants attended State University, five attended Founder University, and one participant attended Central University and Southeast College, respectively. To provide further detail of each participant, a description of each will be given in the same order in which they were interviewed.

Michelle

On a Sunday afternoon, I drove an hour and a half to meet with my first participant, Michelle, on-campus at State University in a conference room. She was wearing a Roller Girls hoody, jeans, and did not appear to be wearing any makeup. Michelle is an 18-year old, White female who grew up in the same town in which she is attending college. She is a freshman at State University and majoring in Journalism and minoring in Film with an interest in magazine writing. Michelle works for the Communications department at her college and has taught at a number of regional and national conferences "about handling sensitive issues in writing." Her career aspirations include writing or teaching. Michelle is also a Roller Girl. While working on her first story assignment as a freelance writer for a local newspaper, she became interested in and involved with the Roller Girls.

When asked about other identities she claims, she identified herself as masculine, bisexual, atheist, lower middle class, and a child of divorce. It was around the age of eleven that Michelle began questioning her Christian upbringing when she learned from her mother about her parents divorce and that her mother was dating another female friend. It was shortly after

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this time that Michelle had her first girlfriend. Throughout the interview, I took note of how articulate Michelle was and how she liked to play with her hair and the strings of her hoody as she talked.

Max

Later, on the same Sunday afternoon and in the same location at State University, I met with Max who was running a few minutes late to the interview, which gave me just enough time to finish my notes from Michelle's interview and prepare for his. He arrived in a large Ford STX extended cab truck and was wearing a jacket, baseball cap, and jeans. He was carrying a cup of coffee in his hand as we met at the door to the building the conference room was inside. As we walked to the conference room, Max told me about how he enjoys driving a vehicle and engaging in activities like fly fishing and hunting that people would not expect him to enjoy.

Max is a 21-year old, White male who grew up "about five minutes north" of the town where he is attending college. He is a senior at State University and majoring in Communication Studies and minoring in Women's Studies. While laughing, Max calls himself a "big nerd" and considers himself a writer "above any of the disciplinary things." In terms of his academic aspirations, Max plans to attend graduate school for a degree in Communications and Culture or Rhetoric and eventually complete his Ph.D. He hopes to get a tenure track faculty position that allows him to "teach and do research." Max's research interests center on the rhetoric of social movements, specifically queer and environmental justice social movements.

Max came out as gay when he was eighteen and a freshman at his college. In terms of his sexual identity now, Max explains he is "definitely gay, I mean definitely a gay identity is very important to me, a queer identity politically is very important to me." Max made a distinction between identifying his sexuality as gay and politically as liberal queer. He explains further that

"the queer political identity influences my academic work so that, I tend to write from that perspective." Max jokes that he currently lives under the poverty line as a student, although his immediate family is "somewhere around upper-middle class" while his broader family is diverse in terms of low and high social economic statuses. Max is an insightful and well-spoken individual who by the end of his interview helped me forget how tired I was earlier that day.

Andrew

A few days after my interviews with Michelle and Max, I interviewed my third participant, Andrew, in a conference room at Founder University. One of Andrew's classes had been canceled that day, so he stopped by my office over an hour early to see if I was free to meet earlier. Andrew was wearing a black tank top and thick-framed glasses. I noticed he had a lunch box that was green-blue in color and had a rainbow strap.

Andrew was personal and conversation was not difficult to strike. As we walked to the conference room, we talked about his major, two study abroad trips he had gone on, and him living on-campus for the past three and a half years. He had just moved off-campus this semester to live with his partner. The conference room we met in was brightly painted orange and was quite large with windows on two sides, one of which faced a hallway. I sat directly across from him at a large conference table. I had not gotten him a bottle of water, so before the interview began I offered him time to fill up a water bottle he had brought with him. While he did this, I was able to prepare for the interview by setting out my laptop and interview materials.

Andrew is a 22-year old, White, gay-identified male who is "from a lot of different places," mostly in Southeast states and a couple years in Turkey, but for the last four years has lived in a suburb of the city his college is located. At the age of three, Andrew's parents divorced and he lived with his mother growing up. He is currently a senior majoring in German

at Founder University. When asked about where his interest in German comes from, he shares that in high school he listened and memorized German techno, metal band music and wanted to understand the music he "just fell in love with." He has since taken German classes and hopes to work at a German cultural center after graduation.

Andrew is a member of the LGBT student organization on campus and holds a leadership position. He likes photography, drawing, art, and playing the ukulele. Andrew explains that he does like music and to sing, but he does not like being on stage as much because it makes him nervous. Andrew also has a fiancée who he now lives with and is 17 years older than him. As he explains about the age difference, "it's love so it doesn't really matter to me." Andrew was easy going, laughed frequently, and looked off at times as he thought of his responses to the interview questions. In addition, Andrew scratched at himself throughout the interview and I noticed red marks on his shoulders and arms from the scratching. I was appreciative of how open Andrew was about personal experiences in his life, and I struggled with how not to ask too much, but ask enough about those experiences to keep the interview on topic.

Coco

Almost a week passed before I met with my forth participant, Coco. We met in a conference room at State University. Coco showed up about five minutes late, apologizing on her way into the room. As she entered and we introduced ourselves to each other, I noticed an LGBT button and a scarf she was wearing. From the moment we met, I could tell Coco was bubbly and full of personality. She spoke quickly and often used her hands to express herself. After the interview, I reflected in a memo that she seemed like someone who always had something to say and the interview felt less like an interview and more like a conversation. I

wondered too if a contributing factor to this was me becoming more comfortable and confident with the interview protocol and process.

Coco is a 20 year-old, White female who is a sophomore at State University majoring in Public Health and Political Science. Coco is interested in one day having a career in disaster relief, specifically serving on a first response team. She originally wanted to attend college in a "really liberal city," such as Chicago, that was away from her home state, but choose to attend State University to take advantage of in-state tuition. Coco was raised as an only child in a two-parent household. Her mother is retired from the military after thirty-six years of service as a two star general. She was obviously proud of her mother saying, "I have to brag… she is the only [general] in the history of the world to be a mother."

When asked about her father, Coco was still mourning the recent death of her father ten months earlier on her mother's birthday. Coco explains that her grandmother now lives with her mother "because she is also a widow, and they have actually like an identical patterns, at like the same, fifty-eight he died of a heart attack, and so did my mom's dad, so they have really similar paths." Coco has taken away from her father's death a "total like commitment to my family" and identifies first and primarily as a daughter. She has resolved to "make their lives better and vice versa" and spends a lot of time on the phone or visiting with her family.

In terms of her sexual identity, she identifies as gay "because it is gender neutral to me." She explains that in high school she identified as lesbian when she had her first girlfriend, but now that she is dating a "trans man" it doesn't seem to fit their relationship. She explains while laughing that at drag shows when they ask the crowd "where are my lesbians at, and I'm like 'Whoa,' but now I'm like 'Oh, right here, no I'm not." She chooses not to identify herself as

queer because she does not really like the word. At the end of the interview, Coco mentioned that unbeknownst to me I would be interviewing with her roommate later in the day.

Zoe

I interviewed my next participant, Zoe, later on the same day as Coco in a different conference room at State University. I had arrived early to the interview location so at about fifteen minutes before the interview, I decided to call Zoe to check on her status. On the phone, she informed me that a crisis with a friend had occurred and that she was on her way. When Zoe arrived thirty minutes after the interview was scheduled to start, she was apologetic and full of energy. She wore a flannel shirt that still had a nametag on it from something she must have been to earlier. Her hair was cut short and curly. Since we were starting later than we had planned, we began the interview shortly after she arrived.

Zoe is a 19 year-old, Hispanic female who was raised in a military and Mormon family. Zoe is a sophomore at State University majoring in Religion and minoring in Communication Studies with a certificate in Leadership and Service. She choose to attend State University because of the scholarship she received required her to stay in-state and it was two and a half hours from her home. She intends to work in the field of student affairs with particular interest in serving the LGBT and religious communities. Her interest in student affairs came from attending a LeaderShape conference that she describes as an "empowering experience" that "helped me devise this vision of creating safe spaces for self-discovery."

When Zoe was 15, she began identifying as bisexual after she had her first kiss with a girl she had met at church camp. While laughing, Zoe shares that "I realized when your first kiss is a girl, there might be something there." Recently, she has started identifying as pansexual because she explains, "I have a lot of trans friends and it's more inclusive of the trans community and I

could see myself dating a trans person." At 16, Zoe also realized she no longer held the same Mormon beliefs and, in coming to college, she has begun her conversion to Judaism. Zoe identifies herself as a "giant ally" to the LGBT and queer communities and does a lot of work in that area. Throughout the interview, Zoe was animated as she spoke and self-reflective. By the end of the interview, I took note that she had drunk almost all of the 20-ounce water bottle I had given her at the start. After reviewing a draft of her participant profile, she explained why she drinks quickly, "I get that from my dad, who can down a 2-liter in less than 5 minutes." As we collected our belongings and where just about to leave the conference room, Zoe asked me if she could give me a hug, which I gladly accepted, and thanked her for the time she spent with me. It was a very nice way of ending a long day of work, classes, and interviews.

Harriet

My sixth participant, Harriet, met me the following Thursday afternoon on-campus in a conference room at Founder University. When I arrived at the conference room, Harriet was already there sitting in the middle of a large conference table with a coffee mug from a local coffee shop and another green-colored drink siting on the table in front of him. He is slender, has blonde hair, and was wearing a multicolor, tie-dyed shirt with a gray jacket over it.

Harriet is an 18-year old, White, gay-identified male who was raised about an hour and a half away from the metropolitan city he now lives and attends college at. He is a freshman at Founder University majoring in Communications and minoring in Sociology. He came to Founder University because he "fell in love" with the metropolitan city the university is situated, noting that the city "had a really good energy every time I came here." He says that Founder University was "somewhere that I felt really strong that I would be happy [at], and I did a pretty

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good job." He has worked in the area of specialty coffee since he was fifteen and currently works at a coffee shop near where he attends college.

Although Harriet describes himself as an introvert, he also says he is "a really social person" who "really enjoy[s] philosophy… like figuring out people." He further identifies "as a student, and not in an academic sense, but in a sense of existence…I'm trying to figure out why I am here." He has one younger sister who he describes while laughing as "cooler than I am… I'm so jealous of how hip she is." In terms of religion, Harriet identifies as agnostic. Throughout the interview, Harriet spoke mostly in general terms without much elaboration or examples given without further probing.

Annie

At the end of the week, I interviewed my next participant, Annie, in the same conference room at Founder University. I arrived about ten minutes early and waited on Annie as she arrived a few minutes late. Annie had to reschedule our interview from the week before because of a recent medical surgery she had undergone. Annie has dark blonde hair and was wearing a t-shirt. She sat directly across from me and spoke openly throughout the interview about safe and unsafe spaces for her. I noted how self-reflective and introspective she was in the interview.

Annie is a 19-year-old, White female who was born in the same metropolitan city where she currently attends college, although she grew up in a large city in South Carolina. Annie spoke about the reason her family moved to South Carolina was because her older sister was arrested there and is now in prison. Her older sister is now twenty-five and her younger brother is ten and autistic. She describes the area she grew up in as "very conservative and… small town." Annie explains while laughing that she came to Founder University because of "the free application and then when I visited and realized it was very accepting…I felt right at home."

Annie is a sophomore at Founder University who is majoring in Social Justice and Non-Profit Management, which is a major she has planned herself. She has a passion for human rights and aspires to attend law school and become a human rights attorney or activist.

In terms of her other identities, Annie describes herself as lesbian, although she also identifies as "queer…because I know like the real definition of queer is just not conforming to gender standards…or gender expectations, and…I mean, I do in the way I dress, but…I don't cook, I don't clean." Annie has a fiancé who she laughed while telling me "is a female." She also identifies as an activist and a mentor.

Brock

My eighth participant, Brock, was difficult to schedule an interview with due to his busy schedule and heavy involvement on his college campus, Southeast College. As a result, I drove an hour and a half to meet with him late on a Wednesday evening at Southeast College. We met in the campus library that is within the Student Center. Although I was not sure what he really looked like, we somehow "knew" who each other was as I walked into the library and noticed him behind the circulation desk. Brock had on a gray shirt and was carrying a backpack. He has short and shaggy dark blonde hair. Brock speaks with a thick Southern accent and smiles a lot while he talks.

Brock is a 19-year old, White male who describes the rural area where he grew up and still lives as "the boondocks." Brock explains further that he is "like a country boy that really belongs in the city." Brock is a sophomore, pre-nursing major at Southeast College. At Southeast College, Brock serves as President of the Student Government Association and a member of the Campus Programming Board. Brock plans to attend a different university in a larger, metropolitan city to enroll in their nursing program. He currently takes classes at

Southeast College, as well as another university nearby in order to complete his pre-nursing program so he can transfer. He hopes to become a Registered Nurse in an Emergency Room and may further his education by attaining a master's degree with a specialty in cardiovascular intensive care. Brock's interest in the specialty of cardiovascular intensive care came from his grandparents who were both involved in this area of medicine.

Brock identifies himself as gay and currently has a boyfriend. He explains that his gay identity "doesn't really like pop out as like the first thing that I actually tell anybody." In terms of other identities, Brock describes growing up "in a poor family" and receiving the Pell Grant to help him fund his education. He does not have any religious affiliation, although he explains "I did go to church for a while and then I kind of got kicked out once they found out I was gay, which was kind of weird, but…but whatever, screw them, I don't need to go to church to believe in God." As we wrapped up the interview, Brock apologized for being "all over the place" because of him having had a long day.

Jennifer

At the end of the week, I met with my ninth participant, Jennifer, in a conference room at Founder University. She was already waiting on me when I arrived to the conference room and was sitting facing the door. As I walked in, she greeted me warmly. Jennifer had short, blonde hair and was wearing a pink shirt. Jennifer is a 19-year-old, White female who is from the same metropolitan city that her university is located. She is a junior at Founder University majoring in Psychology. Jennifer learned what psychology was in a fifth grade gifted class and decided that was what she was going to do as a career. She explains that she is "really fascinated about how people's minds work and what makes them do what they do." She hopes to work with children with autism in a more clinical setting. Jennifer is also interested in politics, science, biology,

philosophy, and music. She identifies as bisexual and shared that she has known "since I was 12."

Danielle

The following Monday, I met with my tenth participant, Danielle, in a small office near the same conference room at Founder University. Just before the interview, I received a call from Danielle and we met at the entrance to the hallway leading to the office. I noticed Mardi Gras beads dangling around her neck that she later shared were from the festival she had just attended. Danielle has short, reddish hair and was wearing a low-cut shirt with a jacket pulled over it. As we sat down for the interview, she shared that she had not slept well the night before and was not sure what she might share. Throughout the interview, she provided often short or "I don't know" responses that may have been the result of her lack of sleep.

Danielle is a 21-year-old, White, lesbian-identified female who is an only child from a nearby town of the metropolitan city that her university is located. She is a senior majoring in Psychology with plans of attending graduate school and conducting research in a clinical field in the future. Danielle choose to attend Founder University because it was "close enough to home where it's still like I could go home, but I'm like away from my family." She also likes her college because of the small classes and feeling comfortable to be out about her sexual identity on-campus. She is involved on-campus in a leadership role in the Psychology Honor Association. In terms of hobbies and her free time, she enjoys drawing and playing Pokémon, watching movies, and "just hang[ing] out and talk[ing]."

Lucy

At the end of the week, I met with my next to last participant, Lucy. She met me in the hallway of the office we interviewed in at Central University. She had not been waiting long for

me and we walked together to the office where the conference room was. Lucy was wearing a pink sweater that was open with a black shirt underneath. She had her black hair down and smiled a lot as she talked. Lucy was very easy to talk to and insightful in her reflections, which resulted in her interview being one of my longest at just under an hour and a half in length.

Lucy is a 21-year-old, Chinese female from Singapore who came to the United States to attend college at Central University. She explains that she had always wanted to come to the United States for college because of the small number of national universities in Singapore. She is a junior double majoring in English and Psychology. She describes her interest in "people's stories" as why she loves literature, reading, and understanding how the mind works. She chose to attend Central University because "it was relatively urban, good Psychology department, and I had family here." After graduation from college, she is interested in working in marking and advertising until she is able to return to Singapore and become a teacher.

In terms of her identity, she places her Singaporean identity as primary "because I think that's very important from where I come from," followed closely by her role as a student because "it's kind of why I'm here." Lucy explains that in her country as a Chinese Singaporean she is a racial majority, whereas in the United States she is now a racial minority and "a part of a persons of color community where back home [in Singapore], like, we don't have the term persons of color." Another important aspect of her identity is her education. She explains that in Singapore "you're really defined by your education" and often people there ask what schools you attended because "a certain set of expectations…[come] from [attending] high schools with really rich heritages," which is the type of high school that Lucy attended. She also describes her educational status as someone who goes to college abroad as "imply[ing] a certain kind of sort of privilege" on her part. Lucy acknowledges that English was her first language and she speaks

the language "comparatively better than a lot of my fellow country people," which "says things about your education and class" in Singapore, even though she identifies as middle class. In terms of her religious background, Lucy was raised Buddhist and now identifies as agnostic.

As a person who identifies as cisgender, Lucy explains her involvement with the queer community in terms of the work she does for the community. At the age of 14, she identified as bisexual and since coming to college has shifted in her understanding of her sexual identity.

> As time went by and primarily when I came to college, I realized that I moved down more into the straight end of the spectrum but my experiences as identifying as bisexual for so many years really, really changed who I am to the point where I don't feel I could identify as straight because it's sort of an important part of me.

Put simply, Lucy describes her sexual identity as "complicated" and "fluid." For that reason, she identifies as queer because it implies "less of a conformity…to heteronormativity or just gender expectations." While laughing, Lucy wonders if because she has not been attracted to women in quite a long time if she has "lost my bisexual card." She leaves open the possibility that she may again be attracted to women and sometimes presents herself as more masculine, which is why she feels identifying as queer more accurately reflects both her sexual and gender identities.

Chuck

My twelfth and final participant, Chuck, met with me at the start of the next week in an office at Founder University. We arrived at approximately the same time and sat across the conference table from one another. Chuck had short, blonde hair and was wearing a black shirt. She had a very friendly demeanor and shared openly throughout the interview. As one of the longest interviews I conducted, we talked with each other for just under an hour and a half.

Chuck is a 23-year-old, White female who is from a small-town in a nearby state from the university of the metropolitan city that her university is located. She is a senior majoring in Political Science "because I find…it's kind of a mixture of writing and…it's a good preparation probably for law." Although she has wanted to be a lawyer, she is "having major doubts" and "heard horror stories about how miserable three years of law school is." She is thinking of participating with the AmeriCorps Program for a few years as she figures out what she wants to do for a career more long-term.

Although Chuck identities as lesbian and is exclusively attracted to women, she explains that being raised to be a "Christian fundamentalist by Christian fundamentalist parents" made it "hard to shake the really negative connotations I have about [being a] lesbian." Although she recalls her father talking about "stupid queers or whatever," she feels more comfortable identifying as queer because it seems a "little like more unused and untainted."

Politically, Chuck identifies as Libertarian and likes having "friends who disagree with me on that." She gives examples of a close friend and her old sister as two individuals who she enjoys engaging in arguments around fundamental rights and the role of the government. Religiously, she classifies herself as a theist who was raised Southern Baptist and "definitely [has] theological viewpoint differences with them." Because of how she was raised, she explains she has had a difficult time "reconciling the religion I grew up with…realizing I'm gay." Although most of her friends identity as atheists, she currently identifies with Episcopalism because she likes that it is "a mix of low church and high church."

Defining and Locating Safe and Unsafe Spaces

Of particular interest in this study is how LGB college students describe and locate safe and unsafe spaces. Through their stories, themes that explain how LGB college students

described and located safe and unsafe spaces include (a) definitions and descriptions of safe spaces, (b) characterization of unsafe spaces, and (c) types of spaces.

Definition and Description of Safe Spaces

Throughout the interviews, all of the participants offered their understandings of safe spaces. Many of these definitions included the terms/phrases *comfortable*, *welcoming*, *no judgment*, *acceptance*, *respect*, and *open*. Safe spaces were described in terms of physical, virtual, and psychological places where participants felt supported and encouraged to be themselves. These definitions provide a complex understanding of the various ways in which the participants perceived and understood safe spaces.

Many of the participants spoke about safe spaces in terms of places where they and others could be themselves without fear of being judged. Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman attending Founder University) succinctly defined safe spaces as, "somewhere physical or mental that people can go and feel free to be who they are, and not be afraid of being judged." Another student at Founder University, Andrew, who identified as a gay man, also shared feeling free to be himself in safe spaces. He stated that he knew he was in a safe space because he felt as if a "weight is off your back, like you don't have to put up this charade, of acting a certain way like, you're completely free to be yourself, no one's going to judge you for being fem or butch." Max (gay-identified man attending State University) also believed he could be himself in safe spaces when he defined safe spaces as "any space or place where anyone, for any variety of reasons or identities, can go and be able to be themselves, without worry." Similarly, Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman attending State University) described safe spaces as a place where "you can be you, and just be." She also explained further that a safe space for her is "a place where in every aspect of my life, I can be authentic." Lastly, Harriett (a gay-identified

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man attending Founder University) defined safe spaces as "an environment where I can say what I want to say, when I want to say it, how I want to say it…." As demonstrated in their explanations of safe spaces, participants believed that safe spaces were places they could be themselves authentically without being judged for their identities or without having to perform their identities to meet their perceptions of dominant heterosexist environments.

A number of participants also spoke about how comfortable they felt in expressing themselves without judgment in safe spaces. Brock (gay-identified man attending Southeast College) stated that he could go to a safe space and "be comfortable…with who I am and not have to deal with the judgment of other people, just my own little area to just breathe for once." Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman attending Founder University) explained a safe space as somewhere "you're comfortable being yourself, you're comfortable being authentic, you don't feel like you have to censor yourself…it's a space in which you feel accepted." Jennifer, (bisexual-identified woman attending Founder University), also felt "comfortable, being myself and expressing myself, particularly with regards to my sexuality" in safe spaces. Danielle, (lesbian-identified woman attending Founder University), described safe spaces as "a place where you're just comfortable and you can be yourself and you won't be judged for it." She further explained that, "it feels nice to know that there are people who will accept you and it's more relaxing than having to like keep a guard up and stuff." As indicated in their quotes, participants' ability to feel comfortable with their identities in safe spaces allowed them to feel accepted, relaxed, and respected.

Other participants, such as Lucy and Michelle, spoke about freedoms and boundaries of learning and speech in safe spaces. Lucy (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Central University) believed that a safe space "facilitates learning" and should offer "a certain level of

confidentiality" that maintains a "commitment…to respecting the private boundaries of people."

