Examining the Impact of Sexual Orientation on the Career Development of LGBQ+ Students

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Examining the Impact of Sexual Orientation on the Career Development of LGBQ+ Students

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
Educational Administration
Higher Education

By

Michael David Hoffshire
B.S. Roger Williams University, 2009
M.A. Michigan State University, 2011

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To the LGBQ+ undergraduate students who served as participants in my study, I have learned a lot from you. It is my hope that the findings from this dissertation study will be utilized to impact the delivery of career services for marginalized populations in the future. I wish you nothing but continued success.
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Abstract

College is a significant stage that heavily contributes to who and what citizens become after degree attainment. During career development, college students’ interests develop through taking part in coursework and employment based occupational exploration. It has been speculated that because sexual identity development and vocational identity development are active during the same phase of life, these processes might exert influence on each other (Chen, Stacuzzi, Ruckdeschel, 2004; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1997). With the changing socioeconomic climate over the past decade, individuals of varying sexual orientation identities have found it necessary or desirable to be more open regarding their identity in their career. Currently, a lack of research exists that examines LGBQ+ students’ career development (Datti, 2009; Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002; Chung, 1995; Morrow, 1997; Schneider & Dimito, 2010).

The purpose of this research study was to examine the career development of LGBQ+ students. Through a qualitative, phenomenological approach utilizing nine participants, the researcher examined how a LGBQ+ sexual orientation impacts a student’s career development. Four themes emerged from the study: the participant coming out process, awareness of intersectionality of identities, navigating their career as an LGBQ+ individual, identifying potential employers, and the role of career counselors. Recommendations are shared to further support LGBQ+ individuals in their career development. As a result of this study, leaders in post-secondary education as well as policymakers are able to gain insight into the career development of this population.

Keywords: career development, sexual orientation, LGBQ+
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the current challenging economic climate, the availability and delivery of career services to college students is more important than ever. College students rely on career service units/offices to help them prepare and review documents such as resumes and cover letters, identify career options, search for job opportunities, develop and foster interview skills, and evaluate job offers (Schaub, 2012). As Gore and Metz (2008) stated, “college is a critical time in young people’s career development” (p. 128). Students are engaging in academic and social endeavors, exploring various identities, and learning to become productive citizens. While institutions have adapted to offer more individualized approaches to student development and success, career counselors have become more educated on the specific needs of their student body populations (Gore & Metz, 2008). It has become imperative for career counselors to have a better understanding of the various identities students are entering the collegiate context with so they can be better equipped to address individual concerns and questions regarding future career decisions. Career counselors may use the student’s salient identities and personalities to gain insight into their preferences for engaging in the career development process and to describe work related strengths and challenges (Schaub, 2012).

Over the past twenty years, the student population of many higher education institutions have become increasingly diverse (Datti, 2009; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Along with the expansion of higher education and increasing tuition costs, the pressure on institutions to retain all students to degree completion has been mounting (Campbell & Mislevy, 2013). As such, institutions have responded by taking a more student-centered approach, offering programs and services to cater to various student needs and identities. One such
population that campuses have actively attempted to decrease the marginalization of, are those who identify as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ+) community.

The researcher has elected to utilize the acronym LGBQ+ as an umbrella term that includes anyone whose sexual orientation falls outside societal norms (American Educational Research Association, 2015). The term refers to an identity of an individual who is physically, emotionally, or sexually attracted to some or all members of the same sex. In addition, per the Oxford English Dictionary, the term queer originated from the English language in the 16th century as a Northern English expression meaning odd or peculiar (“Queer,” 2015). Up until the late 19th century, authors utilized the term queer in the literature to describe feminine men who engaged in same-sex relationships (Chauncey, 1994). However, beginning in the 1980s, the term was reclaimed by the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community with the help of academia, art, and popular culture. Today, LGB communities have reclaimed the term queer to mean a resistance to oppression and as a means for empowerment (Dilley, 1999; Dyer, 2002; Hall, 2003). For the purposes of this study, LGBQ+ will refer to those individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. The term heterosexual can be defined as an individual who is sexually, and emotionally attracted to a member of the opposite sex (Chase & Ressler, 2009).