Michelle, a bisexual-identified woman attending State University, had a different take on safe

spaces than other participants, comparing these spaces to free speech zones. She explained that

it is important to her that safe spaces be places for "free speech without backlash." She further

clarified,

> I'm not saying that there doesn't have to be judgment because that is impossible to ask
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> for but, where you feel like you can say what you need to, especially what you need to
>
> not just what you want to.

For Michelle, having a space that is comfortable and provides a support system is important. She

explained, "You need to be able to have a support system, whether it's on the Internet, or just a

place where…you just feel comfortable, you don't have to explain yourself about anything."

The freedom to feel comfortable being themselves and knowing that confidentiality will be

maintained in these places were two important elements of safe spaces for these participants.

The phrase *safe space* is often used in the literature and professional practice to signify

the type of spaces of interest to this study (Barrett, 2010; Holley & Steiner, 2005; Kenney, 2001;

Redmond, 2010). In this study, however, many of the participants spoke about safe spaces in

different terms, such as *chill*, *cool*, and *awesome*. When Harriett (gay-identified man attending

Founder University) was asked about how he tells others about his safe space, he said that he and

his friends in his age group used the term "chill" to signify a safe space. He explained,

> We will be like, "Oh yeah, it's chill," and when you say, "Oh yeah, its chill," it's
>
> understood that it's a place where you know you will be accepted…And I have never
>
> really thought about it like that, but that really is just something we communicate

amongst ourselves and created that word to mean its own thing, and for us it does mean a

safe spot.

Harriett was surprised when one of his professors, who was not that much older than him and his

friends, answered with "It is 'pretty chill'" to his question about whether an area of the

metropolitan city in which he lives is gay-friendly. Harriet described his reaction to his

professor's answer as, "I was like, 'Oh, that's great, like that works.'" Another participant,

Danielle (lesbian-identified woman attending Founder University), said that using the phrase safe

space felt "formalized and awkward" and she preferred to indicate safe spaces by "it's cool" or

"awesome."

Summary of the Theme: Definition and Description of Safe Spaces

In summary, this theme provides descriptions of participant's understandings and

definitions of safe spaces. Similar to defining words like *diversity* or *multiculturalism*, defining

safe space for participants was not always easy and was unique to each person although the

definitions shared similar characteristics. For some, such as Annie (lesbian/queer-identified

woman attending Founder University) and Andrew (gay-identified man attending Founder

University), safe spaces were places where they could be themselves free of judgment, whereas

for others, such as Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) and Max (gay-

identified man attending State University), safe spaces allowed them to openly express their

multiple identities and aspects of themselves. These definitions of safe spaces were gathered not

in hopes of labeling or defining singularly what safe spaces are, but rather to show the diversity

of understanding and complexity of meaning participants place on these spaces.

Although the phrase *safe space* frames this study and much of the literature, participants

used other words to describe places that they considered safe spaces. These words were often

simple, such as *chill* or *cool* spaces, and participants used these words to signify safe spaces with others. Similar to the definitions of safe spaces, the words used by participants to describe safe spaces varied by the participant and were not meant to define the limits or bounds of safe spaces. Instead, this terminology is useful in hearing how the participants spoke of and about safe spaces. Taken together, the definitions and terms participants used to describe safe spaces provides an understanding of how these LGB college students define the complexities of various safe spaces.

Characterization of Unsafe Spaces

When describing what safe spaces are, participants often spoke of unsafe spaces and how they characterized these spaces. Unsafe spaces were typically described as locations where their sexual identities were not validated or supported. All four of the male participants in this study shared negative stories of and emotions stemming from unsafe spaces. One participant, Brock (gay-identified man attending Southeast College), spoke about an unsafe space as somewhere that "there really wasn't a space for gay people to actually be their own people or anything." He gave the example of his high school as an unsafe space and how he and other gay classmates had to hide in that environment. He shared, "We had to hide in the corner and pray to God that nothing happened to us."

Often in these unsafe spaces, participants were hyperaware of their sexualities as different from those around them. While at a restaurant on a date with another man, Max (gay-identified man attending State University) described during his interview the fear he felt of drawing glances from others. He explained, "It was more or less what I was feeling, not so much anybody said anything in particular." As a result, Max tried not to make eye contact with others at the restaurant "for fear that I might…catch someone's glance or something, then they [would]

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really know that we [were] up to something." Harriet (gay-identified man attending Founder University) also spoke of not wanting to be noticed in unsafe spaces and how this affected his behavior:

> I am not really myself. I'm withdrawn, just because I don't want to be noticed, like I don't want to be questioned for being who I am. I don't need to be questioned for being different, and I don't want people to wonder, or like whisper, "Oh is he gay?" I just don't want to be noticed.

Another participant, Andrew (gay-identified man attending Founder University), spoke of similar feelings of being "self-aware" when he decided to dress in drag to a "straight" bar to watch his friend's band perform. He shared that his friend's band often wears "crazy costumes" to shows both on and off-campus and so he started wearing costumes to their shows, as well. On the occasion that he attended the show dressed in drag, "I felt really self-aware, like…everything I was doing, and just this feeling of pressure….[I]t's really uncomfortable, it's the way I would describe it." Andrew did not share similar sentiments when he attended another show dressed as a sailor. Regardless of (un)intentionally drawing attention, all male participants shared similar stories of feeling hyper- and self-aware of their sexual identities in unsafe spaces.

Many of the female participants also shared stories of unsafe spaces and how they understood and recognized these spaces. Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman attending Founder University) knows she is in an unsafe space when she looks around and only sees "a lot of straight couples…or people that look pretty conservative and mainstream." Because of her unsafe perceptions of others within these spaces, she feels "a lot more guarded, and there is definitely some anxiety that comes with that" when she is in unsafe spaces. Lucy (bisexual/queer-identified woman attending Central University) affirmed that "there's always

that feeling that you have to be very careful" in an unsafe space. For Danielle (lesbian-identified woman attending Founder University), being careful in unsafe spaces was often because of the possibility of being physically and emotionally unsafe. Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman attending Founder University) described unsafe spaces as places where she is "not myself when I go there and I have to act a different way." In handling unsafe spaces, Annie said that "[you] just talk your way through the uncomfortableness…and say, 'It will be over in an hour,' or 'I'll never see these people again.'" With these definitions of unsafe spaces, participants provide a vivid characterization of negative spaces as physically and emotionally unsafe that result in feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness. Unlike the definitions of safe spaces discussed earlier, participants described unsafe spaces as locations where they must perform their identities differently than they might want to otherwise.

Summary of the Theme: Characterization of Unsafe Spaces

In summary of this theme, participants characterized unsafe spaces as places where they were more aware of their sexual identities and often fearful of how others might treat them negatively because of their identities in these spaces. For instance, both Max (gay-identified man attending State University) and Andrew (gay-identified man attending Founder University), shared stories of how they felt more aware of their sexual identities as different from those around them in unsafe spaces. Because of this self-consciousness, some participants, such as Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University), tried not to be noticed in unsafe spaces, whereas others like Andrew, tried to be noticed in an unsafe space but still felt uncomfortable and self-aware. Feelings of being guarded and emotionally and physically unsafe often represented ways in which many participants, such as Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at

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Founder University) and Danielle (lesbian-identified woman at Founder University), were able to recognize unsafe spaces.

Types of Spaces

All of the participants identified specific places that met their definitions and descriptions of safe and unsafe spaces. These safe spaces included physical locations, such as LGBT Resource Centers, homes, coffee shops, and gay bars, as well as virtual locations, such as social media websites and blogs, and psychological locations that are both mental and emotional spaces of reflection and support. As mentioned above, when describing safe spaces, unsafe spaces were also discussed by many of the participants. Unsafe locations included places and people, such as high schools, restaurants, and relationships. To visually describe the safe spaces they had identified, participants provided photographs. These photographs were used during the interviews to help participants reflect on their safe spaces. Photographs were not provided by participants of all safe spaces discussed during their interviews, however many of the photographs that were provided are included in this section to give a greater understanding of identified safe spaces. Several participants took images of the same general locations (i.e., college campuses and blogs), therefore, only some of the photos for each location are provided to visually illustrate the safe space.

Physical safe spaces. One physical safe space often discussed by participants was their particular college or university. All six participants who attended Founder University discussed their college as a safe space. Three of the participants, Harriet, Danielle, and Annie provided photographs of their college campus to further show how it is a safe space for them. From the moment that Harriet (gay-identified man) arrived at Founder University, he "felt super comfortable" because of the "combination of the people, the energy, just like everything here is

just super positive." To represent Founder, Harriet provided a photograph of a campus building

that has a clock on it (Figure 1) because "it's one of the most beautiful places at [Founder]."

Harriet shared that he goes through the front gates of campus just to drive past the clock tower

and "appreciate it."

Figure 1. Harriet's Photo of the College Campus

Danielle (lesbian-identified woman) also came to Founder University because she was

able to identify it as a safe space:

Part of the reason I came to [Founder] is because I could tell it was gay friendly…I knew

they had [a] Gay/Straight Alliance…and also I was a prospective student here and I

stayed in some dorms with these two girls…One of them was like, "If you don't like gay

people, you shouldn't come here." (laughter) So it was like, "Hmm, interesting, good

school."

Annie (lesbian-identified woman) also shared that she came to Founder because "I know I felt

safe here, and you know, not everybody is going to believe what I believe…and have the same

values, but they don't judge me for them, and they respect mine, and I respect theirs, and so it's

safe for me." Similar to Harriett, Annie believed that the campus was "gorgeous" and felt that "…the people are probably what make that space safe, the faculty, the staff, the students, the RAs [Resident Assistants], the Nurse… just everybody at [Founder], makes it feel that way. I could never have dreamed of a better campus."

Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) classifies Founder University as a safe space because of her ability to date others of the same gender openly. She shared, "I definitely feel safe there [at Founder]. I've been to three homecoming dances…[and at] all of them, I brought a date, and, all three were girls." For Chuck, being able to take a date to the homecoming dance in college was "such a contrast" because it was not possible for her to do so when she was in high school. She explained, "I went to both my junior and senior prom [in high school], and I went with a group of friends, because I wasn't even out, so it wasn't even an option to have a date." With a previous girlfriend she dated, Chuck was able to "walk around holding hands and it wasn't a problem" at Founder University, whereas it would have been in other places like her high school.

Similarly, Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman) identified Founder as a safe space and provided a photograph of herself and her girlfriend before they went together to the homecoming dance. She chose this particular photograph because:

> …not only am I with my girlfriend about to go [Founder's] homecoming, but we were both dressed pretty dykey. (laughter) So, I was comfortable enough to do that, because I had a dress, but I didn't really feel like wearing it...And so [we] went to homecoming together and we danced together and we had a great time.

In the photograph she provided, she and her girlfriend are both wearing suits, which she referred to as "dykey" in her interview. For Jennifer, her ability to not only openly display her sexual identity, but also her gender expression at Founder University made it a safe space.

Lastly, Andrew (gay-identified man) identified Founder University as one of his safe spaces because of his involvement in the Gay/Straight Alliance and ability to socialize with friends. Even within this safe space he discussed homophobic incidents that occurred which made him qualify his college as a "relatively safe" space:

> I feel [Founder] is pretty open, pretty safe. I know there's a couple of people who have been called "faggot" from cars…I'm very aware of that stuff because I'm head of [the Gay/Straight Alliance], like I'm trying to gauge what's going on, but I think all and all it's relatively safe.

Like those participants who attended Founder University, Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College) also provided a photograph of his college campus (Figure 2), which he identified as a safe space. One reason he identified his campus as a safe space is the inclusive mission of his institution. He explained,

> Part of our mission is to just be open for everybody and kind of like in a lot of words, it says safe space for everybody because we have a wide variety of clubs and organizations ranging from Latino organizations to Black organizations, just like we cover the entire race, gender, everybody.

For Brock, the mission of his institution as well as having inclusive student organizations made it a safe space. Because of his leadership role as the President of the Student Government Association (SGA), he also felt acknowledged and respected. Brock shared, "[B]eing student government president, I basically know everybody who goes to this campus now, so I just kind

of feel like I am hot shit on this campus, like I know everybody, everybody knows me."

Through his involvement and leadership on his campus, Brock has also been able to overcome

the struggles he faced in high school. He "turned a new leaf" when he enrolled in college and

got involved on campus through the President's Leadership Program scholarship that he was

awarded. In describing what his leadership involvement has done for him, Brock explained, "I

feel like I have power again. I'm like my own person, not looked at, 'Oh, there's that gay guy'

and 'There's that kid' and just kind of like, 'There's [Brock],' I actually have a name."

Figure 2. Brock's Photo of Southeast College

Although many participants spoke about their colleges and universities as safe spaces in

general, a number of the participants also spoke about specific areas of campus that they

considered safe. These included areas such as LGBT Resource Centers, on-campus living

spaces, and Greek fraternity houses. The most discussed of these specific on-campus safe spaces

was the LGBT Resource Center on the participants' respective campuses. Lucy (lesbian/queer-

identified woman) provided a photograph of the LGBT Resource Center at Central University

(Figure 3) and explained that it was a safe space on her campus because "a lot of people I met in

there, including the staff, are super welcoming of students and they're encouraging of students to

use the space." Due to the location of the LGBT Resource Center being in a "semi-rather public space" in the Student Center at Central, Lucy explained that whomever goes into the office "has to be sort of comfortable with being around people of LGBTQ identities and being seen being around people of LGBTQ identities." Within the office, though, there is also a wall that "people can actually sit and not be seen by anybody who walks by" and provides some privacy for those who do not want to be seen in the office. Lucy described the idea of the public and private nature of this space as a "dual allowance of space." Aside from the people and the physical place, Lucy also spoke about the support, education, and advocacy of the LGBT Resource Center, which made it a safe space for her:

> They do support a lot and sponsor a lot of student programs for students like the Queer Discussion Group that I do is under the Office and Pride is sort of like affiliated with the office so there's a lot of support for student work towards LGBTQ identities and to build safer spaces and…besides being welcoming, [the Office is] always really willing to educate students and willing to advocate for the students so I guess it's a combination of the people involved and the place that make it feel safe and the space itself that I quite enjoy.

Figure 3. Lucy's Photo of the LGBT Resource Center

Lucy was not alone in her identification of her campus LGBT Resource Center as a safe space. All of the participants who were enrolled at State University spoke about the importance of their LGBT Resource Center and its sponsored programs as a safe space for expressing identity, developing relationships, and gaining education. Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman) provided a photograph (Figure 4) of the inside of the LGBT Resource Center at State University to represent how the Center and LGBT student organizations serve as safe spaces for her identity. She explained, "The Center, which is an established safe space, and through [the Gay/Straight Alliance] and these organizations that are established safe spaces, because you can already assume that everyone is going to be a safe space." She was often surprised by how many people are in the Center and compared the space to a living room. Max (gay-identified man) also identified the LGBT Resource Center at State as the only "signified official place designated for queer people" in the city in which the university is located. Because Coco (gay/lesbian-identified woman) lives off-campus, she said that she is in the LGBT Resource Center at State University every day because it serves as a "mock dorm room" for her and many of her friends. Michelle (bisexual-identified woman) found the LGBT Fair sponsored by the LGBT Resource Center and organizations that occurred outside the Student Center at State to be incredible for "being so open about sex and sexual health."

Figure 4. Zoe's Photo of the LGBT Resource Center

Several participants spoke about the importance of symbols and stickers that identified physical places as safe spaces. In particular, Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) provided a photograph of Safe Zone and Safe Space stickers (Figure 5) that signified that the LGBT Student Organization Office is a safe space.

Figure 5. Zoe's Photo of LGBT Symbols

In explaining the importance of these stickers and what they have meant to her, she shared,

> This is the sign outside the [Gay/Straight Alliance] office. But the reason I took this
>
> picture is because of those stickers, especially the one on the right, it's the safe space
>
> sticker and as I first came to college, those things…like the stupid little stickers…every
>
> time I'd see one, I'd smile, because I knew that I was welcome here and that I could relax
>
> and that…this was a pre-designated safe space, like…there's one in the tutoring center
>
> and it's just on a column and I'm sure every person who walks by never realizes it. But
>
> for the people who are looking, it means the world.

For Zoe, these Safe Space stickers serve as signifiers of safe spaces. They are physical displays of locations that are accepting and welcoming of her identities. Safe space stickers and lapel

pins were especially important to her as a first-year student transitioning into a new environment and determining how safe and accepting it was of her identities. She explained further,

> So these signifiers are…like I cannot stress how important they are for me, especially as I was a freshman, seeing them in the smallest places…like little pins on people's backpacks are a reason to throw a parade, because they're a signifier that this is like, "I'm okay," like that this is a place to be okay, this is a place where you can be you. [I]f it's a [lapel] pin, I'm a person where I'll accept you. And that's why these things are so important to me. But yeah, that's what that sign was for.

Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) also provided an image of a Safe Space sticker that was included on a slide from a presentation she gave to high school teachers on how to address sensitive issues in their classrooms (Figure 6). She was on her high school news magazine staff for three years and felt comfortable enough to write about personal topics because of how safe she felt with the other staff members. When she was not with the staff, though, she would look for Safe Space stickers to help her identify safe spaces. Although she shared that she would not approach a teacher who had a sticker on their door, these stickers made her feel "comforted" and supported in a classroom environment. She explained the importance of these stickers to standing up for herself in high school in the following way,

> When I was in English class, in tenth grade, and someone called someone else a faggot, and I was like, "You need to stop." I was like, "That's freaking annoying and I'm not going to put up with it," and my teacher backed me up, and I was like, "Alright, that's a good thing," and I was like, "It's not going to work in the hallways, but that's fine, I can stick up for myself out there."

The photo Michelle provided includes a photo of a safe space sticker and a quote beside the sticker that describes an incident of a boy using a derogatory word on his Facebook page. Although the boy's family was upset with the incident, his peers were not, and he normalizes the remark as something "any normal 16-year-old boy might do." This incident represents for Michelle the need for formalized Safe Space programs that allow queer and straight allies to know they are supported in speaking out against homophobia in high school spaces.
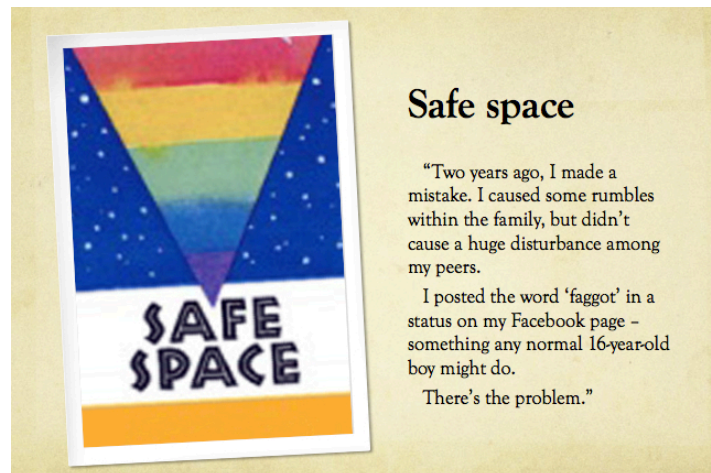
Figure 6. Michelle's Photo of Safe Space Symbol

Although these Safe Space stickers were effective in allowing Michelle to assert herself during high school, she acknowledged that they are only effective within the classroom, not outside in the hallway or other areas that are not designated by such stickers. Although Safe Space stickers and lapel pins are one way of identifying safe spaces for Zoe and Michelle, less formalized ways of identifying safe spaces were often discussed by other participants, including language and behavior. Furthermore, for participants like Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College), whose college does not have a Safe Space Program, he was still able to feel safe in spaces not identified by safe space stickers.

Several participants also identified their living spaces on-campus as safe spaces. These locations included their residence hall rooms and apartment living rooms. Annie (lesbian/queer-

identified woman at Founder University) discussed the importance of her residence hall room as a safe space and provided a photograph to show how her room represents her safe space (Figure 7). Annie described her residence hall room as her "first real home…because that is where I feel most comfortable" and she has decorated it in ways that represent her identities, including colorful posters, flowers, and rainbow-colored knickknacks. Whenever Annie is dealing with a difficult situation or feels "discouraged, or confused, or angry, or judged, I just go to my room and sit at my desk, or sit at my altar, or whatever, and I feel safe." In relation to her spirituality, Annie has an altar in her residence hall room that she is able to kneel beside and read empowering quotes for inspiration and encouragement. In many ways, Annie's room serves as a space of retreat and refuge for her.

Figure 7. Annie's Photo of Residence Hall Room

Lucy (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Central University) described how the living rooms of her and her friend's apartments were used as safe spaces (Figure 8). She stated,

It's just that kind of informal friendship space that also feels safe in a different way… like most of my friends in that group are queer so it's sort of like self-selecting space already

and…when you hang out with each other there's already that barrier removed that you

don't have to guess or sort of assume, like everybody knows everybody's personal

identities and it wasn't forced out of you, it's more like slowly people volunteer stuff and

we kind of just hang out every week, every weekend or something. It's a fluid group but

I would say there's always about ten or slightly less of us just sitting in there and playing

cards and stuff like that, so it's a very informal space.

Figure 8. Lucy's Photo of an Apartment Living Room

Lucy shares that within the informal safe space of their living rooms, she and her friends are able

to talk about topics that might not be appropriate in other safe spaces, such as the LGBT Office:

I guess it's a space for people [to] unwind and you can be more frank or talk about more

informal things that might not always fly in the office because…when you know each

other you have more license to say certain things whereas if you were in a public space

you would probably be a bit more polite, which it's not a bad thing, I think there are

different codes, whereas just that like here ya get to explore different sides of yourself so

definitely some more like politically incorrect or more blunt side of myself that I feel safe

sort of divulging because I know it's accepted, like my friends won't judge me for it and a

safe space for us to sort of just talk our really, really, really personal experiences without other people overhearing, without being judged and stuff like that.

Within this safe space, the membership of the group is self-selected and made up of individuals who already know about each other's personal identities; many of whom share similar sexual identities. The group eventually grew in numbers and even adopted a name, "Club Malinche." Lucy shared that, "I guess once you have a name like that [the] group forms a real identity." When asked to further explain how the name came to define the group, Lucy explained that a few of the members in the group identify as Latino or "Latino-philes," meaning "they have all gone study abroad [to] Latin American countries." Because the group often speaks in Spanish, they began "invoking the name 'Malinche,' which is one of the historical figures in, I think, Mexican history." Lucy was not completely certain of the details surrounding "Malinche," but she said because the "name just kept getting thrown around…we thought it would be really funny if we called ourselves Club Malinche, like the Malinches…"

Known as "La Malinche" by the Aztecs and Doña Marina by the Spanish, she was the daughter of a noble Aztec family and is a controversial figure in Mexican history due to her relationship and involvement with Spanish conquistador, Hernan Cortes, who conquered the Aztec Empire (Lenchek, 1997). Some recognize her as a heroine for her role as an interpreter and negotiator who saved thousands of Indian lives, while others consider her a harlot and traitor responsible for assisting Cortes with conquering Mexico from her fellow Aztec people. Choosing such a figure to represent their informal group speaks to the type of historical and political topics the group shares openly with one another. The group meets weekly, exchanges inside jokes, and starts the meetings with certain YouTube videos. By defining themselves,

Lucy's group of friends have named themselves and identified the living rooms of their apartments as safe spaces for the group to express and explore their identities with each other.

As Lucy and her friends demonstrated through their informal meeting space in each other's living rooms, a group of people can construct safe spaces in a variety of places. This was also true for several other participants at Founder University who identified a particular Greek fraternity house on their campus as a safe space (Figure 9). Harriet (gay-identified man) shared that his fraternity brotherhood is made up of "people who care about you, and support you, and love you, no matter what….[I]f someone is messing with you, they take care of you [which] creates a super comfortable and super safe environment." Harriet spoke about the differences between his and another fraternity and explained,

> People [in my fraternity] are people who love to listen and love to learn, and are very smart. Then we have [another fraternity] who are a little more set in their own ideas, and the focus of their fraternity is the very traditional idea of a gentleman, which goes against homosexuality, and so I would have never been given a bid [invitation to join] from [the other fraternity]."

Figure 9. Harriet's Photo of a Greek Fraternity House

Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman) confirmed Harriet's description of his fraternity house, indicating her level of comfort is "because I know that there are other gay guys in [the

fraternity], and they're just a more accepting environment in general." Jennifer also said that

there was a sorority on campus that she would feel safe joining if she wanted to become a

member of the Greek community:

> There is one sorority on campus that kind of has a reputation of being the gay girl
>
> sorority. So, I know that if I wanted to join a sorority, there is that place on campus
>
> where I would feel comfortable being gay and still being accepted by my peers.

As demonstrated in their quotes, these participants have internalized theirs and others'

perceptions of different fraternities and sororities as being safe or unsafe based on personal

experiences and the organization's reputation.

Figure 10. Chuck's Photo of the ACLU Office

Although many on-campus locations were mentioned, several participants also spoke

about off-campus locations. These included non-profit organizations, coffee shops, restaurants,

and gay bars. Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) provided a

photograph of the non-profit organization, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), where she is

completing an internship (Figure 10) and shared, "the ACLU [is] another place where I feel

really comfortable being gay and being open about it." One of the projects Chuck worked on for

the organization required her to research websites that were being censored by a county school.

Through this project and talking with one of her co-workers about their shared gay identities, she considered the ACLU to be "a very open office."

Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) also provided the logo of a non-profit organization, Amnesty International, for which she volunteers (Figure 11). When asked why this organization is a safe space for her, Annie shared, "It's just when I think of a physical space, that I feel like I'm never judged…one of the first things that comes to my head is Amnesty." Annie's work with Amnesty allows her to stand up for herself and not care about being judged for who she is. Furthermore, her values and passions are congruent with the values and passions of Amnesty, which is one of the biggest reasons for her involvement with the organization. Annie's interest in social justice led her to Amnesty because the organization advocates for many of the same issues she is interested in, such as abolishing the death penalty and individual LGBT rights.

Figure 11. Annie's Photo of Amnesty International

Another participant, Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University), identified coffee shops as physical safe spaces where he feels comfortable to be himself (Figure 12). A self-identified "coffee snob," Harriet worked for a number of years at specialty coffee shops before moving to the metropolitan city where he currently attends college. From the moment that Harriet stepped into the specialty coffee shop, he felt a really good "energy" and the amount of

diversity of people really got his attention. He explained, "[The specialty coffee shop] is still one of the most comfortable places…for me, like when I have a really, really rough time, my phone is off, and I'm at [the specialty coffee shop], no one can find me, no one knows where to get me …like I create my own little reality for a little bit." After moving for college, he needed a job and took a "step down" to work at Starbucks, which was one of the "best things that could have happened to me." Through his position at Starbucks, he has met many different types of people and established a friendship with one of his co-workers. When asked about why he chose Starbucks as a safe space, he shared, "Just because the people I have met through that position have been so incredible, and it really, really has been a safe place." The specialty coffee shop is where Harriet goes to be alone, whereas Starbucks is where he goes to work and meet people.

Figure 12. Harriet's Photo of Starbucks Coffee

Max (gay-identified man at State University) identified another physical location that he regularly meets friends at, called Around the Corner (Figure 13). Around the Corner is a restaurant located downtown in the city in which he attends State University. It is at this restaurant that he meets weekly with his friends to socialize and relax. In describing why he chose this location as a safe space, he shared,

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I use [this] as an example because we get together and we actually create our own little

safe space, so every Friday night, at 5:30 p.m., we don't have to be prompted, we all

show up, we all go order a drink, and then we all sit around and just talk for an hour and a

half, or two hours, and we talk about anything and everything—normally not politics—

but we talk about all kinds of things that are happening in our lives and of course for all

of us generally queer is a part of it so…we can talk about issues, and there is a shared

understanding that the types of issues that we are talking about are important, we don't

have to justify why we are talking about something that's going on in the gay world, we

don't have to explain those types of things, so that for me is a space where I feel really,

really comfortable in my own shoes without having to worry so much about…I go into

that group and I don't have to worry.

Figure 13. Max's Photo of Around the Corner

For Max, this particular physical location allows him and his friends to meet and feel free,

without worry, to discuss aspects of their queer identities in an environment where they do not

have to explain themselves to one another or others. He expects when he enters this space to feel

welcomed because of the type of open environment that has been created there among his group

of friends. He explained, "[T]he physical space of [Around the Corner] and the people that work

there…and the atmosphere that I think they [the staff] have worked really hard to create is one that's very open, and accepting, and unquestioning, and not a harassing space." Therefore, both the physical environment and the atmosphere created by the staff is a safe space for Max because of how open and accepting it feels for him.

The church Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) attends serves as a safe space for her (Figure 14). Annie learned of this particular church her freshman year of college through a class assignment for which she had to interview a community leader. She conducted a Google search for "gay churches" and was surprised to learn of a gay, Christian church. She met with the pastor of the church and realized how affirming the church was of the LGBT community so she decided to attend weekly. She described the church as "a huge family" that accepts "all different religions, Buddhism, Taoism, Jewish, Muslim…we have a bunch of different religions." Annie explained why people of diverse religious traditions and sexual identities choose to come to her church: "they feel safe, and feel like they can practice their spirituality in a safe environment, and they can be gay and whatever religion they are." This physical safe also serves as a mental space for Annie because she is able to pray and "[talk] my way through something" and "[talk] to somebody up above about it." Within this physical safe space, Annie feels comfortable enough to also utilize her psychological safe space of prayer.

Figure 14. Annie's Photo of Church Service

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Another safe space for Annie was a body modification shop (Figure 15). During her freshman year, Annie decided she wanted a piercing "for the wrong reasons" (i.e., for pain and an adrenaline rush) because she was upset and stressed about her finals and did not have enough money for a tattoo. At the piercing shop, Annie met a piercer whom she considers to be "a role model of mine." Because of the good experience she initially had at the piercing shop, she came back and brought friends with her. She explained, "Every time I walked in…I wasn't judged, and it was just a very calm place, and for a body modification shop, it's weird for it to be calm, but it really is." For Annie, the piercing shop often is a place she is able to turn to when she is dealing with difficult situations outside of her church and her college. She explained, "I will end up stopping there, and I just sit on the couch and watch people come in and out and get pierced, and don't get pierced, and have panic attacks, and leave and, you know, [I] look at the jewelry, and [the piercer] will let me help her clean it." Annie shared that for her the piercer "is kind of like my therapist" and she listens to "all of my girl problems." Like many physical safe spaces identified by other participants, the people who occupy these spaces are often the reasons that the physical space is considered a safe space.

Figure 15. Anne's Photo of a Tattoo & Piercing Shop

Annie also provided a photograph (Figure 16) of a microphone to identify an additional physical safe space where she feels comfortable to expresses herself. Annie had few safe spaces

growing up, but standing behind a microphone and performing spoken word poetry was an outlet

for her to deal with issues she was facing. She has performed spoken word poetry since the age

of thirteen after her father heard her read one of her poems. He started taking her to weekly,

Monday Open Mic nights where she performed her spoken word poetry for an audience. Her

first spoken word poem she read was her coming out story, which she remembered made the

audience "go crazy" with applause. However, after finishing her coming out poem, she shared,

> …as soon as I got down off the stand that was a different story, because everybody's eyes
>
> were judging, but when I was up there, I didn't care and then I learned that I can express
>
> myself about anything through my poetry.

For Annie, when she is behind a microphone, she is "in my own zone" and does not care about

what others think of her. Although she felt some judgment after reading her coming-out poem,

she has since realized that "they may judge your poetry, but they are not going to judge you"

because "if you are performing poetry behind a microphone, it's because they like what you have

to say."

Figure 16. Annie's Photo of a Microphone

While Annie used a microphone to express her feelings, Brock (gay-identified man at

Southeast College) used his car to process his thoughts (Figure 17). Brock identified his car as a

physical safe space to "chill out and think about what I'm going to do before I actually do something." During his coming out process, Brock's father was not "really as supportive of it" and whenever they argued about his sexuality, Brock would retreat to his car. He shared, "So whenever he wanted to start yelling or anything like that, I'd just run out and get in the car and drive for 15 or 20 minutes…just chill out and come back and try to have a calm, collected state of mind before I absolutely killed somebody." Brock also spoke about another time when he got in a fight with his supervisor and driving his car "made me feel so much better after that." For Brock, his car provides a safe space to reflect and relax by himself from stressful situations and people.

Figure 17. Brock's Photo of Driving a Car

Virtual safe spaces. The most often cited virtual safe space by participants was Tumblr, which is a social networking website that allows users to post multimedia and other content to a short-form blog. For participants, Tumblr is an anonymous space for community, anonymity, expression, and learning. Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University) explained Tumblr as "one of the things of my generation; I think Tumblr is our greatest contribution to society." Harriet spoke about the sense of community of artists that he experiences on Tumblr,

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Never before has there been such a large gathering of artists, in the world, as Tumblr, it's absolutely incredible. [T]he goal of Tumblr is expressing yourself, in whatever form is best for you, be it poetry, mine is almost exclusively photography, but there is some other stuff on there. My site isn't that great, I do a lot more reading than posting, but it really is a great community, and that is of interesting is it's not an anonymous community…but you are not labeled as a person, you are labeled by what you present.

Harriet felt that he "see[s] a truer form of you" on Tumblr because of what is presented by authors on the website. Using his own Tumblr as an example (Figure 18), he explained, "[W]hile I consciously selected all of those [photos] my subconscious had a huge influence in what I selected, and so I really think when I am looking at someone's Tumblr, I'm looking really deep inside of them." For Harriet, this virtual safe space allowed him and others to express themselves in both conscious and unconscious ways.
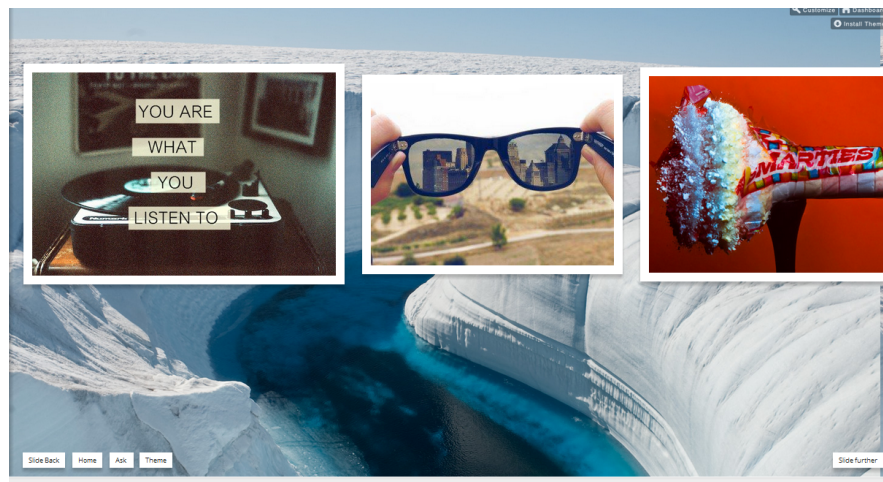
Figure 18. Harriet's Photo of Tumblr

Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University) also described Tumblr in terms of community building, but he spoke specifically about the queer community (Figures 19 and 20):

> [I]t's kind of like Twitter…but it's more than a Twitter cause you put photos and it's kind
> of like a blog, but everyone can see what you're writing and you can see what everybody
> else is writing. I really like it because I have a lot of queer friends on there.

Andrew also preferred using Tumblr than other online spaces because of the sense of anonymity it affords him. He shared, "Tumblr is kind of secret, not everybody knows about Tumblr and it's kind of like a journal, like my diary in a way." He also provided a screenshot of his "Tumblr crushes" that are his "most liked" and "reblogged blogs." His top "crush" is a user who has a photograph of Shania Twain, followed by a user with a bleeding eye. As evidenced by these screenshots, Andrew was able to display and express himself in multiple ways on Tumblr.
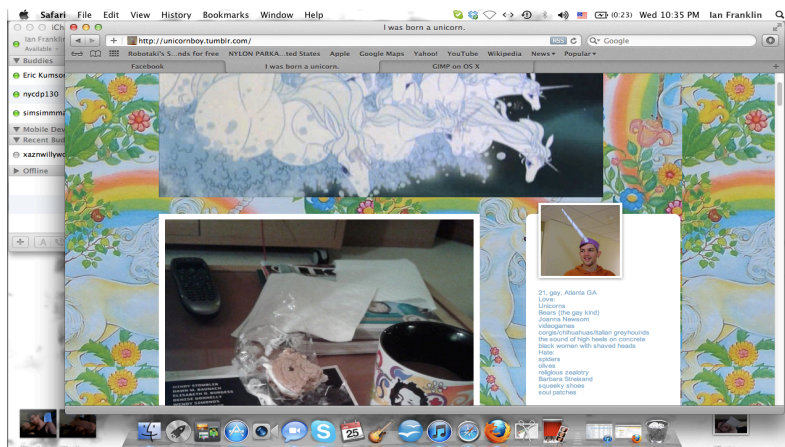
Figure 19. Andrew's Photo of Tumblr
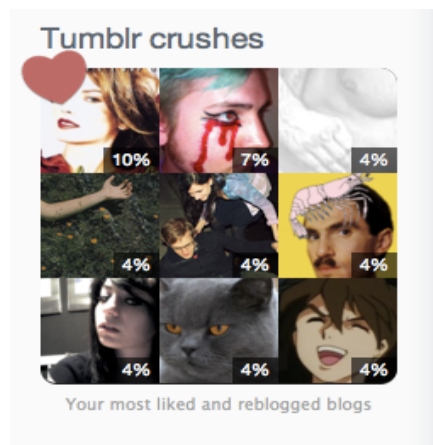
Figure 20. Andrew's Photo of Tumblr Crushes

For Coco (gay/lesbian-identified woman at State University), Tumblr was a safe space where she has an audience to vent to when she is upset (Figure 21). Similar to Andrew, Coco enjoyed that Tumblr is an anonymous outlet:

[Tumblr] is so anonymous, you know, I have people who are following me, who I have no idea if they are even like American. I mean, I'm sure they are like international and so if you post something, and then someone…likes it or re-blogs, or whatever… it's like…inter-connectedness…citizen of the world thing, like it's…become such an easy way to learn about different cultures, and…it's just like anonymously sharing of your life and realizing that everyone has anonymous shit just like you do.

Not only is Tumblr a space where Coco felt anonymous, but it was also where she can express herself with others and feel a part of a larger community.
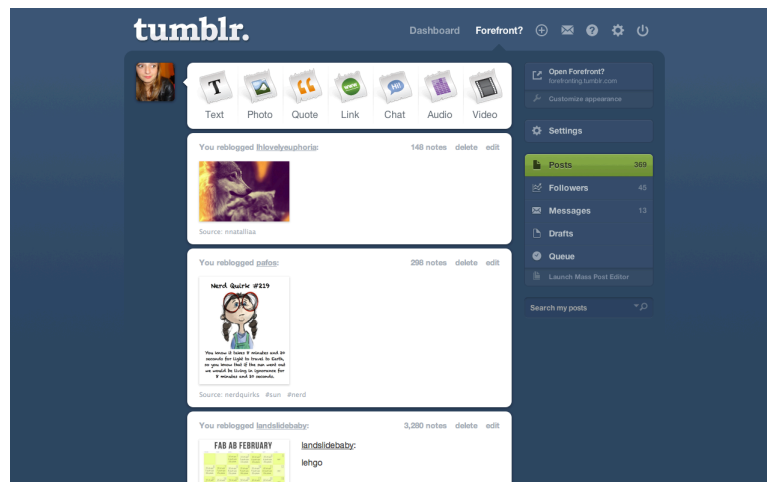
Figure 21. Coco's Photo of Tumblr

Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) provided a photograph of her dashboard of Tumblr (Figure 22) and, similar to Coco, discussed how the site is a place where she can learn about and become informed about different topics, whether personal or political. In explaining how Tumblr is a safe space for her to learn and be herself, she shared,

It's been a place where I learn a lot of things on Tumblr…I follow a few tags and a few of

them are trans[gender] issues, and because it's something that I'm really interested about

and passionate about. I've learned a lot about like what it means to be trans[gender], and

you know, what sort of emotional things people are going through, because it's sort of

like a blog format…It's really a place where I can learn about things, like I'm informed a

lot through Tumblr, about this last Prop 8 [California Marriage Protection Act] thing, like

I've learned first through Tumblr, which is a place where you can go to be like you… I

can go for information and a place just like to scroll along, lollygag and relax.

Although Coco does not identify as transgender, she is dating a transgender man, therefore

Tumblr has provided her a safe space to learn more about the transgender community and current

political issues. For Zoe and Coco, Tumblr serves as a safe space for information and learning.

Figure 22. Zoe's Photo of Tumblr

Danielle (lesbian-identified woman at Founder University), also provided a photograph

of her Tumblr page (Figure 23) and believes that the website has "a lot of support for gays on

there." She explained further, "I've seen so many reblogs of 'love is love,' and 'fight for gay

rights,' '[LGB] soldiers to be in the army,' all sorts of stuff like that. And it's just like, 'Whoa, I

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feel loved and special.'" Danielle also enjoys how she can choose how much interaction she has

on Tumblr. She shared, "You can ask people questions…anonymously or not. I just tend to

reblog whatever…and a lot of times I will reblog those gay friendly things." For Danielle,

Tumblr is a safe space because it has gay-affirming content.
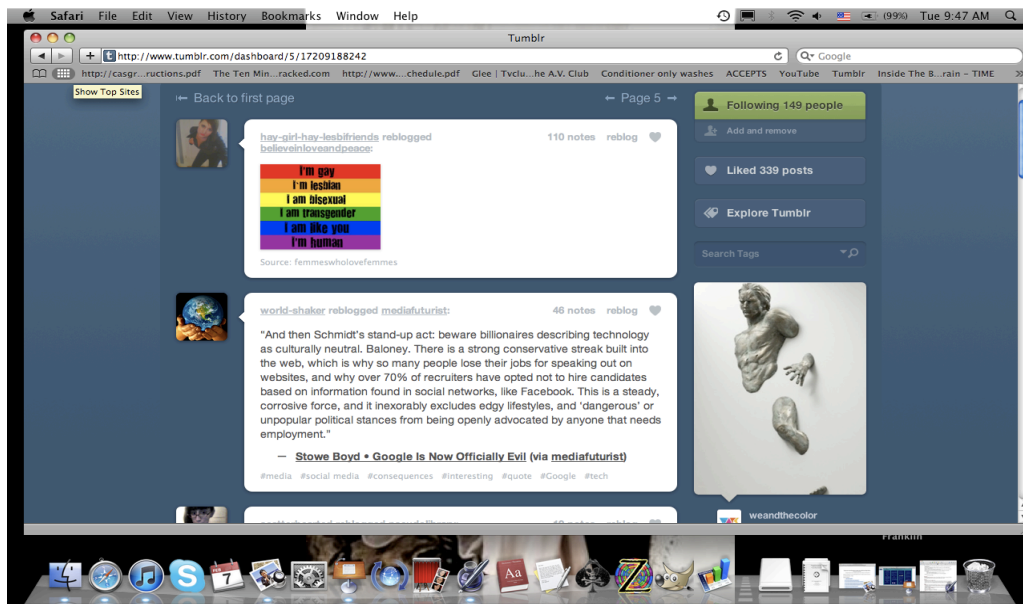
Figure 23. Danielle's Photo of Tumblr

Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College) explained that he discovered Tumblr

through a friend who had met his boyfriend through the site (Figure 24). Similar to Danielle who

uses Tumblr for gay-affirming content, Tumblr serves as a virtual safe space for Brock and

confirms for him that there are other gay people out there:

I just like to get on Tumblr because there is [*sic*] other people who are out there like me

and like being gay and everything and…growing up over in the boondocks [an area of

rural northeast Georgia], where everybody was like total assholes to gay people. More

people are out there like me, so I know I'm not alone in the struggle of homophobia and

also I've been able to post stuff up there…just [to] vent. [A]nd then people comment on

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it, like, "Oh, it's going to be okay. I totally dealt with that. I've been in your boat before."

So it helps.

Figure 24. Brock's Photo of Tumblr

Again, like Danielle, Brock often finds "inspirational stuff" on Tumblr. He follows the

Trevor Project[3] and other inspirational posts that he said, "Warms my heart." Brock also reposts

on Facebook these inspirational posts to combat homophobic remarks he has seen on the social

media site:

I always find nice little inspirational stuff on Tumblr and I always feel the need to repost

that to Facebook, being like, "Okay, here you go, stop being homophobes and just let us

be who we are," because every now and then I'll see these homophobic remarks on

Facebook, and it's just all within my will power not to either cuss the person out or repost

the post or something like that. But I always go back and [think], "Okay, if I was an

outsider, what would I do?" and I would just go back and write something that

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[3] The Trevor Project was founded in 1998 and is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth (Trevor Project, 2012).

completely contradicts that person, makes them sound stupid and makes me sound smart, all at the same time.

Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) spoke about a Tumblr page that she follows called "Queer Secrets" (Figure 25), which has the subtitle of "secrets from the lives of sexuality and gender minority people." In explaining what Queer Secrets is, she stated, "it's [like] PostSecrets[4]...but it's like the queer edition, where queer people can go and write their PostSecrets issue." Zoe follows the different queer secrets because she can relate to them. Zoe also spoke to the anonymity that exists through the site and said, "You can just submit whatever you threw together on, you know, your Paint application or whatever, and it's completely anonymous and I feel like it speaks to the anonymity that comes with Tumblr and also the queer space that Tumblr is."