The creation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and LGBQ+ (LGBTQ) Centers (Fine, 2012; Rankin, 2005; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005), greater inclusion of LGBTQ issues in the curriculum and student affairs programming (Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997; Mayo, 2009; McRee & Cooper, 1998; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005), the creation of student organizations based on LGBTQ identity (Beemyn, 2003; Dilley, 2002; Hall, 2010; McRee & Cooper, 1998; Walls,

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1 Consistent with recommendations set forth by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the researcher has elected to utilize the acronym LGBQ+ to represent the wide range of sexual orientations that cannot be defined as heterosexual. This term is not meant to be all inclusive, but rather capture the wide array of sexual orientations prevalent in our society.
Kane, & Wisneski, 2010), and the addition of sexual and gender identity to non-discrimination clauses (Githens, 2012; Rankin, 2005; Rhoads, 1997; Woodford, Atteberry, Derr, & Howell, 2013) are just a few mechanisms that campuses have utilized to create a more supportive and accepting environment for students. Within the past twenty years, individuals of differing sexual orientations have become more widely visible and accepted within mainstream society (Datti, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2013).

With the changing socioeconomic climate over the past decade, individuals of varying sexual orientation identities have found it necessary or desirable to be more open regarding their identities in their career environments. Openness regarding one’s sexual orientation enables LGBTQ+ workers to achieve congruence in their public and private identities, establish closer relationships with peers and coworkers, and avoid negative cognitive effects (Fassinger, 1995; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). For organizations, creativity, satisfaction, productivity, and team member well-being are potential positive impacts of cultural and gender diversity (Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander, & Maznevski, 2010). However, some LGBTQ individuals choose not to disclose their sexual orientation identity, a concept known as “passing”. According to Berger (1992), the concept of passing represents the notion that homosexuality is an invisible identity which often can be hidden from others. Berger (1992) also commented that passing leads to poor self-concept and potential emotional distress. In addition, Weinberg and Williams (1975) found that failure to disclose one’s sexual orientation can encourage the internalization of negative concepts. If an individual chooses to engage in “passing” over the long term, it can cause themselves to create a negative self-concept (Berger, 1992; Weinberg & Williams, 1975). As such, career counseling with LGBTQ+ individuals should involve considering the role that sexual minority status plays in the employment discrimination,
the impact that this discrimination has on the decision to be open regarding sexuality on the job, and the problems faced within their career (Elliott, 1993; Maree, 2014; Parnell, Lease, & Green, 2012; Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2011). This study offers an examination of LGBQ+ students and their career development in a collegiate setting.

**Problem Statement**

According to recent results of a Pew Research Center (2013) survey, over 92% of LGBT Americans say society has become more accepting of them in the past decade. Participants in the survey attributed these changes to a variety of factors, from people interacting with someone who is LGBQ to engaging in some form of LGBQ advocacy and education. However, the same survey indicated that many in the LGBQ community continue to feel stigmatized, have been rejected by a family member or close friend (39%), physically attacked (30%) or felt treated unfairly by an employer (21%). Furthermore, a recent 2013 study found that LGB adults are unemployed at a rate 40% higher than the overall average (Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress & Human Rights Campaign, 2013).

Recent legislation continues to openly discriminate against the LGBQ+ community. For example, North Carolina recently passed the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act, which requires individuals to use public restrooms according to the biological sex on their birth certificate. Furthermore, it strips workers from the ability to sue under a state anti-discrimination law against LGBT individuals (Logue, 2016). In 2016, Georgia passed the Free Exercise Protection Act, which enabled clergy to refuse to conduct same sex marriages on the basis of their religious beliefs. It also allowed faith based organizations the right to refuse to employ an individual who identifies as a member of the LGBT community (Nanos, 2016). According to Thompson (2015), the “need to protect the civil rights of gay and transgendered persons as well
as the constitutional right of religious exercise and expression are the key issues that make religious exemption from employment so contentious (p. 299).” After drawing wide spread criticism, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal exercised his veto power on the act (Capehart, 2016).

Currently, there are twenty-eight states that do not offer protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation (see Table 1.1) (Movement Advancement Project, 2016). In these states, there are no employment non-discrimination laws covering sexual orientation, although federal law does offer some protections. Employment practices that target LGBTQ+ employees are not uncommon, especially among religious organizations (Thompson, 2015). In fact, 52% of the LGBT population resides in a state where employers can discriminate based on sexual orientation (Movement Advancement Project, 2016). Those impacted by such discriminatory policies have little recourse, as Title XII of the Civil Rights Act does not protect LGBT identity (Thompson, 2015). However, current efforts by several legislators, such as Senator Jeff Merkley, have sought to change that in the form of the Equality Act (an addition to Title XII that would outlaw workplace discrimination on behalf of sexual orientation and gender identity) (Terkel, 2015). To date, the measure has not passed.