Figure 25. Zoe's Photo of Queer Secrets

Several of the participants also spoke about the differences between Tumblr and Facebook. Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University), for instance, stated matter-of-factly the differences between the two social media sites:

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[4] PostSecret is an ongoing community art project where people mail in their secrets anonymously on one side of a homemade postcard (PostSecret, 2012).

I wanted to say it on record that the Tumblr me is different from the Facebook me

because although I will say that my Tumblr is linked through Facebook, like it's there

for… whoever seeks it, but…the boundaries are down when I'm on Tumblr, because my

grandmother doesn't friend me on Tumblr, my parents aren't on Tumblr. And a lot of the

people who I'm friends with on Tumblr do identify as LGBTQ or whatever. So [Tumblr

has] become like a safe space and you can easily unfriend or "unfollow" or follow,

whatever you want.

Despite Facebook being different than Tumblr for Zoe, she did speak about how she used

a Facebook group (Figure 26) to reach out to others in "places that I wouldn't traditionally call

safe." Zoe explained that because she has many friends that she considers safe spaces on

Facebook, she feels comfortable having a group that she can "post news things about what's

going on in the queer community." She feels safe having this group and posting about the queer

community because "they got my back." She explained the members of the group as "safe

people that make unsafe places [such as Facebook] safe."
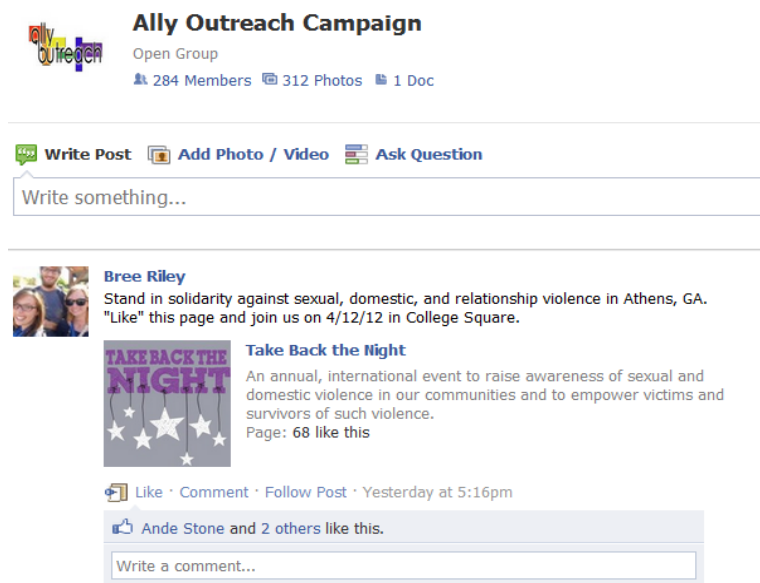
Figure 26. Zoe's Photo of a Facebook Ally Outreach Group

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For many participants like Danielle, virtual spaces often lack the privacy protection that they need to feel fully safe, although some virtual spaces were mentioned as better than others. Lucy (bisexual/queer-identified woman at Central University), spoke about her online blog through Live Journal as a safe space because of the privacy settings (Figure 27). She explained, "Live Journal has a lot of privacy settings…where you can have private posts, you can have completely public posts…so it's really a filtered level of privacy that I really, really, really, really enjoy." For Lucy, Live Journal provides a sense of history, security, and sharing, as well as a place to build community. She shared that she uses Live Journal for "blogging but also for participating in fan communities," which are "communities of interest."
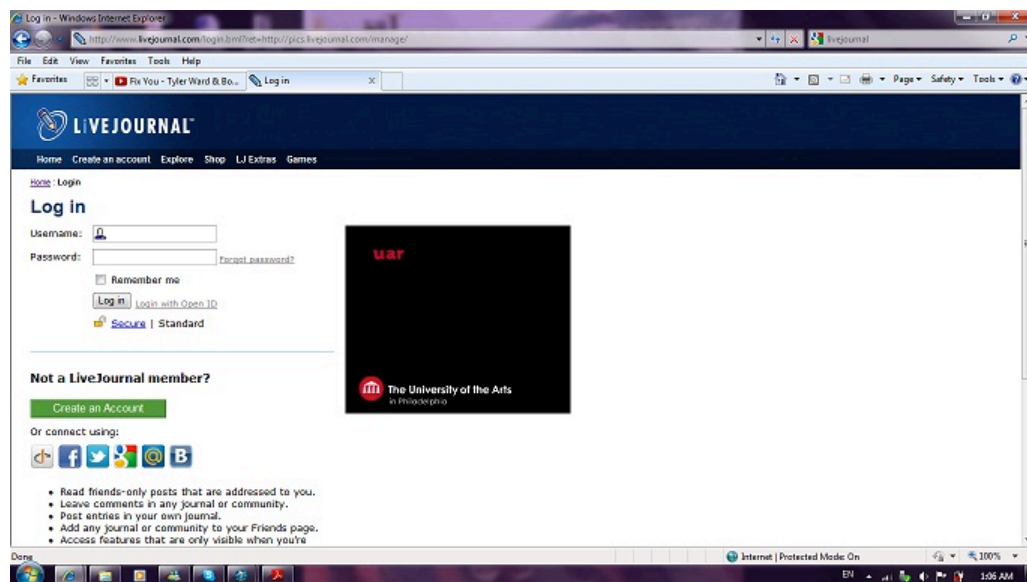
Figure 27. Lucy's Photo of Live Journal

Lucy said that she received her "first education in LGBTQ issues, feminist issues…things like that" through Live Journal. As Lucy explained, blogs are a safe space for her because of the educational component she receives by reading about others' lives through the site. When taking a Gender and Sexuality class during her first year in college, she realized that she understood the terms and concepts from what she had read on Live Journal. She explained,

I realized how much that [Live Journal] had given me, because even today like we're still talking about issues like race, ableism, fat phobia, things like that so it's really cool spaces [to] think about things and read about things that you wouldn't normally get to do….

Describing how she learned about sexual assault through a blog she follows, she shared,

One of the bloggers I follow is a sexual assault survivor and she has been very candid and sort of detailing her process of going through therapy and the different processes her depression and stuff like that, so for a psychology major it's also really interesting to read these stories and have people share their experiences to educate others….

An additional virtual location identified by participants was Autostraddle, which as Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) explained is a "lesbian culture website" (Figure 28). The website was a safe space for her because, "It's a really cool community and it's definitely a safe space. I think with my identity and how it interacts with safe spaces, there are very few spaces where I feel comfortable with both my political beliefs and my sexuality." Autostraddle has a combination of political and gay-specific articles that Chuck believed is "accepting of all viewpoints" and has "room for dissent." Chuck also uses Autostraddle as a "barometer" of how "clued into queer culture" someone is. She gave the examples of friends who use and do not use Autostraddle, which depending on their answer communicates how connected she feels they are to the queer community. Another participant, Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University), also spoke about Autostraddle and how she has "learned a lot from there" about the lesbian and bisexual culture, although she admitted, "I don't necessarily participate."

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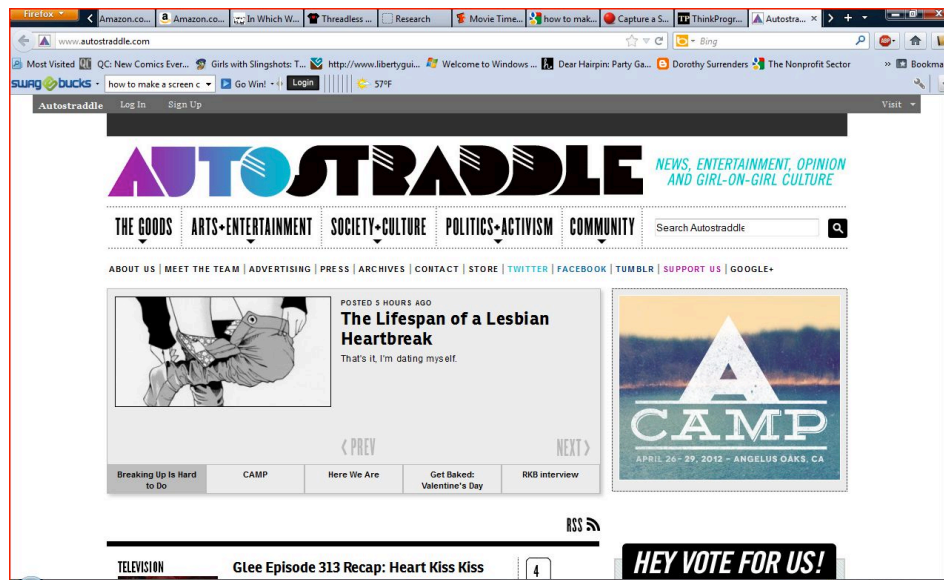
Figure 28. Chuck's Photo of Autostraddle

A screenshot of the website Reddit was provided by Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) who described this virtual safe space as "so amazing because it has these personalized communities where you know you are not going to get judged" (Figure 29). From stories about dating to discrimination, Reddit provides a space where any topic can be discussed and news can be shared with one another. Michelle explained, "It's that place where you can go and know that people who are complete and utter strangers are totally there for you."
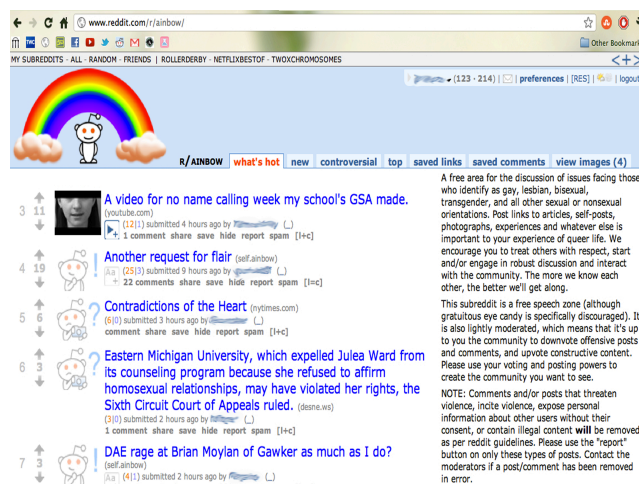
Figure 29. Michelle's Photo of Reddit

Another website that a participant, Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College), found useful and is a virtual safe space for him is Pinterest, which is "…kind of like Google Images[5], so you can type in something and it'll like pop up like a bunch of different stuff." He considers this website "a good stress reliever" that he can use to create boards of information and websites. In explaining one board he created on Pinterest, Brock shared, "I have a board for what I want for my future house, um, a gay living board, which has like all this inspirational stuff on it." Brock uses Pinterest as virtual safe spaces in multiple ways: to connect with a broader gay community, read inspirational posts, and reduce stress.

Psychological safe spaces. The most often cited psychological safe space was one's own inner thoughts, reflections, and processing. This could be done through a number of ways, including writing, prayer, and self-reflection. Often, participants utilized psychological safe spaces as ways of dealing with difficult situations or environments.

Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) included mental safe spaces in her definition of safe spaces. She explained mental safe spaces as "a space you can go to in your mind, where you feel safe…so if you are in an uncomfortable physical space…you can go to a safe space in your own mind." Put another way, mental safe spaces allow Annie to "talk your way through the uncomfortableness." Annie gave the example that, when visiting her grandparents, she has to go to her psychological safe space in order to act and perform differently than she normally does. She shared, "I have to act very proper which, I'm respectful but I'm not proper (laughing), you know, I have to go help my grandmother cook and clean, and wear the aprons and it's just not who I am." Annie also identified prayer as a mental safe space for her, as she explained, "Another mental [safe space] would be when I pray…so if I'm not talking my way through something, I'm talking to somebody up above about it."

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[5] Google Images is a comprehensive image search tool on the Internet (Google Images, 2012).

Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) and Danielle (lesbian-identified woman at Founder University) both discussed how writing helps them process their inner thoughts and serves as a safe space. Michelle explained,

> I think writing always helps because I know that if I experience something…if I wanted to write about that I could do it, in an effective way, that would be respected, as a legitimate argument, not a rant, and so knowing those skills is really important for me because even if you talk to someone about it, like, "Hey, I want to talk to you about this experience I had the other day." I'm not that crazy person that is like yelling and screaming about something, like I can put my thoughts together. I can really formulate what I'm feeling, you know.

Danielle also found writing to be useful in helping her process her thoughts and kept a journal to write about her experiences. She shared,

> I knew writing about things is helpful; it helps you organize your thoughts, even though I reread some of the entries and my thoughts make no sense still. And, I can't believe I ever thought that. But, I mean, I just know it's a good way to let out your emotions and if I was upset about something, then I could write about it.

Danielle also recognized that she writes when she is upset, not when things are happy. She explained, "I usually write in my diary…just when I'm upset and not normally when I'm like, 'Oh, awesome,' I mean, sometimes I do, but yeah." As demonstrated in these examples, though, mental and psychological spaces can be safe places for participants to collect and process their thoughts, whether through self-reflection or writing.

Physical unsafe spaces. An often-shared physical unsafe space was middle and high schools. Many participants spoke of middle and high schools as places where they faced homophobic and derogatory environments that were often uncomfortable and hostile.

For instance, Max (gay-identified man at State University) shared how in his middle school students were picked on for being gay. As a result, he felt it would have been good to have a faculty member or counselor who was gay-affirming that he could talk to about his experiences. In describing his middle school experiences, he shared,

> That's the one point in my life I do not ever want to return to not because it was traumatizing, or really all that bad, but because there was just the one time where I had to deal with other people's ignorance and discrimination and hate, and misunderstanding in a very direct way.

In high school, Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University) kept dating women "under wraps" because she knew other people would not be comfortable with it. She explained that because she knew that other students talked about her and labeled her the "gay kid," school was very "alienating". Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) also said that she did not feel comfortable being out to her high school classmates and did not come out until college. Danielle (lesbian-identified woman at Founder University) was also not out in high school and shared that she was "more uncomfortable then," "had no life," and "didn't have many friends." This meant that she "didn't leave the house at all and [so] it was go home, be online for like five hours or whatever." It was not until Danielle came to college that she said she could be out about her sexuality and have "more of a life now."

Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) characterized high school as an unsafe space despite coming out to some of her friends and one teacher. Chuck found high

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school to be affirming intellectually, but not an affirming place for her sexuality. Chuck gave an example in high school of when she was debating on coming out through a school newspaper article she wanted to write on the pros and cons of gay marriage. She thought this would be a good opportunity for her to also say she was gay. She was not able to write this article, though, because her principal was not in support and told her, "The newspaper is not a place for opinion." Although she disagreed with him, she did not fight his decision. Chuck was also involved in competitive shooting in high school. As she recalled, most of her shooting team members were very religious and, therefore, she lied about her sexuality to others in the organization because they were not accepting. During this time, she felt like she was "between a rock and a hard place" with wanting to come out and fearing that she would be "accused of throwing it in their face." The decision of coming out in different places and to different people was a constant struggle for Chuck in high school.

Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College) said high school was "hell for me," and "I absolutely hated it because being one of the only three gay people in my graduating class [of 500], I was constantly the target of bullying." Brock feared coming out in high school because of what he had seen happen to other students who had come out. During his senior year, though, he told another classmate about his sexuality and other students soon found out and started asking him questions. This made him feel forced out of the closet and made him the target of bullying. Brock explained one incident,

> I remember walking out to the truck one day and there was a skinned raccoon with duck wings attached to it and then something was flying from my antenna. I was like, "What is this shit?" So like I talked to the principal about it and then he defers me to the vice-principal, because it's like discriminatory…[The Vice Principal] was just kind of like,

"Oh, it's just simple kidding around and stupid crap like that," and I'm like, "Oh, hell no!" So once I found out who did it…the only thing that I had to say to them was, "I'm gay and I can still skin a raccoon way better than your little country hick ass." And they took that as a threat and then I proved it to them. I'm just kind of like, "Here's a better skinned raccoon, enjoy."

Because Brock lacked the support of high school administrators, he took the situation into his own hands to stand up for himself. These incidents, though, were detrimental to his self-esteem. He shared, "I feel like I had lost my momentum in life and for a while there, I was pretty depressed about that."

Although Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University) was out in high school and had a boyfriend, he spoke about how it was not a safe space for him. As an example of this, he shared a story about him and his boyfriend trying to hold hands in the library. He explained,

We would go to the library and we would hold hands or something like that and they would, the librarians would be like, "You can't do that," like, I think a lot of it was our school was like, "You're not allowed to do it if you're straight too either" but because we were gay it was visible like people do it any way, but because we were gay we were visible and so they called us out on it.

The lack of contact he was able to have with his boyfriend at school was coupled by a lack of privacy at home, which meant he "couldn't really experiment with my sexuality 'cause there was just nowhere where I could go." Related to this lack of space to explore his sexuality, he said that during high school he dealt with depression and "almost tried to kill myself." It was not until college that he felt he had the space to fully explore and experiment with his sexuality.

High school was also not a safe space for Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University) who stated, "There were few points in high school that I did feel safe and comfortable, and that's why I'm kind of overwhelmed with how happy I am now, just because it never really happened before." He wondered if he would classify himself as an introvert because of how he had to act in high school as an unsafe space. He shared, "I still introduce myself as introverted, but maybe that's just because I'm only like that when I'm not feeling safe, and now…so much of me is feeling safe all the time."

Other frequently discussed physical unsafe spaces were fraternities, fraternity houses, and bars. Although Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University) is comfortable going to one of the fraternity houses on Founder's campus with his friends, he said that going by himself "would be weird." He enjoys dancing and has gone dancing at parties at this particular fraternity house, which is the same fraternity chapter cited as a safe space earlier by Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University). Andrew describes this fraternity as "different from most fraternities in that they are pretty open-minded, like a lot of their members are gay." Even in that environment, though, he is more "self-aware" than in other spaces, such as a gay bar that he likes to frequent. In speaking of the difference between dancing at the fraternity and the gay bar, he explained,

> If I am dancing [at the fraternity house] I know people are watching me, just like that I'm…obvious, I don't know, like just people are looking at me...If I'm at [the gay bar] people are looking at you, but they aren't looking at you because you're gay, like maybe because they are into you or whatever. It's completely different….

Andrew will visit and dance at one fraternity house despite being stared at when he dances, but he said he would not step foot in the other fraternities because "I'm not invited, I already know

I'm not invited, ya know, it's unspoken." For Andrew, being invited to a space is important in making it feel like a safe space.

Coco (gay/lesbian-identified woman at State University) also experienced feeling unsafe when visiting fraternity houses and provided two different examples of incidents that occurred at the fraternity houses. One incident that Coco described involved a classmate from her high school who saw her making out with a female friend and told "everyone at [my] high school" within the "first two weeks of college." Another incident involved one of her queer friends,

I went with a friend [of mine], who identifies as queer, I think, but at first glance she has

really short hair and is very much like your stereotypical lesbian looking…but she is very

masculine, and we were trying to go in to some [fraternity house], this was like freshman

year, when that's [what] you are supposed to do, I guess, so we did, so we went to some

frat house, and they were like, "Oh no, y'all can come in, but she can't," and we were

like, "Sorry, what?," and they were like, "Oh, we are only letting girls in." What an odd

thing to say. So she left, and I don't think it offended her because she's, I think gender

queer, she is like fluid…but what an odd thing to say, like I think they meant that as an

insult, and so it's funny [that] she took it as kind of a compliment…so after that I just felt

very like, "Ewe…what sad, big, scary houses these are.

Max (gay-identified man at State University) spoke about downtown bars in his city that fraternity men and sorority women frequent as unsafe. He shared,

I guess there's been a couple of times too when I've gone downtown to straight

bars…particular to…the high frequency fraternity/sorority places, never felt like I was in

physical danger, but again, that sort of hyper awareness that I am gay, and these other

people are not, and that's part of why…I think a safe space means that you don't have to

worry about those things.

For Max, his awareness of heteronormative environments, such as "straight bars," resulted in a

consciousness of his own sexuality within these spaces, which made him not feel safe.

A few participants also spoke about restaurants where they did not feel safe. While on a

date in high school, Michelle (bisexual-identified man at State University) described being asked

to leave a Chick-fil-A for being affectionate with her girlfriend on Valentine's Day during her

freshmen year of high school. She explained,

I was with my girlfriend, and we were sitting on the same side of the booth holding

hands, and drinking a milkshake, and some manager came up and was like, "This is a

family place, and you need to leave," and I'm fourteen. I was like, "What am I going to

say to this guy?" So…we get up and leave and [my girlfriend] is in a huff obviously, like

she is a little more aggressive than I [was] at that point in my life…and looking back on it

I'm furious, but then, it's just kind of like you are shocked, you are like, "What, really?"

After leaving Chick-fil-A, Michelle and her girlfriend walked to the nearby Borders

where outside the bookstore her girlfriend gave her a hug. She told her girlfriend, "I've never

been in this position before, I feel really embarrassed about something I shouldn't be

embarrassed about. I feel publicly shamed." It was while they were consoling each other

outside the bookstore that another man approached them and said, "I just want you to know that

what you are doing is fucking disgusting." Her girlfriend turned around to face the man and

said, "If you ever talk to me like that I will pepper spray you in the face" so "get out of here."

The man responded, "Okay, whatever," and did not leave initially. Michelle and her girlfriend

just stared at him before Michelle then asked him, "Do you not understand that I will kick you in

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the balls, if you don't leave?" This resulted in him finally leaving. Because of these incidents and because she feels Chick-fil-A does not support the LGBT community, Michelle said she has not and will not eat there now.

Another restaurant that was mentioned by Coco (gay/lesbian-identified woman at State University) as an unsafe space was Waffle House. For Coco, a space is made unsafe when others stare at her and her transgender boyfriend, Lance, and her queer friends. As an example, she spoke about an incident that occurred at a Waffle House one evening after a group of her friends, one of whom, Raven, is a drag queen, and she had attended a drag show. She explained,

> People [were] just so blatantly staring at her [Raven] and so I was bringing my check to
> the cashier and she [Raven] had gone before me, and there was a guy in a booth…just
> staring at her…and so then [it was] my turn and I am feeling totally violated, like my
> privacy, like through my friend and I said, "She's pretty hot isn't she?" (laughing) And
> he was like, "You could say that," and I was just like, "I just noticed that you were
> noticing my friends, and I wanted to say I noticed you noticing them and like mind your
> own eggs, please, because you are messing up my evening," and he…got pissed off kind
> of, but that, so Waffle House is not a safe space for me.

Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) spoke about another physical unsafe space for her, Wal-Mart, where she did not feel comfortable expressing her affection with her fiancé. She shared, "My fiancé came home [to my parent's house] with me and we went to Wal-Mart, did not hold hands, did not touch, and again, it's not because I'm ashamed of who I am, it's because I just fear for my safety." Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) also shared that she felt unsafe at a Wal-Mart and used it to "test the waters." She explained, "[T]here have been like testing of the waters in places that I wouldn't

consider safe like going grocery shopping at Wal-Mart, wearing overtly gay things, or, 'You really going to wear that to Wal-Mart, are you?' 'Okay, let's go.' (laughter)." Zoe said that when she is "testing the waters" she goes in a group because unsafe spaces "turn into safe spaces when you're with the right people." Despite Wal-Mart being a physical unsafe space for her, Zoe still chooses to express her sexual identity through her clothing when she is with her friends.

Although Lucy (bisexual/queer-identified woman at Central University) wants to teach in high schools in her home country of Singapore, she feels like it "might be an unsafe space for me." She explained her perceptions as,

> There's always that feeling that you have to be very careful about…what you say and what you do like even something like, how do I respond to a homophobic slur in the classroom without having the tables turn on me and having their parents being like, "Why are you promoting homosexuality?"

Despite her fears of being unsafe teaching in high school classrooms, she finds a lot of meaning in teaching and that there is potential for her to help be part of the change. She shared, "You may not be able to promote a certain cause but you can educate your students to change their minds and for me there's a lot of source of empowerment in that."

Relational unsafe spaces. Several participants spoke about relationships with immediate and extended family and significant others who were unsafe for them. Often these unsafe family and dating relationships were unsupportive of the participants' sexual identities and did not respect their relationship boundaries. Coco's (gay/lesbian-identified man at State University) extended family is not considered a safe space, which was evidenced by the example she provided. One summer, while visiting her grandmother, she observed some of her extended family members teaching her younger cousin to use the word "fag." She explained, "They were

having her write it in little letters on the fridge, on like a magnetic thing." Although in that moment she wanted to tell them to stop, she remained silent and remembered thinking to herself, "what an odd thing." Although she is out to her grandmother and considers her accepting and "the hippie of the world", her extended family does not share the same beliefs and, therefore, she has not shared her sexual identity with them.

Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) also spoke about her immediate family being more accepting of her sexual identity than her extended family. Even though her father "doesn't really care," her "fundamental religious" stepmother was an unsafe space, because of how poorly she treats Chuck and the relationships she has with other women. Chuck stated that even if civil unions or gay marriage were allowed, her stepmother would not recognize either and would treat her differently than her straight-identified sister if her sister married a man. She explained, "Gays can't really ever be married in her eyes." Chuck's sisters' boyfriends were invited to family trips after dating for only a few months, whereas her parents "don't even know her [partner's] name" after a year of dating. Her stepmother's lack of acceptance of her identity and different treatment of her relationships than her sister's make her father's house an unsafe space for Chuck, despite Chuck's father being accepting of her sexual identity. Once again, this speaks to the important role people play in safe and unsafe spaces.

In many ways, Lucy (bisexual/queer-identified woman at Central University) feels safe and comfortable in her family home and with her parents. However, Lucy indicated that her family home is not always a safe space because she is not out to her family and feels she has to downplay her LGBT advocacy and leadership work to them. When she is describing her LGBT work to her parents, she lumps it under the umbrella term of "diversity" work. She stated, "It's not a lie [that I promote acceptance of other identities]…it's just not primarily what I do, so

there's always that couching and I guess for me I never came out to them… because I've always

been rethinking and reconsidering the boundaries of my sexual orientation." Although she is still

in the process of understanding her sexual identity, she shared that she has not felt comfortable

discussing that with her parents because of:

> ….getting into an argument with my mom in the car about how she was talking about
>
> some gay person and it got really heated and [was like] the Cold War for two days and
>
> then my dad was driving me home one day and…that was when I started identifying as
>
> bisexual, he was suddenly like, "Your mother thinks you might be a lesbian." And, I'm
>
> like, (deep breath), I'm gonna lie by omission (laughs), "I'm not a lesbian," and I guess if
>
> he were more semantically sensitive he would be like, "What are you?" ya know, but he
>
> was just like, "Ok, good," and like (laughs) we just went on. I guess that sense that I
>
> would be really upsetting my parents if I ever came out as anything other than straight
>
> and coming out to them as bi[sexual]…it's still not awesome because they would feel that
>
> you have the choice, then, to just choose to be straight….

For Lucy, she believed her parents are not a safe enough space to share with them her journey to

understanding her sexual identity because she does not want to upset them. Although she is also

not out to her younger sister, she feels more comfortable telling her sister about the LGBT-

focused work she does without calling it "diversity work".

Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University) spoke about an unhealthy

relationship he had while in college. Andrew had chatted online with a man whom he eventually

met for a first date at the man's house. When it was time for bed, Andrew made a point of

letting his date know, "Ok, I don't wanna sleep with you…we can sleep in the same bed, but I'm

not having sex with you." His date, though, was drunk and pressured Andrew into doing more

than he would have wanted to do, despite Andrew "telling 'no'…like thirty times and…pushing

him off." What started as a safe space for Andrew, ended up turning into an unsafe space. He

dated this person for a couple months for reasons he does not understand except for possibly

"trying to make it ok." Andrew felt that his lack of experience dating in high school and his

parents being divorced since he was three contributed to his lack of understanding about what

healthy relationships look like.

Summary of the Theme: Types of Safe Spaces

In summary of the theme, types of safe spaces, narratives and photos of physical, virtual,

and psychological safe and unsafe space locations were presented throughout this section.

Physical locations of safe spaces included a number of places, such college campuses, LGBT

Resource Centers, restaurants, and others, whereas virtual locations of safe spaces included

social media blogs and websites. Psychological safe spaces were often inner thoughts,

reflections, and processing that were often demonstrated through writing, prayer, and self-

reflection. As a whole, these various types and locations of safe spaces allow the participants to

be themselves without judgment, without worry, and without stress that otherwise may be the

case in other spaces, such as the unsafe spaces participants identified. These unsafe spaces were

both physical locations, including stores, restaurants, and middle and high schools, and personal

relationships, such as significant others and extended family.

As evidenced in this section, identifying both safe and unsafe spaces for the participants

was contextual and relative to the persons within a particular space and time. Although Annie's

(lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) church is a safe space for her, it may not

be a safe space for Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University). Similarly,

what is safe for Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College) may not be safe for Max (gay-

identified man at State University), and what is safe for Max may not be safe for Lucy (bisexual/queer-identified woman at Central University). The same is true for unsafe spaces. A few participants, such as Harriet (gay-identified man attending Founder University) and Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University), felt a particular Greek organization was safe, whereas others, such as Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University) and Coco (gay/lesbian-identified woman at State University), felt unsafe in different Greek organizations. Therefore, both safe and unsafe spaces should be considered relative to the person, place, time, and context rather than making generalizations about spaces being safe or unsafe.

Discussion of Themes Related to Defining and Locating Safe and Unsafe Spaces

In this section, themes that explain how LGB college students described and located safe and unsafe spaces were presented. These themes included (a) definitions and descriptions of safe spaces, (b) characterization of unsafe spaces, (c) types of spaces, and (d) queer(ing) spaces. The definitions and descriptions of safe spaces included spaces that were welcoming and affirming of personal identities without judgment. Unsafe spaces were characterized as locations where participants' identities were not validated or supported. Types of spaces were also discussed in terms of safe and unsafe spaces. Types of safe spaces included physical, virtual, and psychological spaces, whereas types of unsafe spaces included physical and personal spaces. In sum, these themes all describe *what* are safe and unsafe spaces for LGB college students and how these students interact with different environments. These themes also provide the conceptual ideas participants had of safe and unsafe spaces, which helps frame how participants used, behaved, and developed in these spaces.

Using and Behaving in Safe and Unsafe Spaces

Themes that describe LGB college students' use and behavior within safe and unsafe spaces included (a) queer(ing) spaces, (b) creating spaces, (c) changing spaces by others, and (d) behaving in spaces, both inside and outside the queer community. Throughout these themes, elements of how dominant forms of sexual identity are resisted and/or reinforced are discussed and explained.

Queer(ing) Spaces

Several participants spoke about queer(ing) spaces. For Coco (gay/lesbian-identified woman at State University), the phrases *safe space* and *queer space* are interchangeable. In a queer or safe space, Coco shared that "everyone there I am assuming is an ally, just because of the environment." Another participant, Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University), spoke about queer space through his involvement online. In discussing the differences between Facebook and Tumblr, Andrew spoke about making Tumblr a "queer space" that is a part of "the queer in my life" which was made up of "a lot of queer people." He used Tumblr as a way to learn about feminist, gay, and political information through what he follows. He was also able to queer a virtual space that otherwise might not be queer through the pages he chooses to follow and read. Similarly, Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) identified Tumblr as a queer space and defined queer space as "where there are a lot of queers. (laugher) But, like…it's established as a place where you can be queer and it's cool." Therefore, similar to safe spaces, queer spaces are established places where one's sexual and, more specifically, queer identity is accepted and affirmed.

In describing safe spaces, Max (gay-identified man at State University) discussed queering spaces through his involvement with an HIV/AIDS organization in his town that has an

annual drag show. He explained, "We go and queer up a bunch of spaces because all of the places where we have events for [the HIV/AIDS organization], they are not signified gay spaces, they are just bars and clubs, and restaurants, and things like that." In speaking more about "queering up" spaces, Max shared,

> We take those spaces and we do something to them and generally for us, it's an awareness thing and even if I'm just out with friends, I consider that an awareness thing too, like, "Yes, there are gay people in your town and yes, we can come dance here too, or yes, we can come eat here," or whatever the case may be and…sometimes it's just a few minutes, and sometimes it might be a couple of hours…we are at the forefront and they have to deal with us…whether they want to or not.

For Max, queering space is about making any space, especially those that are not gay-identified, different in some way and "not be too scared about it." This is often done through performances that challenge dominate forms of gender identity where "men [are] in dresses and women [are] in suits." Max put it simply, "queering a space…is to not be ambivalent about things, to not be ambiguous about things, to not hide." In other words, queering space is about disrupting space and blurring boundaries between gender and sexuality.

Summary of the Theme: Queer(ing) Spaces

In summary of this theme, queer(ing) spaces can be both a location and an act. Participants, such as Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University), spoke about queer spaces as those that were made up of queer individuals, whereas for Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University), queer spaces were established spaces where individuals can be queer without worry. Best described by Max (gay-identified man at State University), queering spaces as an act is about queer performance and challenging dominate forms of gender

identity. Whether a queer space or the act of queering a space, the notion of not hiding and being

open about a person's sexual identity was present and affirmed through queer(ing) spaces.

Queer and queering spaces both have more specialized functions than safe spaces with the

purpose of challenging heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality within different spaces.

Creating Spaces

Participants spoke about formal and informal ways of creating spaces that they

considered safe throughout the interviews. Participants often created these spaces as ways to feel

supported and affirmed in their sexual identities. For instance, Max spoke about a formalized,

monthly gay night he helps coordinate called "Gay Bar" that is hosted at a local bar in his town

and is meant for socializing and dancing. He and two others created this space as "a way to meet

people…kind of a familiar, friendly way to meet each other…it's really just supposed to be a

social space." Max explained how he utilizes Facebook to advertise the event, which usually has

over 150 people in attendance. Mostly gay men attend at these events, but some straight women

and lesbians also attend. He also shared that once he posts the advertisement online, a lot of

"random kind of people from out in the country, who are trying to meet people in town" respond

and often attend. For those who do not live in Max's college town, he believed this was a

meaningful event for them to connect with other gay people. He shared,

> This is their once-a-month gay encounter…they don't have many gay friends where they
>
> come from, they don't get to be out very often, and so this…for them, this has to be a
>
> really kind of a big deal safe space I would think.

Because Max is connected to the LGBTQ community within his town, the purpose of the event

is different from those who live outside his town. As he shared, he has moved from accessing

safe spaces for himself to helping create safe spaces for others.

As stated above, Tumblr was identified as a safe space location for many participants and many of them create an online LGBTQ community through this online medium. Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) explained,

> A lot of the people who I'm friends with on Tumblr do identify as LGBTQ or whatever. So it's become like a safe space and you can easily unfriend or like unfollow or follow, whatever you want. So it's become that sort of a safe space.

For Zoe, her ability to choose whom she follows allows her to create this safe space.

Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University) believed that his college allowed him the space to create safe spaces. In talking about the reasons why he chose to attend his university, he explained,

> We just wanted to go somewhere, we can be ourselves, so I think that…we have created an environment for the purpose of being ourselves, and that's what makes [Founder] such an overwhelmingly safe place for everyone…we have all created it for ourselves and we all coexist together in that way.

From the first event he attended at Founder, which was a community service program, he felt the students at his college were interested in him and each other "as a person, and not…what you do." By showing interest in each other, Harriet and others at his college created a community that led to "an open exchange of dialogue [that] really does create a safe space." Another way they create this safe space is "you…don't just have a lot of people talking, there has got to be listening and talking."

In high school, Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University) created a Gay/Straight Alliance in order to create a safe space for LGBT students. She described creating the Gay/Straight Alliance as "a process and a battle" that "wasn't so easy." She was initially

denied by the principal to have the organization until she told him he was legally not allowed to deny the organization. Without her permission, the principal contacted Jennifer's mother to let her mother know what she was trying to create at school. Her mother responded to him with, "Not only do I know what she's doing, but I fully support her and you better support her too." Despite the challenges she faced creating the group, Jennifer knew she had her mother on her side. Eventually, she was able to create the Gay/Straight Alliance, although she did not receive a very favorable reaction from the school administration. She explained,

> The school had to make some changes like the principal had to send out a…permission slip at the beginning of the year saying, "If there are any clubs that you don't want your child to join, please sign here." That slip wasn't there before I started my club. So, yeah, the reactions were interesting, but I never got too much trouble for it.
>
> Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) spoke about how

YouTube videos documenting lesbian story lines on AutoStraddle are created. She explained,

> So, people will do these YouTube videos and often it will be…a series of them. And sometimes…maybe parts of it'll be clips from…a soap opera. And it'll be just the lesbian storyline. Or maybe even a movie or just a TV show, not even a soap opera. [There's] even like…an acronym for it, like lesbian story line clips on YouTube or something, and I was like, other people like…seek them out. I can see the view counts and their creating them, but it's just nice to see it referenced in print.

For Chuck, these "very affirming" videos are a way that she and others can express their identities "and [these videos] makes you… feel like you're a member of this super-secret awesome club sometimes."

For two participants, Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) and Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College), driving is a way of informally creating a safe space for both of them to process and reflect about what is going on in their lives. For Annie, she spoke a number of times during her interview about taking "one of my drives where I would think" and process her thoughts. As discussed earlier, Brock also utilized driving as a way of creating a safe space for him. For both Annie and Brock, driving is a way for both of them to create an alone space where they feel safe to be in their own thoughts.

Summary of the Theme: Creating Spaces

In summary, participants spoke about the theme of creating spaces through informal and formal ways. For some, like Max (gay-identified man at State University) and Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University), they created formal safe spaces for socialization and community building. For others, such as Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University), Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University), and Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College), informal safe spaces they and others created allowed for identity expression and self-reflection. These stories of creating formal and informal spaces also speak to the strategies these participants took to build spaces that affirm and respect their identities. For various reasons, including lack of community, visibility, and support, the creation of these formal and informal spaces are ways in which these participants make their communities and their lives better.

Changing Spaces by Others

A number of participants spoke about how spaces are changed based on the people who are in the space. Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University) explained that the dynamic

of the Gay/Straight Alliance at this university changes "depending on who's in the group." He shared further,

> Like, when we have a lot of allies [in the group]…it's not the same as if it was all gay people, it's just really, (deep breath), it's kind of like we watch movies and have fun…or we plan things like that, it's not about reality.

Andrew would prefer that they discuss topics such as the AIDS Walk or National Coming Out Day, but "we don't talk about things like that [which] I feel might have more of an impact on the way people view gay people." Instead, as he shared, some members "get off topic and talk about Harry Potter" because "they don't understand…not being able to walk into a bar and feel you're safe, like they don't experience that, so it's different [for them]." For Andrew, the Gay/Straight Alliance "is a safe space for gay people" and often straight allies change the focus of the space.

Also at Founder, Harriet (gay-identified man) knows there are people who negatively change his safe space. He explained,

> There are people at [my college] that do that…and [they] exist all over the place just because there are people who are not willing to accept and not willing to listen…and that's one of the most unfortunate things because if you can't open your mind, you can't open your eyes, then why were you living? Like, you are wasting your senses.

Harriet feels that even though people are at his college who are not accepting or willing to listen, overall the "goodness here is stronger." That positive regard for the collective community at his college allows him to change a negative experience or people into exceptions rather than rules. For instance, while he was walking on-campus he heard, "Faggot, make me a latte," yelled from a car passing by him. He was able to laugh and brush this incident off because "safe places are stronger than that" and he knew he had the support of others on-campus.

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For Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College), whenever the upper administration, like the college president, enters one of his safe spaces, such as the Student Life Office, they change how he acts. He explained,

When the administration walks in the Student Life Office, I always have to censor myself, because it's hard for me to find the censor button some days. (laughter) So, I always have to think and like, "Okay, so if I say this, it'll totally ruin my credibility [as SGA President]." So let's just come down a notch and we'll just wait until they leave.

For this reason, Brock believed he "need[s] to be professional" rather than "friendly" when he is interacting with the administration of his college.

Although some people or groups of people can change safe spaces negatively, others were also discussed as positively changing spaces. Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University), who identified her father's house as unsafe because of her unaccepting stepmother, considers one of her sisters a positive "space changer" in unsafe spaces. This is because, as she explained,

I know she supports me no matter what and she's been nothing but supportive since she found out and she wants me to talk about girls and relationships and give advice, and we both share pretty much everything and, um, so if I'm going to go [home] to Ohio and bring [her], it'll be a much safer space than if I like go to Ohio alone. And when I'm at dad's house and [she] comes, that makes it a safer space and I feel better.

Different from established unsafe spaces mentioned by other participants, Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University) intentionally makes her car an unsafe space in order to make homophobic people uncomfortable. She had seen a couple of cars with

rainbow stickers on them, which always made the "week just become a great week," so she

decided to do the same for others. She explained,

> I choose to make it an unsafe [space] in order to get a message out…just like Martin
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> Luther King, Jr. said, "Having the highest form of respect for the law is rebelling against
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> it and being imprisoned for it." And, so…I don't really care how much torment I go
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> through, I want to make this statement because I know it's right.

> Annie has four rainbow stickers on her car with two on each side and two on the back.

Although having these stickers on her car makes her feel "really uncomfortable" when she

drives, except while on campus, she does it to make a statement and show her support for others

within the LGBTQ community. Because of the rainbow stickers on her car, she has been run off

the road multiple times, flicked off, and had people roll down their windows and yell at her. On

the positive side, though, she has also had "people who smile, or who wave, or who honk,"

which "outweighs all of the other middle fingers." Although the rainbow stickers on her car has

created negative consequences, for Annie these are outweighed by the positive reactions and

support she is able to give to others by stretching the boundaries of safe and unsafe spaces.

Summary of the Theme: Changing Spaces by Others

In summary of the changing spaces theme, participants often felt others, such as

administrators, family members, and other college students, who entered different spaces could

change it both positively and negatively. For example, Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder

University) had the safe space of his college campus changed negatively by individuals who

yelled a derogatory word at him. Other participants, such as Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified

woman at Founder University), had an unsafe space change positively by one of her sisters being

present in the space. "Space changers," as Chuck referred to her sister, are characterized as

individuals who enter safe and unsafe spaces and change them in positive and negative ways. This theme speaks to the importance and influence that oppressive and supportive individuals can have on these participants' lives and spaces.

Behaving in Spaces

Another aspect of safe and unsafe spaces that was discussed by participants was behavior that was displayed within and outside the queer community. Many participants spoke about the behavior of those who are part of the queer community within safe spaces, as well as behavior of those who are outside of the queer community. Behavior often depended on the particular person or place and participants performed their identities in different ways as a result.

Inside community. Participants spoke about behavior from within the queer community in safe spaces. Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) identified Reddit[6] as a safe space for her, although sometimes arguments and insensitive comments have been made on the site. When incidents happen on Reddit, such as a transgender person being harassed on a discussion thread, Michelle enjoys when people "[stand] up [to] someone just being really rude to transgender people…[by] moving sub-Reddits [news threads]." In this example, Michelle identifies how members within the queer and transgender community both disagree and support one another through their behavior in an online space.

Michelle also spoke about comments that were made to her by one of her Roller Girls teammates. As discussed in her participant profile, Michelle has been involved with the sport of roller derby since she worked on her first story assignment as a freelance writer for a local newspaper her freshman year of college. She explained how one of her teammates makes sexually charged comments at her:

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[6] Reddit is a user-generated news website where users vote to promote stories to the front page (Reddit, 2012).

[W]ith the Roller Girls…I think we are really receptive of each other, um, one of the Roller Girls is a lesbian and is very open about it, she brings her wife to all our stuff and she's like…"I think it's funny, to sexually harass you," she was like, "I'm not going to really do anything, but if you are skating in front of me in a weave line, I'm like "Damn, you look good today, or…talking about like how your body is keeping me going, or something." [S]he was like, "If you don't think it's funny I won't do it…Just give me a look and I won't do it" and so it's a group of girls, like we just do funny things, in front of each other…we have silly names for all our moves, like the "porn star fall" (laughing) you know, it's on all fours, it's just funny, but if anyone's uncomfortable with that, it doesn't happen, like it's not going to be said again….

As illustrated in Michelle's story, there are certain behavioral expectations that are shared and respected within her roller derby group that may be different from those outside the group.

As described earlier, Max (gay-identified man at State University) identified the bar Around the Corner where he frequents every week as a safe space for him and his friends to meet and hang out. Within the safe space of the restaurant, Max and his friends are able to discuss queer issues and make comments that they would not make in other spaces. He explained, "We can make jokes that we might not make in mixed company." Furthermore, he and his friends often discuss queer topics and issues in their lives with one another within this safe space.

Although not identified as a safe space for Andrew (gay-identified man at Founder University), he did speak about the queer space, Grindr[7], as a virtual location where the gay community oppresses each other based on different identities. He explained,

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[7] Grindr is a chat application that allows users, mostly gay and bisexual men, to communicate, exchange pictures, and share their locations with one another using an iPhone, Blackberry, or Android devices (Grindr, 2012).

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I know in the gay community there's a lot of race issues, which I think is really

ridiculous…I don't use Grindr, but my friend…uses it and, like, people put "no fats," "no

fems," or like "no Black people, I don't like Black guys," "I don't like Asian guys,"…just

that sort of mentality like even if you're gay, I don't know, like you're being oppressed,

you do the oppression to somebody else, like that pisses me off.