Table 1.1: States Lacking Protections for Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idaho</th>
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<td>Pennsylvania</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
During career development, college students’ interests develop through taking part in coursework and employment based occupational exploration. According to Sung, Turner, and Kaewchinda (2013), for students, “career trajectories are also supported or hindered by their abilities to set and meet academic and career-related goals, and by the support and influence of peers, professors, parents, and advisors” (p.128). College is a significant stage that heavily contributes to who and what citizens become after degree attainment. In addition, college is a crucial time for self-identity, self-discovery, and identity solidification (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). It has been speculated that because sexual identity development and vocational identity development are active during the same phase of life, these processes might exert influence on each other (Chen et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1997; Morrow, 1997). Therefore, these processes of identity development have caused some scholars to hypothesize that the process of vocational identity development for LGBQ+ identified individuals might occur along a different trajectory when compared to heterosexual individuals (Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996; Fassinger, 1997).

Due to the emergence of a larger gay culture in mainstream society, LGBQ+ individuals are no longer funneled through a certain stereotypical career path (gay males as hairdressers or lesbian women as truck drivers) (Datti, 2009). During adolescence, students become more aware of environments surrounding various careers and slowly come to identify which fields may be lesbian and gay friendly (Morrow, 1997). For example, a LGBQ+ student may assess the compatibility of a particular occupation with their self-image to determine how much energy and effort they are willing to exert on a particular occupation (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Morrow, 1997). Furthermore, LGBQ+ students may be less willing to put in additional effort to enter fields that are perceived as homophobic because they are already
exerting an incredible amount of energy on their sexual identity development (Ueno, Abraham, Pena-Talamantes, & Roach, 2013). Social relations and lifestyles associated with each occupation suggest that individuals are concerned about the social identity conferred with each occupational type (Holland, 1997). In addition, LGBQ+ students may not want to put themselves on a career path on which they feel vulnerable or threatened (Plug, Webbink, & Martin, 2014). The presence of homophobia, both on a college campus and in a work environment, can hinder a LGBQ+ individual’s career development (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007; Sailer, Korschgen, & Lokken, 1994).

Throughout their life span, LGBQ+ students face a plethora of issues, including but not limited to rejection, low self-esteem, identity confusion, environmental barriers, and social isolation (Datti, 2009). This is particularly salient during the collegiate years as LGBQ+ identity formation is considered a “primary developmental task” (Hetrick & Martin, 1987, p. 25). While it can be argued that all students face similar challenges as they transition to the college environment, sexual minority students face increased pressure from societal norms and a culture of heteronormativity (Kirsch, Conley, & Riley, 2015; Zubembis & Snyder, 2007).

Heteronormativity can be defined as the implicit framework that supports the practice of heterosexuality in which those that do not conform are considered deviant (Warner, 1991). Examples of heteronormativity include the opposition of same-sex marriage, same-sex benefits, and same sex adoption. Datti (2009) proposed the concept of a “bottleneck hypothesis” in which LGBQ+ individuals cope with career development and related tasks at a slower pace than their heterosexual counterparts because they are simultaneously dealing with a marginalized sexual orientation. Therefore, LGBQ+ students often get caught in the space “in between” identity formation and career development. During the coming out process, other parts of a person’s life
are often “put on hold” making career exploration difficult (Chen, Stracuzzi, & Ruckdeschel, 2004; Fassinger, 1997; Morrow, 1997; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). The disclosure of a stigmatized identity may make the individual the subject of prejudice, discrimination, or victimization (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Studies conducted by Lyons, Brenner, and Lipman (2010) and Schmidt and Nilsson (2006) supported the concept of the “bottleneck hypothesis.”

Currently, limited research exists that examines LGBQ+ students’ career development (Datti, 2009; Degges-White, & Shoffner, 2002; Chung, 1995; Morrow, 1997; Schneider & Dimito, 2010). LGBQ+ individuals may experience obstacles in career development if a preponderance of mental energy is given to developing sexual identity (Russon & Schmidt, 2014). Garnets and Kimmel (1993) and Mohr and Fassinger (2000) hypothesized that many major developmental tasks are delayed because of cultural stigma and lack of modeling and social support. In selecting a major or career, LGBQ+ students must go through a mental process that includes weighing the variables or obstacles that stand in the way of their achievement (Datti, 2009). Current research suggests that there are many barriers to effective career development among LGBQ+ students, including social stigmas, open discrimination, homophobia and lack of mentors (Datti, 2009; Mobley & Slaney, 1996; Morrow, 1997.; Schnedier & Dimito, 2010). As sexuality becomes more visible within mainstream society, it is important that researchers undertake a critical examination of the way a student’s sexuality intersects with their career development processes.