Another behavior that was mentioned by two participants was being in a group of queer

individuals versus being alone and how safe or unsafe one feels as a result. Coco (gay/lesbian-

identified woman at State University) explained that she and her group of friends will often

surround her transgender boyfriend when they are walking downtown in the city she lives to

"create a little circle of safe[ty]." The only time that Coco said she felt like a target or unsafe

was when she is "walking with…someone who I feel might be more vulnerable than I." This

was echoed by Max, who shared that when he was with a "gaggle of gay boys" he is "hyper

aware" and "might be tempted to not go to certain places." Behavior, such as surrounding each

other for protection or not visiting particular places from being self-conscious, appears to have

some relationship between being alone or with a group and how much of a target of

discrimination or harassment one feels.

Outside community. The behavior within safe spaces of those outside of the queer

community was often discussed by participants. As stated earlier, Andrew (gay-identified man

at Founder University) believed that straight allies who attended his college's Gay/Straight

Alliance often spoke about unrelated topics to the purpose of the group. He has to then remind

the group that "this is a safe space for gay people, like this is what we're here for," in order to

refocus the group. Andrew believed that because allies had not experienced the same level of

discrimination based on their sexual identities they might not have the same purpose for the group.

Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University) is able to determine if a space is safe based on how those outside of the community respond to her through their reactions and behavior. She stated, "If I mention [something] about gay people, are they giving me a disgusted look…or if they [are] not reacting at all, because it's not a big deal to them? So, I guess how people look and how people talk and react to things [affects my behavior]." She also said that if she notices many straight couples who look conservative and mainstream in a particular space, she may act more reserved. The behavior of those outside of the queer community can influence how safe and comfortable Jennifer feels within a space.

As discussed in the previous theme, Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) felt comfortable with a fellow Roller Girl commenting about her body, however she did not think this behavior was appropriate for someone outside of the community. Although women often referee Roller Girl scrimmages, sometimes men referee. On one occasion, a male referee who was penalty tracking was asked a question and responded, "I don't know, this girl's tits were just flying in my face." This made Michelle uncomfortable and she felt this was inappropriate because it made her feel like a sexual object. She stated,

> [I]f we are wearing underwear that say, "Get Well" or something like, that's for us, like we are not doing it to be a sexual object for you, if anything it is for the audience, like for the fun, but if you are an official, like I better feel comfortable around you because if I don't like you, you are not coming back here.

For Michelle, the Roller Girl costumes are for the participants or those watching the Roller Girls and that those who referee the scrimmages should not view them sexually.

Summary of the Theme: Behaving in Spaces

In summary of this theme, behaving in spaces, participants provided stories of behavior within safe spaces of those inside and outside the queer community. Participants perceived and interpreted behavior differently depending on the people and place in which the behavior occurred. Through her involvement with the Roller Girls, Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) provided two different examples of acceptable behavior for those within the queer community versus unacceptable behavior for those outside the queer community. Participants also shared earlier, such as Lucy (bisexual/queer-identified woman at Central University), that the forms of behavior and types of conversation are different inside rather than outside a safe space. Participants judged their behavior on their surroundings, such as Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University) on how affirming and accepting the people within a space appear to be. This theme highlights the relationship that safe and unsafe spaces can have on participants' behavior within different spaces.

Discussion of Themes Related to Using and Behaving in Safe and Unsafe Spaces

In this section, themes that describe LGB college students' use and behavior within safe and unsafe spaces were presented. These themes included (a) queer(ing) spaces, (b) creating spaces, (c) changing spaces by others, and (d) behaving in spaces, both inside and outside the queer community. Queer(ing) spaces was defined by participants as both a defined and created space where queer identities were present and visible. Queer spaces are often pre-established locations and queering spaces is action taken to create a queer space. Participants provided examples of formal and informal ways in which they queered and created safe spaces that affirm and support their sexual identity. Stories were also shared about how already existing spaces, whether safe or unsafe, are changed in positive and negative ways based on who occupies the

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space. Lastly, participants identified behaviors that those within and outside the queer

community display within safe and unsafe spaces. When considering these themes together, they

all relate to what participants *do within* safe and unsafe spaces. Whether queering, creating,

changing, or behaving in safe and unsafe spaces, these themes describe different forms of actions

that LGB college students demonstrate in safe and unsafe spaces. Within this context, of

participants' understandings of *what are* and what they *do within* safe and unsafe spaces, LGB

college students are able to develop their identity through these spaces.

Developing Sexual Identity Through Safe and Unsafe Spaces

Themes that related to the sexual identity development of LGB college students within

safe and unsafe spaces included (a) identity depends on people and place and (b) coming out

through safe spaces. Participants provided examples of how their sexual identity was dependent

upon what people and which places were in their lives. Within these spaces, stories of coming

out as a process were also shared.

Identity Depends on People and Place

For many participants, the importance they place on their sexual identities in their overall

identity was related to people and places. For example, Max (gay-identified man at State

University) spoke about how his primary identity depends on the place and with the people.

While at gay-oriented events, he shared that his gay identity is usually his primary. He stated,

> I mean it really alters in a lot of different contexts, when I'm at a Gay Night, my gay
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> identity is probably somewhere close to the front, but the conversations that I have with
>
> people are oriented around academic work, or relationships that I may be having, or they
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> may be having, or gossip, or whatever, and so the fact that I am gay is certainly out there

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and it's present and it's one of the reasons that I'm there, so that would be context where

it is generally highest.

Within contexts that are not gay-focused, his sexual identity is often "very low" for him because,

as he explained, "I'm not thinking about that…[it] is not on my plate partly because there's

probably not any cute guys there to remind me of that part of my identity." While at home,

though, his gay identity is usually "somewhere in between" primary and secondary as "it comes

up in conversation occasionally…but it's not…for my family, that is not my primary identity."

For Max, he tries "not to be the same thing at all times" and which identity is primary for him

"just depends" on the people and the place.

Another participant, Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University),

spoke about how she has had the opportunity to explore her sexual identity through physical and

personal safe spaces. She shared, "I feel like…through the [LGBT] Center and through the

people that I deem…safe spaces, I've been able to really come into my identity as a pansexual or

a bisexual. [Be]cause they're an established safe space, I'm given the freedom to be me more."

Zoe said that because of her safe people and places she has had a "chance, and a support group to

really…thrive and cultivate the safe spaces elsewhere." In many ways, the people and places

that are safe spaces for Zoe allow her to authentically be herself and have the "safety net" to

support her identities. Zoe does not, however, express her sexual identity in front of "overtly

conservative people" because they put "their guard up, and like they just become really tense and

uncomfortable" at any mention of her sexual identity.

Jennifer (bisexual-identified woman at Founder University) does not put her sexual

orientation on Facebook because she is worried about what information is shared about her

online and wants to have control over who knows about her sexual orientation, therefore she

chooses to share her sexual identity in person, rather than online. She explained, "I'm not out on Facebook…just because I'm always concerned about what can be said about me online... but if someone asks me, I'll definitely tell them."

For Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University), many negative feelings were associated with having to lie about her sexual identity in church. In her Baptist church, she believed she could not fully express her sexual identity because of sermons she heard. She shared,

> From church stems so many feelings like anxiety and guilt and…feeling like a bad person
> type of thing. And growing up in that and having this secret and not being able to talk
> about it because it's kind of unique and…so it's like not only am I wrong, but I'm hiding
> things and sometimes I lie about things because it's just easier that way.

In order to cope with the conflict between her sexual and religious identities, she had to create boundaries for herself growing up to hide and lie about her sexual identity. Chuck credits a "bunch of peers" with supporting her attraction to other women and described them as "encouraging" and offering "a lot of advice…when I'm interested in a girl." This support from her peer group in college allowed her to openly express her sexual identity and affection.

Summary of the Theme: Identity Depends on People and Place

In summary, participants shared stories of how their identities have been shaped and influenced by the people and places they have encountered. Similar to how behavior within safe and unsafe spaces depends on people and place, so too does identity. As evidenced by Max (gay-identified man at State University), who described how his primary identity shifts based on who he is around and the space he is in, safe and unsafe spaces can play a role in how identities are displayed and developed. Other participants, such as Chuck (lesbian/queer-identified woman

at Founder University), had to withhold or not disclose parts of their identities in certain spaces, such as churches and high schools, for fear of the consequences of disclosure. Overwhelmingly, participants felt they could authentically share and develop their identities in safe spaces more freely than in unsafe spaces.

Coming Out Through Safe Spaces

From people to places, safe spaces often play a role in the coming out process of participants. When asked to define safe spaces, Max (gay-identified man at State University) explained that his understanding of safe spaces has changed through his coming out process. He stated:

> [My understanding of safe spaces] has shifted for me because…I came out right when I came to college, so my entire adolescent life at home…I was not out, and so safe spaces for me, at that particular moment in my life, meant on-line spaces like chat rooms, things like that, where I could be gay for a very select audience and not [be] gay to anyone else and if I was sneaky enough I could delete my history…on the computer and things like that…and so…that shifted now that I'm out, and out not only to friends but also to family.

As evidenced in what Max shared about his coming out process, he utilized different safe spaces as he explored his sexual identity. Initially, he used virtual spaces to connect anonymously with other gay men, whereas when he came out and his sexual identity became "only one part" of his identity, his safe spaces became his family and friends.

Although Zoe (bisexual/pansexual-identified woman at State University) is not out to everyone, she believes that the people who are safe spaces for her "got my back sort of deal." She shared, "Like I friend people on Facebook who I consider safe spaces and if they write

something queer on my wall, it's like…eventually the people who I deem aren't safe spaces are going to find out. Like it's inevitable; you're continually coming out." Zoe's continual coming out process has been supported through "safe people that make unsafe places [and people] safe." Zoe also watched YouTube videos of other "gay people" while she was coming out. As she explained, "I don't think It Gets Better[8] was established by then, but the fact that like there are gay people and they're fine and there's a community…and so I feel like that's how I got a lot of my information when I was coming out." For Zoe, YouTube was "huge for me in that process" and the "only safe space I really had."

Due to this lack of safe spaces when she was initially coming out, Zoe has a vision "to create safe spaces for self-discovery." She explained,

[T]he wonders it would have done to have known that there is a place where I could go and just talk. But it wasn't there for me and there was a lot of being in my room alone and crying, or being on YouTube and crying. It was a lot of being alone for me during that time period [coming out] because there wasn't a safe space that I could access and I sure the hell could have used it, but it wasn't there.

While in high school, Zoe was able to come out to some of her friends that she "knew were gay" and one who was also Mormon. She eventually came out to her parents who had mixed reactions. Her mother told her "whatever makes you happy, makes me happy," while her father considered it to be "a phase." Zoe later shared that "coming out as not Christian to my father hurt him more than coming out as gay." For Zoe, coming out was not only a process for her sexual identity, but also her non-Christian identity.

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[8] It Gets Better is an Internet-based project founded by Dan Savage to inspire hope for young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender through user-created YouTube videos of inspiration and empowerment (It Gets Better Project, 2012).

Other participants, including Harriet, Michelle, Annie, and Brock, also used safe spaces to help them through the coming out process. While a freshman in high school, Harriet (gay-identified man at Founder University) came out to his safe space of close friends. Writing has been one way that has helped Michelle work through the coming out process. Michelle (bisexual-identified woman at State University) has also seen on Reddit people getting advice on different coming out issues, ranging from asking someone out to technical sexual questions. For Annie (lesbian/queer-identified woman at Founder University), reading her spoken word poetry at Open Mic Night helped her through coming out. The first poem she ever read in front of her father and then at Open Mic Night was her coming out story. Through reading her spoken word poetry, she has "learned that I can express myself about anything." As mentioned earlier, Brock (gay-identified man at Southeast College) identified his car as one of his safe spaces, which was especially important in helping him deal with coming out. When asked if he utilized any of his safe spaces during his coming out process, he shared,

> Mainly the car back then…like I would just kind of drive around or just kind of like think about stuff… smoke my cigarette and just kind of like chill out and just kind of be like, "Okay, this is who I am."

For Brock and others, safe spaces provided people and places where they could share and further understand their sexual identity.

Summary of the Theme: Coming Out Through Safe Spaces

In summary of this theme, coming out through safe spaces, participants provided examples of how they utilized safe spaces to help them through the coming out process. A number of participants, such as Max (gay-identified man at State University) and Danielle (lesbian-identified woman at Founder University), made use of different safe spaces as they

came out. For instance, Max shared that he initially used virtual safe spaces to learn about his

sexual identity and now that he has come out, his safe spaces are more physical and face-to-face.

This shifting of anonymous, alone safe spaces to more public, in-person safe spaces speaks to

how different forms of safe spaces support different sexual identity development needs. Based

on the findings from this theme, various types of safe spaces—physical, virtual, and

psychological—can be quite useful and needed at different times during the coming out process.

Discussion of Themes Related to Developing Sexual Identity Through Safe and Unsafe

Spaces

In this section, themes that related to the sexual identity development of LGB college

students within safe and unsafe spaces were presented. These themes included (a) identity

depends on people and place and (b) coming out through safe spaces. Participants' identity was

often dependent upon both the people and the place in which they were present. Additionally,

stories of coming out were discussed as a process that participants were constantly working

through as it relates to different spaces. Unlike previously discussed themes which describe

participants' understandings of *what are* and what they *do within* safe and unsafe spaces, these

themes illustrate how LGB college students develop identity due to safe and unsafe people and

places.

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Chapter Summary

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The findings and themes identified in this chapter related to the three research questions

that guided this study. First, themes that illustrate how LGB college students described and

located safe and unsafe spaces were discussed and included (a) definitions and descriptions of

safe spaces, (b) characterization of unsafe spaces, and (c) types of spaces. Second, emergent

themes that describe LGB college students' use and behavior within safe and unsafe spaces were

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provided and included (a) queer(ing) spaces, (b) creating spaces, (c) changing spaces, and (d) behaving in spaces. Third, themes that emerged related to the sexual identity development of LGB college students within safe and unsafe spaces were explained and included (a) identity depends on place and (b) coming out through safe spaces. The findings and themes found and discussed in this chapter provide a greater understanding of the complexities of how and where various safe and unsafe spaces are experienced by LGB college students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings presented in this study provide a greater understanding of how and where

physical and virtual safe spaces are experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college

students. Guided by social constructivism and queer theoretical perspectives (Abes, 2009; Abes

& Kasch, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Gamson, 2000), this study was designed to answer the following

research questions: (1) How do LGB college students describe and locate physical and virtual

safe spaces? (2) How do LGB college students use physical and virtual safe spaces to resist

and/or reinforce dominant forms of sexual identity? (3) How do physical and virtual safe spaces

affect the sexual identity development of LGB college students? To answer these questions,

interviews were conducted and documents were collected, including photographs and

screenshots, from 12 LGB-identified college students. To make meaning of the collected data,

methods of narrative analysis were employed and the findings were represented through

participants' narratives and photographs. In this chapter, conclusions are discussed based on

how the findings in this study relate to the research questions and contribute to the literature.

This chapter also offers implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the literature and findings in this study, five general conclusions are offered and

discussed as they relate to the experiences of LGB college students in safe and unsafe spaces.

First, LGB college students described the negotiation of safe and unsafe spaces as moving from

safe(r) spaces to queer(ing) spaces. Second, safe and unsafe spaces affect LGB identity

development and performance within these spaces. Third, safe and unsafe spaces depend on a combination of people and locations. Fourth, safe spaces are places for coping and finding support within unsafe environments. Finally, the blurred boundaries of safe and unsafe spaces often challenge the binaries of safe/unsafe and dominant forms of sexual identity. When considered together, these conclusions provide a greater understanding of the experiences of LGB college students in both safe and unsafe spaces.

Moving from Safe(r) Spaces to Queer(ing) Spaces

In relation to the first research question, which investigated how LGB college students described and located physical and virtual safe spaces, the findings supported a shift away from safe and unsafe spaces toward the concept of queer(ing) spaces. As discussed by some participants, the term "safe space" was not always used to denote spaces they considered accepting and respectful of their identities. Participants used other words and phrases, such as *comfortable, welcoming, no judgment, acceptance, respect, open, chill*, *cool*, and *awesome*, to identify these spaces. Within the classroom environment, Barrett (2010) found similar elements of safe spaces, including comfort, expression of identity, and risk taking. Other participants spoke about safe spaces in terms of *queer spaces* or *queering spaces* (Betsky, 1997; Morris, 2000). In both instances, words and phrases other than *safe spaces* were used to define these spaces and may suggest that perhaps there are better ways of describing safe and unsafe spaces.

In reflecting upon the findings of this study, I contend that the phrase *safe space* is a misnomer that does not fully encompass the complexities of these spaces. Safe space appears to be a phrase employed by the field of higher education and student affairs professionals (Redmond, 2010), in particular, to describe spaces created for, rather than by, LGB college students. Throughout the participant narratives of various safe and unsafe spaces, the data

suggest that there is not a singular safe space, but rather a spectrum of safe and unsafe spaces. A few participants spoke of different safe and unsafe spaces based on the degrees to which these spaces were safe or unsafe. This finding suggests that there may be a continuum by which LGB college students perceive how safe and unsafe spaces are and based upon these perceptions make judgments about safety and support within these spaces. These judgments were often made from behavioral and environmental cues they noticed within certain spaces, such as (dis)affirming people or (un)accepting places. Depending on an initial assessment of where a person or place fits on the spectrum of space, this may determine how participants act within these spaces and the view that participants hold of similar spaces.

For some, safe spaces are indeed places of safety both for themselves and others, whereas for others, it may not always be safe for all of their identities. For instance, several participants' classified religious and Greek organizations as disaffirming of their identities. However, other participants spoke affirmatively about these spaces. Therefore, classification of spaces into a binary either/or of safe and unsafe categories can be problematic in light of how relatively safe or unsafe these spaces are for different individuals. Additionally, a participant may have identified a space as safe in one case, and unsafe in another. Therefore, safe spaces should be seen as complex, evolving locations that depend on the people, place, time, and context in which they exist. Alexander and Banks (2004) suggest that perhaps these spaces should more appropriately be called safe(r) spaces due to the contextual and relative nature of these spaces. Moving away from safe spaces towards safe(r) spaces is more inclusive of the many ways space is safe, unsafe, and everything in-between, sometimes even at the same time.

Participants in this study often spoke about being comfortable expressing their sexual identities in safe spaces, without mention of other identities, such as race, social class, or gender.

I make this conclusion because of the lack of other identities discussed by many of the participants, regardless of their identities, within their stories of safe spaces. This may have been due to the focus of my research or the interview questions I asked the participants, but it may also suggest that safe spaces are notions only considered by LGB college students in the context of sexual identity without focusing on the intersections of other identities. For example, when considering the experiences of safe spaces shared by the White, gay men in this study, as well as my own experiences, I believe that safe spaces may be a way of creating a privileged space for specific identities. Considering the privilege that White, gay men already have due to their race and gender, safe spaces for sexual identities may become places of empowerment for that population and continued marginalization and oppression for lesbian and bisexual women, as well as people of color. When sexual identity becomes the sole focus of safe spaces, other identities become silenced and unacknowledged for all those who occupy these spaces. Safe spaces as they are currently constructed may be safe for sexual identity expression, but are they safe for all identities?

I argue that based upon the focus of sexual identity within safe spaces, it may be more fitting to use the phrase *queer spaces* to denote spaces that are occupied by queer people for queer purposes. Although the literature does discuss queer spaces (Betsky, 1997; Morris, 2000), several participants in this study discussed queer and queering spaces and provided distinction between the two concepts. Whether dressing in drag or "taking over" a straight bar for a gay night, participants in this study gave several examples of actions they or others take to "queer" a space. Whereas *queer space* is a noun, referring to a location where queer individuals congregate, *queering spaces* was used by participants as a verb and refers to an action or a means for queer individuals to use a space.

Because the phrase *safe spaces* was often described as comfortable and safe by participants in this study, I propose that *queer spaces* may more accurately describe a space that has a queer focus but may not always be comfortable or safe (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Furthermore, as one of the participants in this study added in reviewing these findings, by identifying some spaces as safe, other spaces are inherently considered the opposite of safe as unsafe or dangerous, which is often not the case. Whether safe, unsafe, or something else altogether, queer spaces resists being singularly defined and allows for multiple and individual meanings. Participants also spoke of changing safe and unsafe spaces in queer ways, or *queering spaces*, through their behavior and performance within these spaces (Doan, 2007). Queer and queering spaces speak to the many places and processes by which spaces are queered by participants, rather than from simply a safety or comfortable perspective. Therefore, because of these findings, I argue for safe and unsafe spaces to be queered in both theory and practice.

Safe and Unsafe Spaces Depends on People and Places

Participants described safe and unsafe spaces as contextual and dependent upon the people and places within their environments (D'Augelli, 1994). On one hand, a safe space, such as a college campus or online blog, could be made unsafe for participants simply by the presence of unsafe people. On the other hand, unsafe spaces, such as fraternities or family functions, could be made safer for participants by having someone with them whom they considered safe. The relationship between people and place is complex and not absolute, but within the findings of this study, there seems to be connection between the degree to which a participant felt safe or unsafe and the people within the space and the actual location. An important finding in this study is the valuable role people play in safe and unsafe spaces. Although physical safe spaces are also important, the people within these spaces are often the determinant for participants'

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assessments of safety in these spaces. This conclusion supports the critical role both queer people and allies play in helping create supportive environments for LGB college students (Poynter, 2000). Undoubtedly, this relationship between people and place also affects identity, which is another conclusion generated from the findings of this study.

Safe and Unsafe Spaces Affects Sexual Identity Development and Performance

A number of researchers, including Abes and Jones (2004), D'Augelli (1994), and Stevens (2007), have found that interactions with different contextual and environmental factors, such as people and places, are important variables influencing LGB identity development. This study also found that safe and unsafe spaces do play a role in how identities are displayed and developed for these LGB college students. Whether physical, virtual, or psychological locations, participants found safe spaces to be affirming and supportive of sexual identity expression. Within safe spaces and with safe people, participants shared stories of learning, growing, accepting, and expressing their sexual identities. Participants often spoke about the difference between their conversations in a safe space and conversations in other spaces. Within these safe spaces, participants more freely discussed topics of religion, politics, and sexuality. This finding is similar to Rhoads's (1997) study of gay and bisexual identity development for male college students, where he found that the content of social interaction, *substance*, was marked by increased discussions of explicit and political conversations.

In their study of college decision-making process and retention of Black gay men, Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVitas (2008) found that students chose a college that provided space to come out and be open. Although not all participants in this study considered the acceptance of their sexual identity on a perspective college or university campus as important in their college choice process, those who did often did so because of unsafe and difficult high

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school experiences. In this study, physical and relational unsafe spaces in high school and college were found to be disaffirming and invalidating of participants' identities (Dolan, 1998; Noack, 2004; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). Types of unsafe spaces identified by participants were both physical locations, including fraternities, stores, restaurants, and middle and high schools, as well as personal relationships, such as significant others and extended family. Within these unsafe spaces, participants often shared feelings of self-awareness, guardedness, and isolation (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010).

Informed by D'Augelli's (1994) lifespan model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development, participants' stories of coming out were seen as an ever-evolving, complex process unique to their experiences. As participants navigated the coming out process, many of them tried to avoid unsafe spaces and utilized safe spaces to help them understand and explore their sexual identities. Initially, while coming out, psychological or virtual safe spaces were useful in gathering information and knowledge about queer communities, whereas physical locations and personal relationships seem to be significant in expressing one's sexual identity once participants had come out. The findings of this study confirm that access to information about queer communities is necessary and needed when initially coming out (Engelken, 1998; Lucier, 2000), especially within virtual spaces like Tumblr and LGBT-focused websites. The shifting of anonymous, personal safe spaces to more public, relational safe spaces found in this study speaks to how different forms of safe spaces can support different sexual identity development needs at different times (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004).

Although this study looked specifically at sexual identity development, participants had multiple identities that interacted with each other within safe and unsafe spaces (Abes & Kasch,

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2007). Because participants in this study often did not discuss or only briefly discussed issues of

race and gender, I can only infer that there may be an interaction between multiple identities and

safe and unsafe spaces. Ethnic/racial and gender identities, among others, may have been

affected by safe and unsafe spaces in ways that were outside the scope of this study.

Safe Spaces are Places for Coping and Finding Support

The reason safe spaces may play a role in identity development is related to how these

spaces serve as places for coping and finding support. An illuminating conclusion of this study

is how often safe spaces appeared to represent supportive environments for coping for many

participants. Whether dealing with issues of coming out or other personal problems, safe spaces

were where participants dealt with unsafe places, people, and other issues. For LGB college

students in this study, safe spaces provided locations to be "free from many of the oppressive

forces that threaten jobs, friendships, personal safety, and even lives…in which they live"

(Woodland, 1999, p. 79). In other words, safe spaces are where LGB college students in this

study went to manage and heal from the oppressive world around them. Rather than viewing

unsafe environments as a barrier or an obstacle in their lives, the participants in this study

accessed safe spaces in order to develop forms of resistance (Abes & Kasch, 2007) and resilience

that supported their own sexual identity growth and development.

Blurring the Boundaries of Safe and Unsafe Spaces

Within safe and unsafe spaces, participants sometimes blurred the boundaries between

the two and often challenged the binary of safe/unsafe and dominate forms of sexual identity. A

few participants intentionally turned a space into an unsafe space in order to disrupt the

boundaries of perceived dominant discourses of sexual identity within that space (Warner, 1991).

In some instances, participants were able to "test the waters" to determine if the space was safer

than they may have originally thought. In other occasions, LGB college students in this study

intentionally defied sexual and gender stereotypes within various spaces as a form of activism

and support for other queer individuals. Through shifting space in different directions, whether

in safe or unsafe ways, LGB college students were able to represent their identities within these

spaces in multiple ways as both a form of identity performativity (Butler, 1990) and resistance

(Abes & Kasch, 2007) of heteronormativity (Warner, 1991).

Implications for Inclusive Practice

The findings and conclusions of this study provide implications for student affairs

administrators, counselors, and faculty members. These implications for practice are centered on

providing inclusive and safe environments for LGB college students to grow and develop. These

implications are not meant to be generalizable to all LGB college students or campuses, but

rather to be transferrable (Patton, 2002) to the unique needs of these students on various

campuses. These practical implications are offered to better assist administrators, counselors,

and faculty with providing safe(r) spaces for LGB college students.

Claiming and Naming Spaces

According to the findings of this study, LGB college students often created and named

safe spaces in different ways than is commonly known within the field of higher education. Safe

spaces were usually referred to by different names and in locations outside of the college

campus, including off-campus and online. A recommendation for administrators, counselors,

and faculty is to be attuned to the multiple ways in which safe spaces are referenced and created

by LGB college students. Although many safe spaces created by college administrators and

faculty both on-campus and in the classroom were valuable to participants in this study, many

other locations not often considered safe spaces were also identified. Perhaps rather than

creating safe spaces for LGB college students, administrators, counselors, and faculty can support these students in accessing queer spaces and queering their own safe and unsafe spaces on and off-campus. When considering what and where safe spaces should be for LGB college students, the best solution begins with asking the students themselves.

Missions and Policies

Although some colleges and universities include sexual orientation and gender expression in nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies, more inclusive mission statements and policies for LGB and other sexual minorities need to be created. As evidenced by findings in this study, LGB college students are reviewing mission statements, admissions materials, and websites to determine how welcoming and accepting an institution is for them. Administrators working in admissions should consider the type of information and messages they are sending to prospective LGB students about the campus climate and culture. How is the LGBT community discussed in recruitment handouts, flyers, and social media, if at all? During campus visits and tours, how is the LGBT community incorporated in presentations, if at all? For campus administrators, advocating for nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies on campuses is also important. As was found in this study, institutional mission statements are powerful messages to LGB college students about the values and beliefs of an institution and how these values and beliefs are inclusive and accepting of queer communities.

Developmentally Appropriate Safe Spaces

A significant finding in this study was how different safe spaces serve different purposes during the coming out process for LGB college students. I recommend that student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty work with LGB college students to assist them with finding and locating developmentally appropriate safe spaces. For a student who is in the

beginning process of questioning her sexual identity, journaling or blogging may be an appropriate safe space for her to consider and process her sexual identity. Another student who is already out to his family and friends may need assistance with finding a peer group or student organization to get involved with in order to continue working on his sexual identity expression. Selection of an appropriate developmental safe space will depend on the person, place, and time; therefore, safe spaces should not be suggested in a prescriptive manner. Rather, LGB college students should be provided referrals from student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty that seem appropriate to students' developmental needs at that particular time.

Safe Space Programs and LGB Services

There are a number of implications from this study that are applicable to Safe Space Programs and LGB services. As demonstrated in the findings of this study, Safe Space Programs are beneficial to LGB students in identifying places and people who are accepting and affirming of their sexual identities. Due to the importance that LGB college students place on these programs, it is recommended that these Safe Space Programs require training on LGB issues and resources before giving a sticker or lapel pin to a person. This is critical in verifying that those who participate in the program are knowledgeable and accepting of LGB identities. A further recommendation is that on-going Safe Space trainings be conducted to keep program participants informed about current issues facing LGB college students.

For those participants on campuses that had LGBT Resource Centers, this location was often identified as a safe space. For this reason, it is recommended that college and university campuses provide resources and physical space for LGB college students to utilize as their space on-campus. In this study, LGBT Resource Centers were often used as physical spaces for community and expression. A further recommendation for LGBT Resource Centers is that there

is a combination of public and private space. As the findings of this study demonstrate, LGB college students may feel more comfortable and safe in different spaces based on where they are in terms of their sexual identity development. Therefore, LGBT Resource Centers should consider this in their designs. A common problem for many LGBT Resource Centers is the limited use of these offices by LGB college students early in their coming out processes, which may be addressed by creating private space for them to feel less visible.

In this study, participants discussed physical, virtual, and psychological safe spaces on- and off-campus, many of which are not being used by colleges and universities to support these students. For instance, Tumblr was a virtual safe space that LGB college students in this study often used to express their identities and connect with queer communities. It is important for student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty members to consider and discuss with LGB college students the multiple spaces in which they explore and represent their sexual identities. These discussions may be opportunities for staff and faculty to offer suggestions to LGB college students on additional safe spaces inside and outside of the campus environment.

Campus Environments

Another implication in this study is the different aspects of the campus environment that are considered safe and unsafe by LGB college students. Campus environments that were often considered safe by participants in this study were LGBT Resource Centers, LGBT student organizations, and their friends. Student affairs administrators, faculty, and counselors can assist LGB college students with identifying safe and unsafe spaces within the campus environment. This not only assists LGB college students with examining areas they may feel safe and unsafe on-campus, but it also helps faculty and staff better understand how these areas are or are not being supportive of these students. Faculty and staff should work with LGB college students on

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encouraging efforts to make all areas of the campus environment safer for identity expression.

This can be done in small ways, such as attending campus programs and events sponsored by the

LGBT Resource Center or student organizations, or in big ways, like working with colleagues

and students on inclusive missions and policies for the queer community at the departmental,

divisional, or institutional levels. Faculty and staff also do not have to look further than their

own offices as a possible space to make more inclusive, such as displaying a Safe Space sticker

on the office door or including relevant LGBT pamphlets and literature in the office waiting area.

No matter how big or small, faculty and staff should make efforts and advocate for resources to

support safe spaces for LGB college students.

Student affairs administrators, faculty, and counselors should also work on addressing

issues of unsafe spaces within the campus environment. For instance, fraternities were often

discussed by LGB college students in this study as unsafe and unwelcoming of their sexual

identities. On at least one campus, a fraternity and a sorority that were considered safe and

inclusive of queer students were labeled as the "gay" fraternity and sorority, as a result. As more

LGB college students are accepted and involved in all fraternities and sororities, the less labeling

of these organizations as "gay" or "queer" may occur. In order to accomplish this,

fraternity/sorority advisors and other student affairs administrators need to do more

programming and outreach to help make all fraternities and sororities more accepting and

affirming of queer students. Those working with fraternities and sororities should speak with

LGB college students on their campuses to understand what perceptions they and others have of

different organizations and how to assist these organizations with making them more inclusive.

One solution to increase the awareness and knowledge of LGB-college students' experiences

with fraternities and sororities is to offer trainings and speakers focused on LGBT and diversity

issues to fraternity and sorority members. Another way to make these organizations more inclusive is to direct recruitment efforts towards LGB college students. Finally, fraternities and sororities should also collaborate with the LGBT Resource Center and student organizations on programs and events that relate to the experiences of LGB college students in their organizations. The more engagement that can occur between the queer community and fraternities/sororities the more likely these organizations will become safer spaces for LGB college students.

Safe Spaces for Coping

A significant finding in this study is the ways in which safe spaces play a role in coping and support of LGB college students. Considering the important role safe spaces play in the lives of LGB college students, an implication for practice is that student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty assist LGB college students with utilizing their safe spaces to cope with unsafe spaces and incidents of discrimination, homophobia, and other problems in their lives. Helping LGB students identify safe spaces already present in their lives, including on-campus, off-campus, and online, or assisting them with finding new ones, can be an important intervention to help them cope and seek support.

Inclusive Classrooms and Campus Programs

Based on the narratives shared by participants in this study, inclusive classrooms and campus programs can play a role in how safe or unsafe an LGB college students feels on-campus, in the classroom, or online. It is recommended that student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty members educate themselves on appropriate language to address all sexual identities. For instance, staff conducting a dating program or faculty discussing relationships should be cognizant of how inclusive the campus program or classroom discussion is of all types of sexual identities. Language that is not inclusive of all sexual identities creates

hostile and unwelcoming environments for LGB college students. In addition, faculty and staff should encourage their students to be inclusive of all sexual identities in both language and program design. One way that faculty, staff, and students can be more inclusive of LGB college students is to allow them to identify and name their own identities, rather than using labels to identify them. It may also be beneficial for student affairs administrators to have programs and interventions for LGB college students to discuss their own safe and unsafe online experiences as it relates to behavior, dating, and privacy within these spaces. Due to the private nature of online experiences for LGB college students, opportunities to dialogue together about those experiences may better inform these students' understandings of both the risks and benefits of these spaces.

Recommendations for Further Research

Few studies have been conducted on safe and unsafe spaces for LGB college students and those studies have only looked at Safe Space Programs (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007). This study provided an exploratory look into the experiences of LGB college students in safe and unsafe spaces. A number of future research studies could build upon the findings of this study.

First, this study only investigated the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students and did not look specifically at the experiences of other sexual minorities, such as queer, questioning, and transgender college students. Future studies could look at these populations, as well as other identity groups, such as ethnic and religious groups. Since only two participants in this study identified as people of color, additional studies that look specifically at the experiences of safe and unsafe spaces for queer students of color would be beneficial and may be able to better understand the intersections of multiple identities within these spaces. These studies could help add the voices and experiences of other marginalized groups in safe and unsafe spaces.

Second, this research study did not specifically look at how institutional type may play a role in safe and unsafe spaces for LGB college students. The four institutions that were represented in this study, however, do provide a starting place for how institutional type may be a factor in how safe and unsafe spaces are experienced by LGB college students at these particular institutions. Future research could investigate the experiences of safe and unsafe spaces for LGBTQ college students at different institutional types, including private, public, single-gender, community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs), tribal colleges, and military colleges. These studies would provide greater specificity for how LGBTQ college students experience safe and unsafe spaces at different institutions.

Third, a number of participants in this study spoke about having little to no safe spaces in their middle and high schools. Often, middle and high schools were identified as unsafe spaces that participants could have used safe spaces to help them through these environments. Additional studies should investigate how middle and/or high school LGBTQ youth experience safe and unsafe spaces in their lives (see Blackburn, 2001). A study like this would be valuable for helping middle and high school educators understand the experiences of LGBTQ youth in safe and unsafe spaces.

Fourth, this was a qualitative study of 12 LGB college students at four institutions in the Southeast. Additional qualitative studies are called for to learn more about the experiences of LGB college students attending colleges and universities in different parts of the United States. Furthermore, a longitudinal study of safe and unsafe spaces is recommended in order to investigate how these spaces may change over time. Quantitative research would also be useful

in studying how safe and unsafe spaces influence sexual identity development and the relationship these safe and unsafe spaces have on coping mechanisms for LGB college students.

Lastly, future research on the lives of LGBTQ college students should continue to include the use of queer theory to challenge stable and binary categorizations of sexual identity. Few studies within the student affairs literature utilize queer theory as a theoretical framework. Admittedly, using queer theory in this study was challenging and complex. I struggled to conceptualize the findings and the conclusions from a queer theoretical perspective and worried how best to present these tensions. Despite these challenges, though, queer theory offered me a powerful lens by which to view student development from a nonlinear, complex, and ever-changing perspective. It is for this reason that I invite future researchers studying queer topics to wrestle with tackling queer theory in their research. It provides a critical avenue by which to give voice to the complexities of queer lives.

Chapter Summary

Examining the experiences of LGB college students in safe and unsafe spaces has uncovered a number of findings and conclusions that contribute to the literature. Three research questions were answered in this study through the identification of themes and conclusions. First, themes that illustrate how LGB college students described and located safe and unsafe spaces include (a) definitions and descriptions of safe spaces, (b) characterization of unsafe spaces, (c) types of spaces, and (d) queer(ing) spaces. Second, themes that describe LGB college students' use and behavior within safe and unsafe spaces include (a) creating spaces, (b) changing spaces, and (c) behaving in spaces. Third, themes that emerged related to the sexual identity development of LGB college students within safe and unsafe spaces include (a) identity depends on people and place and (b) coming out as process.

Based upon these findings, five conclusions could be made. These conclusions include (1) safe(r) spaces considered as queer(ing) spaces, (2) safe and unsafe spaces depends on people and places, (3) safe and unsafe spaces affects identity development, (4) safe spaces are places for coping and finding support, and (5) safe and unsafe spaces blur the boundaries of binaries of safe/unsafe and dominant forms of sexual identity. The findings and conclusions in this study provide understanding of the unique experiences of LGB college students in safe and unsafe spaces. Student affairs administrators, counselors, and faculty can use these findings and conclusions to better serve and support LGB college students through practice and research. As demonstrated in this study, safe and unsafe spaces truly do go beyond the walls of our institutions, but their influence is surely felt in the lives of our LGB students.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF SAFE SPACES

Through this process, this journey, this adventure that is this dissertation, I have found new meanings of myself and my understandings of safe, unsafe, and queer spaces. I started this dissertation with a discussion of how I searched for safe spaces throughout my life. Now, as I end this dissertation, I cannot help but look back and reflect on my experiences and the new, queerer understandings I have of both my own, and others' safe spaces. In this chapter, I reflectively analyze my own understandings of safe spaces and how queer theory applies to the findings and conclusions of this study. Reflexive analysis is the process by which a researcher is concerned with the research process (Glesne, 2006). This is not meant to be a self-analysis for the purposes of self-interest, but rather a reflective analysis of the issues that arose in the course of conducting sexual and queer research for the benefit of my own and other scholars' future research studies using queer theory.

In many ways, this chapter highlights both the epistemological and methodological tensions that arose through the course of this study, especially as they relate to queer theory and social constructivism. As Plummer (2005) explained, "Contradiction, ambivalence, and tension reside in all critical inquiries" (p. 371). This chapter is meant to speak from my own experience about the struggles and contradictions that exist when using queer theory and the opportunities that queer theory has for higher education and student affairs research. First, I discuss the issues I had using queer theory and social constructivism in this study. In light of my own difficulty applying queer theory, I next trouble the findings and conclusions of this study using several

tenets of queer theory, specifically heteronormativity (Warner, 1991), performativity (Butler, 1990), and liminality (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967). Lastly, I discuss how queer theory can be useful in pushing the scholarship in higher education and student affairs forward.

Wrestling with the Application of Queer Theory and Social Constructivism

Employing queer theory was not easy, especially for a novice researcher who was also working from a social constructivist perspective, and it was fraught with tensions. Abes (2009) refers to using multiple theoretical perspectives in research as working within "theoretical borderlands," which offers new opportunities for higher education and student affairs research to be more inclusive of marginalized students. This was my goal and my hope with using queer theory and social constructivism in this study. Although I was aware that social constructivism and queer theory took epistemologically different positions, I choose intentionally to use both because they helped me understand my topic and answer all of my research questions. I was not aware of how my own positionality as a researcher within the field of higher education and student affairs would push me closer to one (social constructivism) than the other (queer theory), despite my attempts to acknowledge and challenge my own subjectivities. To better understand my grappling with the tensions inherent in using multiple theoretical perspectives, I will discuss my experiences during this research study with this on-going struggle.

Although using both queer theory and social constructivism provided me multiple and different perspectives of identity in this study, the college student development theories guiding the study were informed more so by social constructivism. Social constructivism's view of identity as socially constructed, rather than queer theory's deconstruction of identity, greatly shapes the literature and theories of college student development. Student development theories, specifically sexual identity development theories outlined in this study (Cass, 1979, 1996;

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D'Augelli, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Rhoads, 1997; Stevens, 2004), discuss identity in terms of social constructivism as socially constructed and developing over time. As was the case in this study, application of queer theory with student development theories is difficult because queer theory challenges the very notion of identity and the linearity of development that student development theories suggest. The nature of student development theories to normalize a process of identity development can and should be further problematized using queer theory.

The dissonance between the theories and myself are evidenced even in the very words I choose to use in this study. Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I struggled with finding the right words to say. Queer theory says "naming kills" (Morris, 2000, p. 27) and yet I found myself using words to identify, classify, and describe aspects of this study in ways that felt difficult to do otherwise, especially within the context of student development theories of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity. I tried to only speak of participant's identities in the terms they claimed, not that I imposed, which often challenged simple labels. Based on LGB identity development theories, I intentionally only looked at this group of students in hopes of limiting the scope of this study. However, my participants often identified themselves in different and multiple ways, such as a gay and lesbian or bisexual and pansexual. Despite my effort to "limit" my study participants in the sake of limiting the scope of this study, I was reminded that identity really does depend on the person and often defies being named or labeled, which queer theory was useful in articulating in this study.

The research questions that guided this study were another point of tension, as they focused solely on sexual identity development rather than the multiple, intersecting, and evolving identities of the study participants. Furthermore, in recruiting participants, I narrowed the scope of this study to only LGB identities without leaving the possibility for participants to have less

named and loosely defined identities. As queer theory argues, sexual identity shifts and defies normative categories of sexual and gender identity (Plummer, 2005). Therefore, in a queer(er) study, I would have focused less on sexual identities and their development and, instead, I would have challenged the notion of student development theories that sexual identity can be singularly named or linearly developed.

The last tension that I encountered was in the representation of the data. I was challenged in balancing common themes and unique differences in the presentation of the data. Whereas social constructivism is interested in the individual meaning attributed to identity, queer theory is interested in deconstructing the meaning and existence of identity (Abes, 2009). Representing individual identity with social constructivism and contesting identity with queer theory called for choosing when to represent their meanings of identity and when to (de)construct their meanings of identity within the participant narratives. In describing the participants in their study of the identity development of lesbian college students, Abes and Jones (2004) explained, "each individual story was richly and exquisitely unique" (p. 630). My participants were no different and representing the data in themes that spoke to both their individual meanings and deconstructed experiences was challenging. Within these themes, I tried to highlight the complexities of their statements and differences among them when they existed to highlight their individual meanings of safe spaces. To a lesser extent, however, I tried to use concepts of queer theory to challenge their meanings of identity and experiences of safe space by looking at how they (re)presented themselves and the spaces in which they occupied. I found it much easier to present the findings and conclusions in the previous chapter in terms of individual meanings based on social constructivism and student development theories, which is why it is important for me to next trouble some of the findings and conclusions more critically using queer theory.

Troubling the Findings Through Queer Theory

In reflecting upon the findings and conclusions of this study, I feel I have offered an effective "queer reading," which means I used elements of queer theory to inform the results but did not employ queer theory in a deconstructive analytic manner throughout. Therefore, while the analysis is extremely useful and interesting, I acknowledge I operated much more from a critical perspective than that encouraged by queer theory. To offer additional insight, I sought to use queer theory to highlight additional considerations of the study's findings and conclusions. By placing greater attention on queer theory, specifically the queer theory tenets of heteronormativity (Warner, 1991), performativity (Butler, 1990), and liminality (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967), deeper insight can be gleaned from this study.

I framed this research study as wanting to understand the positive, safe spaces that LGB college students spend their time expressing and exploring their identities. I thought that by understanding safe spaces I could provide an explanation of how to make the lives of LGB college students better. As I reflect back, the very questions I was asking in this study, about *positive* safe spaces, speaks to my own positionality as a White, gay man who has had the ability to access *positive* and *safe* spaces, often constructed for other White, gay men. My own view of safe spaces as catalysts for sexual identity development, rather than detrimental sites for sexual or other identity development, speaks to my own privileged view of safe spaces. This view inevitably influenced how I constructed this study and the findings that resulted because of the questions I asked, how I asked the questions, and how I heard the answers.

In order to talk about safe spaces, I found that my participants often had to share gripping stories of unsafe spaces where they were or are bullied, harassed, and often left hiding. As I heard these stories, I could not help but realize my privilege of how distant my own experience

has become from queer college and high school students today. I certainly can remember being a target of harassment growing up and the pain that made me feel at the time. However, as I have gotten older and become a part of (safe) spaces that are accepting and affirming of my identities, the distance of these difficult experiences growing up have slowly faded into the background. As good intentioned as I was in wanting to see the positive, my research had other plans and certainly taught me new lessons. As I understand now, safe spaces are often the result of dealing and coping with unsafe people and unsafe places. In many ways, safe spaces are our places of strength, of hope, and of resilience despite other unsafe places. As I have begun to understand it now, *the real problem is not that we need more safe spaces; it is that we need less unsafe spaces.*

Through a queer theoretical lens, safe spaces are locations where heteronormativity (Warner, 1991) within safe and unsafe spaces is both resisted and reinforced through performatives (Butler, 1990), sometimes even at the same time. For example, participants in this study spoke of incidences in both safe and unsafe spaces when they performed in heteronormative ways, like in how they dressed or behaved, and in other incidences when they resisted heteronormativity by creating or queering spaces. Additionally, the distinction between safe and unsafe spaces is problematic and simply not a binary, but a relative spectrum that depends on the person, place, and time. *Queer spaces* may more accurately describe spaces that defy singular or universal definition, yet serve as liminal spaces (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967) that contend with and conform to heteronormative influences. Therefore, addressing issues of heteronormativity, as well as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and other forms of oppression, may point to the deeper root of the problem than just the existence of unsafe

spaces, which might never be fully realized within such a deeply rooted system of multiple oppressions in our society.

The underlying issue that remained underacknowledged and undertheorized in a less queer analysis of safe spaces is how these spaces function within systems of power (Foucault, 1976/1978) that resist and reinforce dominant forms of sexual and gender identity. In order to shift in our thinking about safe spaces, we must then consider and ask questions about what power structures, such as societal or institutional, restrict our thinking around safe spaces and even reimagine something different. In terms of this study, several questions come to mind. As evidenced by study participants' use of other words than safe spaces to identify these spaces, a central question to be asked is how has higher education and student affairs normalized discourses of safe spaces? Do student affairs professionals perpetuate the need for safe spaces on college campuses by the creation of institutional "safe" spaces and programs? Are Safe Space programs created by student affairs professionals for rather than with or by the queer community? Do viral campaigns and news media outlets further communicate an "ideal" safe space that is then articulated by the queer community? Do White, gay men who often speak for, rather than with, the greater queer community, or communities of color for that matter, working towards or against greater emancipation from forms of oppression within safe spaces? These are just a few of the many questions queer theory is useful in helping us ask of safe, unsafe, and queer spaces, which speaks to the larger need for myself and others to look critically at who and where these discourses around different spaces originate and continue being dispelled.

Pushing Myself and the Profession Toward a Queer(er) Perspective

A paradox in higher education and student affairs is: "Although colleges and universities are the source of much queer theory, they have remained substantially untouched by the queer

agenda" (Renn, 2010, p. 132). It is my hope that in this study I was not only able to "touch" but also push higher education and student affairs in a direction towards *queer(er)* perspectives of safe spaces and student development theories through the findings and tensions present in this study. I did not go into this study thinking I would be articulating a call to action for higher education and student affairs research to queer our research and practice of both the concept of safe spaces and the very theories we use to understand how college students grow and develop. However, as I conclude this dissertation, that is where this research has led me.

Using queer theory in higher education and student affairs research can be beneficial for researchers and scholars in a number of ways. Most importantly, the use of queer theory to challenge linear models of identity development offers a more fluid and complex way of understanding college students (Abes & Kasch, 2007), especially in relation to linear models of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Instead of seeing college students as in a linear trajectory of developing, queer theory views them as always in a state of constantly becoming (Turner, 1967). The focus of queer theory on performativity (Butler, 1990) and movement (Morris, 2000) can also be helpful in higher education and student affairs research to resist labeling static identity, rather than celebrating fluid subjectivities. Whether in this study or in other research, classifying students into identity categories risks silencing their multiple and shifting subjectivities. Although using queer theory in higher education and student affairs research can be hard, it offers an opportunity for researchers and scholars to answer the paradox of using queer theory both within and on higher education and student affairs research.

Where To Go From Here?

Although this is the end of a long journey, it is far from over and there is much work still left to do. From this experience, I have a newfound appreciation for the power of asking tough

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questions, thinking deeply, and writing well. To me, this work represents more than just a dissertation; it highlights the struggles and tensions that exist between spaces both inside and outside ourselves; it speaks to the places we go for freedom; it acknowledges the places we avoid for peace; and it offers hope for the future of safe(r) and queer(er) spaces. I leave this study with more questions, than answers, because this study, these participants, and this journey is only the beginning of my understanding of queer(ing) spaces for queer purposes.

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RECRUITMENT FLYER

☑ **Are you a college student between the ages of 18 and 24?**
☑ **Do you identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB)?**
☑ **Do you use Internet technology?**
☑ **Are you willing to discuss physical and/or virtual "safe spaces?"**
☑ **Could you use a $10 VISA card?**

If your answers are yes, then please consider this research study!

ABOUT THE STUDY

•In this research study, we are studying LGB, college-aged (18–24 years old) students who have physical and virtual "safe spaces." The purpose of the study is to understand how and where safe spaces are created by LGB college students.

•If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participant in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 60–90 minutes and take 2–6 photographs of "safe spaces." A camera will be available if you do not wish to use your own.

If you are interested in participating, please call or e-mail to learn more.

CONTACT INFORMATION
DANNY – 336–693–4177 – DGLASS@UGA.EDU
MICHELLE – 706–542–4334 – MESPINO@UGA.EDU

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APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Dear Student,

My name is Danny Glassmann and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia. I am currently conducting a research project for my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Michelle Espino and I would like to invite you to participate in my study. The study is titled *Physical and Virtual Safe Spaces for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) College Students* and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia (Project Number: 2012-10420-0).

I am studying lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB), college-aged (18-24 years old) students who have physical and virtual "safe spaces." ***The purpose of the study is to understand how and where safe spaces are created by LGB college students.*** If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participant in an audio-taped interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes and take 2-6 photographs of physical and virtual "safe spaces." The meeting will be held at a mutually agreed upon location or online. During the interview, we will discuss the photos you have taken and where and how you create physical and virtual safe spaces. Two $5 gift cards will be provided for participating in this study, regardless if you complete the study or not.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study will also remain confidential. While the results may be published, your identity will be protected.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You may contact me at dglass@uga.edu.

If you would like to participate, please send an e-mail to me as soon as possible. In the email, please include your contact phone number and the best times to reach you. I will call you to further discuss the details of the study.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Danny Glassmann
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services
336-693-4177 – dglass@uga.edu
Investigator: Dr. Michelle Espino, Ph.D.
706-542-4334 – mespino@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR INITIAL SCREENING

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. As the email indicated, my name is Danny Glassmann and I conducting research for my dissertation under the direction of Dr. Michelle Espino in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia's College of Education. This research study is about how and where lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students create physical and virtual "safe spaces." The goal is to learn how to better support LGB college students in physical and virtual spaces.

I would like to ask you some question(s) to determine if you qualify for this study. This should take less than 5 minutes of your time.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may also stop this conversation at any time. If you qualify for this study, you will be asked to meet with me for approximately a 60-90 minute interview which will be audio-taped, take 2-6 photographs of "safe spaces" with a phone or digital camera you may already have or one provided to you, review your interview transcripts, answer any follow-up questions that arrive throughout the research process, and review a draft copy of the research results. Overall, I anticipate that you would spend between one-and-a-half hours to two-and-a-half hours of time in total assisting me with this research project.

If you do not qualify for this study, the information you give me today will be stored electronically in a password-protected file in the researcher's computer files until all selected participants have been interviewed. At that time, all records of this conversation will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you can ask to have all of the information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

As a result of participation, you may come to a greater sense of self-understanding or awareness through the reflective process inherent in interviewing. Discoveries of this nature may be healing or painful. The potential for revealing painful discoveries is expected to rarely, if ever, to occur, and the degree of discomfort is expected to be minimal given the nature of the interview questions. Additionally, because of the nature of Internet communication confidentiality cannot be ensured when e-mail or other modes of communication are used. For this reason, you have the option of communicating in this study completely through phone or face-to-face. Any information received via Internet communication will be stored on a password-protected computer only accessible by the researcher.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will receive a $5 gift card for your involvement in the photo portion and another $5 gift card for the interview, whether you complete the study or not. Do you have any questions at this point? You may ask any questions now or at any point during the course of the study. Do I now have your permission to proceed with the screening questions?

Screening Questions:
- Do you attend a college or university?
- What college or university do you attend?
- What year are you in college?
- Do you identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual? If so, how do you identify?
- Are you between the ages of 18-24?
- Do you use Internet technology? If so, do you have an online profile?
- Do you have what you would consider a physical and/or virtual safe space?

Thank you for answering my question(s) today. You [do/do not] qualify to participate in this research study.

[If qualified]
You quality for the study, so I would like to ask you some more questions regarding participation requirements of this study:

- Would you be willing to take 2-6 pictures using your own phone or digital camera or one provided by the researcher, describing physical and virtual "safe spaces" and how those spaces contribute to your development?
- Would you be willing to discuss these "safe spaces" in a personal, face-to-face one to one-and-a-half hour interview to discuss those developed pictures? If not, would you be willing to interview online via Skype or GoogleVoice?
- Would you be willing, although not required, to review the transcripts of the interview and findings and make clarifications at a later date?

Participant Information
Thank you. I would like to now get a little more information about you and arrange a convenient place/time to meet to discuss the study and obtain your consent to participate. If you would like to choose a location that you consider one of your "safe spaces" for us to meet, we can do that, or I can arrange for a safe and secure location for us to meet at. You also have the option of completing the interview through Google Voice or Skype. Which would you prefer?

Name: _____ Telephone: _____
Email:_____ Meeting Time:_____
Meeting Location: _____
Pseudonym: _____

Documents to Send to Participant: Consent Form, Photo Prompt Sheet, and Interview Questions

Again, thank you so much for speaking with me today. If you have any other questions regarding this study, please call me at 336-693-4177 or e-mail me at dglass@uga.edu. You can also contact Dr. Michelle Espino at 706-542-4334 or mespino@uga.edu.

If you have any questions or problems about your rights as a research participant, please call The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia at 706-542-3199.

APPENDIX D

Table 1., Participants' Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Sexual Identity	Ethnic Identity	Age	Classification	Institution
Michelle	Woman	Bisexual	White	18	Freshman	State
Max	Man	Gay	White	21	Senior	State
Andrew	Man	Gay	White	22	Senior	Founder
Coco	Woman	Gay/Lesbian	White	20	Sophomore	State
Zoe	Woman	Bisexual/Pansexual	Hispanic	19	Sophomore	State
Harriet	Man	Gay	White	18	Freshman	Founder
Annie	Woman	Lesbian/Queer	White	19	Sophomore	Founder
Brock	Man	Gay	White	19	Sophomore	Southeast
Jennifer	Woman	Bisexual	White	19	Junior	Founder
Danielle	Woman	Lesbian	White	21	Senior	Founder
Lucy	Woman	Bisexual/Queer	Chinese	21	Junior	Central
Chuck	Woman	Lesbian/Queer	White	23	Senior	Founder

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSTENT FORM

I, _____, agree to take part in a research study titled "Physical and Virtual Safe Spaces for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Students" (Project Number: 2012-10420-0), which is being conducted by Danny Glassmann from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia's College of Education under the direction of Dr. Michelle Espino, from the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services in the University of Georgia's College of Education (706-542-4334). My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have information that can be identified as mine returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

This research study is about how and where lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college students create physical and virtual "safe spaces." The goal is to learn how to better support LGB college students in their use of physical and virtual spaces. My participation in this study may advance the available literature that will allow institutions of higher education to provide better service to LGB students and enhance the campus climate related to LGB issues.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:
- Meet individually with the researcher for a one 60-90 minute interview. During the interview I will be asked: - Questions related to "safe spaces"   - Questions related to my sexual identity   - I understand that I may elect not to answer any question during the interview without having to explain why.   - I agree to take 2-6 photos of objects that describe my "safe spaces" within physical and virtual environments.   - Review my interview transcripts for accuracy or clarification; however, I may waive my opportunity to do so.   - Potentially respond to follow-up questions that may arise as the researcher conducts the study.   - Review a draft of the research findings and provide feedback; however, I may waive my opportunity to do so.   - I understand that I will receive two $5 gift cards for participating, whether I complete the study or not.

I understand that the total estimated duration of my participation in this study will range between one-and-a-half hours to two-and-a-half hours depending on length of interview, photographs, and any follow-up.

I will not benefit directly from this research outside of the opportunity to reflect on the research topic. The findings of this research may lead to educators having a greater awareness and understanding of the experiences of LGB college students and how and where "safe spaces" are created. It is the aim of this research that this greater understanding will create better, safer environments for LGB college students in physical and virtual places. Two $5 gift cards will be provided for participating in this study, one for the photo portion and the other for the interview.

As a result of participation, I may come to a greater sense of self-understanding or awareness through the reflective process inherent in interviewing. In the event that I experience heightened emotions that may need to be further discussed with a professional, I will be directed to the University of Georgia's Counseling and Psychiatric Services (706-542-2273). Additionally, because of the nature of Internet communication confidentiality cannot be ensured when e-mail or other modes of Internet communication are used. For this reason, I have the option of communicating in this study completely through phone or face-to-face. Any information received via Internet communication or other forms of collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer or a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

The only people who will know that I am a research subject are members of the research team. No individually identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others, without my written permission unless required by law. The researcher and I will discuss which of my photographs/screenshots may be used in presentations or publications, and my permission will be recorded in the researcher's notes. I will be given the opportunity to create a pseudonym, or will be assigned one, for the purposes of data collection and corresponding research reports. The pseudonym code will be maintained in a password protected electronic document in the researcher's computer files and will be destroyed after the final report has been written, which will be no later than May 31, 2015.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (336) 693-4177.

My initials below indicate whether or not I give permission to be audio recorded during interviews. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____ I **DO** give permission to have my interview audio recorded.
_____ I **DO NOT** give permission to have my interview audio recorded.

Dr. Michelle Espino_____   **_____**   **_____**
Name of Principal Investigator   **Signature**   **Date**
Telephone: (706) 542-4334   **Email: mespino@uga.edu**

Danny Glassmann_____   **_____**   **_____**
Name of Co-Investigator   **Signature**   **Date**
Telephone: (336) 693-4177   **Email: dglass@uga.edu**

_____   **_____**   **_____**
Name of Participant   **Signature**   **Date**

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction
Hi. My name is Danny Glassmann and I am a doctoral student in the College Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Georgia. I am conducting a research project on the safe spaces for LGB college students. Specifically, I want to learn more about how and where you create physical and virtual safe spaces and how this may contribute to your identity. It is from my own experience as a gay man and the many stories shared with me by other LGB people that I am interested in studying how we understand safe spaces. As an LGB college student today, you offer a unique perspective on safe spaces in physical and virtual places. I appreciate you meeting with me today to talk more about that.

Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that the information you share during the interview will be kept confidential as explained in the consent form. I will not use your name or any other identifying information about you that might allow someone to figure out who you are. Feel free to skip any questions you do not want to answer and at any time you may end the interview. I anticipate that the interview with take approximately an hour. Though I will be asking you questions, if at any time you have questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask. At this point, do you have any questions for me before we begin?

About the Participant
I would like to start our conversation by getting to know you better, so can you begin by…
   1. Tell me about yourself?
       Probing questions: How did you end up attending college? Where is your hometown? What year in school are you? What is your college/major? What are your career aspirations? What identities do you classify yourself as (sexual orientation, gender, ethnic, religious, social economic status, etc.)?

Transition: Thank you for sharing with me about who you are. I would like for us to now look at how you describe and locate safe spaces. I have several questions that will guide our conversation and more may arise as we discuss. Can you please answer the question…

Research Question
RQ1: How do LGB college students describe and locate physical and virtual safe spaces?
   2. How would you define the term "safe spaces?"
       Probing question: If you were creating the definition for "safe spaces" in the dictionary, how would it read?
   3. Can you share with me about where you consider a "safe space?" [Refer to photographs]

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Probing questions: How did you find out about that space? How does it make you feel? What does it look like? Are there other locations?

4. Tell me about something meaningful that happened to you in your "safe space?"
   Probing questions: How was it meaningful? What happened? What did you learn from that?
5. How would you describe somewhere that is not a "safe space?"

Transition: You have shared with me about how you describe and locate safe spaces, so now I want to shift our conversation to how physical and virtual safe spaces contribute to your sense of identity. Can you tell me…

Research Question

RQ3: How do physical and virtual safe spaces affect the identity development of LGB college students?

6. Where are you in your coming out process?
7. Think about the issues you have had to face with regard to coming out. How has the "safe spaces" you previously identified supported and/or challenged you coming out? [Refer to photographs]
   Probing questions: How can you be yourself in "safe spaces?" How can you not be yourself in "safe spaces?"
8. What have been turning point moments or crises moments that you have experienced in your coming out process and how has any of your "safe spaces" played a role in these?

Transition: We have discussed the role of safe spaces with regards to your identity, so now I would like to learn more about how you express your identity in these spaces. To start…

Research Question

RQ2: How do LGB college students use physical and virtual safe spaces to resist and/or reinforce dominant forms of sexual identity?

9. Are there people who enter your safe space that change your safe space?
   Probing question: How so?
10. How and who do you communicate to about your "safe space?"
    Probing questions: Are there people you really want to know about it? Who? How so? Are there people you do not communicate with about your "safe space?" Who? How so?
11. How would you describe your "safe spaces" in terms of non-LGB people?
    Probing questions: How are non-LGB people included in these spaces? How are they not included? Who is included and not included in your "safe spaces?"
12. What would you do to protect your "safe space?"
13. If you were to design the "perfect" safe space, what would it look like?
14. Can you imagine a world without the need for a safe space?
    Probing questions: If so, tell me about that world. If not, why not?

Final Question: Though I have asked many questions of you, I want to give you the opportunity to share with me anything else that you would like to add. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Summary Statement: In the interview, I took note of several themes that were noticeable to me. These included (insert themes). Do you think I summarized these correctly? Are there any other things that stand out to you from the interview?

Wrap-Up: I want to thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciated your insight and time you spent with me today. If I have any follow-up questions later, may I contact you again?

APPENDIX G

PHOTOGRAPHY AND SCREENSHOT PROMPT SHEET

Thank you for participating in my research project. To complete this portion of your participation, you will take 2-6 photographs of physical and/or virtual spaces using your own phone or digital camera or have one provided to you. If you need a digital camera, we will meet at an arranged time for you to receive and return the camera to me. In addition, you can take screenshots on your computer of virtual spaces. Please use the provided prompt sheet to assist you with this part of the research study.

- You can take pictures of anything you feel is appropriate to meet the below instructions. However, because of confidentiality, you *CANNOT* take pictures of other people.

- If you have a problem with the digital camera provided, please let me know as soon as possible. I will provide you with a new one.

Photograph Prompts

- Take 1-3 photographs and/or screenshots to describe physical and/or virtual safe spaces.

- Take 1-3 photographs and/or screenshots to describe how safe spaces have contributed positively and/or negatively to your LGB identity.

Once you have taken all of these photographs, e-mail the photographs to me directly. You also have the options of meeting me in person or mailing them directly to me. Please let me know if you would like to send your photos through any other medium than e-mail. If you use the digital camera provided from me, please keep it in a safe location and ensure a timely return.

If you have questions, please contact me at 336-693-4177 or dglass@uga.edu.

APPENDIX H

CODING SCHEME

DEMO   Demographic Information

CAREER Career Aspirations/Interests

TYPES   Types of Spaces
  TYPESS Types of Safe Spaces
    TYPESS_WRITE Writing
    TYPESS_NET Internet
    TYPESS_SPORT Sports
    TYPESS_PROGS LGBT Programs
    TYPESS_COFFEE Coffee Shop
    TYPESS_REST Restaurant
    TYPESS_RC LGBT Resource Center
    TYPESS_BAR Gay Bar
    TYPESS_PEP People
    TYPESS_SOC Social
    TYPESS_ORG Student Organizations
    TYPESS_HOME Home
    TYPESS_DRAG Drag Show
    TYPESS_BUT Button
    TYPESS_RAIN Rainbow
    TYPESS_APT Apartment
    TYPESS_MOM Mother
    TYPESS_FRND Friend
    TYPESS_OK Ok Cupid
    TYPESS_RED Reddit
    TYPESS_ROLLER Roller Girl
    TYPESS_STAFF Staff member
  TYPESU Types of Unsafe Spaces
    TYPESU_MID Middle School
    TYPESU_HIGH High School
    TYPESU_DTOWN Downtown
    TYPESU_CHICK Chick Fila
    TYPESU_FRAT Fraternity
    TYPESU_MASC Masculinized
    TYPESU_REL Relationships
    TYPESU_WH Waffle House
    TYPESU_EF Extended family

TYPESU_IF   Immediate family
TYPESU_REL   Religion

BEHAV   Behavior Within Spaces
       BEHAVINS   Inside community behavior in safe spaces
       BEHAVOUTS   Outside community behavior in safe spaces
       BEHAVINU   Inside community behavior in unsafe spaces
       BEHAVOUTU   Outside community behavior in unsafe spaces

DEFINE   Defining/Characterizing Spaces
       DEFINES   Defining/Characterizing Safe Spaces
              DEFINES_RE   Relax
              DEFINES_COMF   Comfortable
              DEFINES_NOWOR No worry
              DEFINES_OPEN   Open
              DEFINES_NOJUD   No judgment
              DEFINES_URSELF Be yourself
              DEFINES_CON   Connections
              DEFINES_WEL   Welcoming
              DEFINES_SUP   Support system
              DEFINES_RESPECT Respect
              DEFINES_EXP   Express self
       DEFINEU   Defining/Characterizing Unsafe Spaces
              DEFINEU_UNIN   Uninvited
              DEFINEU_HATE   Hateful

STRCREATE Strategies for Creation of Safe Spaces

STRPROT   Strategies for Protection of Safe Spaces

BAR   Barriers to coming out in spaces

QUEER   Queer(ing) Spaces

IDENT   Identity
       IDENT_PLACE   Identity depends on place
       IDENT_SEX   Sexual identity

PRIV   Privilege

HETERO   Hetero-sexism/normative

CHNG   Changing Spaces
       CHNGPOS   Changing spaces positively
              CHNGPOS_H   Changing spaces positively by allies/heterosexuals

CHANGENEG   Changing spaces negatively
     CHNGNEG_H   Changing spaces negatively by allies/heterosexuals
CHANGEIN   Spaces changed from others within community
CHANGEOUT   Spaces changed from others outside community
COMOUT   Coming Out
     COMOUTS   Coming out through safe spaces

PERFECT   Describing "perfect" safe space

RACE   Race

HOMO   Homophobia
     HOMOIN   Internalized Homophobia

OPP   Oppression

LEARN   Learning

SAFETY   Safety

VOICE   LGBT Voice

SUPSYM   Support System

SEXISM   Sexism

DISCRIM   Discrimination

FAITH   Faith/religion