**Purpose of the Study**

There has been limited research published examining the career development of LGBQ+ individuals despite calls for increasing diversity in the workplace in addition to ethical and professional considerations (Croteau, 1996; House, 2004; Longborg & Phillips, 1996; Nauta,
Saucier, & Woodword, 2001; Pope, Prince, & Mitchell, 2000; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the impact a LGBQ+ sexual orientation had on a student’s career development. The study examined how LGBQ+ students explored their identity and its relationship to their understanding of their career development. By conducting this study, the researcher uncovered the perceived challenges LGBQ+ students faced in their career development and the potential impact it played on their major and/or career choices. Because more LGBQ+ students are open regarding their sexuality throughout college, educators need to have a better understanding of how to assist this student population in their career development (Chojnacki & Gelberg, 1994; Maree, 2014). This researcher will produce a qualitative analysis of the career development of LGBQ+ students.

**Conceptual Framework**

The researcher has developed a conceptual framework that encompasses Ruth Fassinger’s (1998) homosexual identity development and Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s (1994) social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Ruth Fassinger’s (1998) theory of gay and lesbian identity development serves two purposes in the building of the proposed study’s conceptual framework. First, it offered an explanation of LGBQ+ identity development. Second, this theoretical model allows the researcher to explore sexual orientation identity development from both an individual and group prospective. Lent et al.’s (1994) social cognitive career theory suggested that an individual’s career choice can be influenced by their belief system, which can be refined through personal performance accomplishments, social persuasion, learning, and physiological states. Throughout an individual’s career development, there is a focus on the way self-efficacy, ability, expectations, and goals relate to the person, context, and learning experiences. Lent et al. (1994) also suggested that bringing together conceptually related constructs, such as self-concept,
satisfaction, and interest would help explain the process of career choice. SCCT postulates that personal inputs (such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) and contextual background factors directly affect learning experiences which in turn affect self—efficacy leading to actions, interests, and goals of a potential career. This conceptual framework provides a lens from which to view the research undertaken and offers a theory of the phenomenon that was under investigation (Maxwell, 2005).

**Methods**

Max Van Manen (1997) described a phenomenological study as one that studies “a lived experience…the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect upon it” (p. 9). This method is appropriate for researching the career development of LGBQ+ students as it does not require the researcher to have assumptions or hypothesis regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, phenomenology is the study of people’s “conscious experience of their life-world that is their everyday life and social action” (Schram, 2003, p. 71). It allows the researcher to learn how LGBQ+ students understand and conceptualize their career development, apart from theories or models that attempt to explain the phenomenon. The result of a phenomenological study culminates in the essence of the experience for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Merriam (2009) argued that in order to understand the basic underlying structure or the true meaning of the phenomenon under investigation, the interview is the primary method of data collection. In addition, as the researcher, I explored my own experiences as a gay male undergoing my own career development to become aware of personal viewpoints and assumptions. Merriam (2009) suggested that prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are
temporarily bracketed as to not interfere with seeing the elements or structure of the phenomenon.

Participants were between the ages of 18 – 24, classified as a sophomore, junior, or senior and enrolled part or full time at an institution of higher education. In addition, participants had to identify as a member of the LGBQ+ community. Primary methods of data collection involved document review and analysis, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals. In the process of data analysis “qualities are recognized and described; every perception is granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of experience are linked thematically, and a full description is derived” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). For this study, the researcher utilized three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective (Creswell, 2013) as a method for data analysis.

Research Question

A research question is the fundamental core of a research study. Merriam (2009) stated that the research question should reflect the researcher’s thinking, guide inquiry, and explain what the study will attempt to explain. As such, the following question had been developed in order to examine the research topic:

- What is the experience of LGBQ+ college students in their career development?

Terminology

Terminology can play an important role in the understanding of a research study. The following terms have been provided to ensure the reader’s understanding of their relation to the research topic being studied.

Career Development. Career development can be defined as a lifelong process in which an individual makes intentional decisions regarding their career (Hiester, Nordstrom, & Swenson, 2009). Typically, this involves a level of career awareness, preparedness, exploration,
and integration (Knowdell, 1996). In addition, career development embodies four major outcomes, which include personal development (Super, 1957), personal skills (Holland, 1997), learning (Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011), and environmental context (Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright, & Ettinger, 1996). These four themes blend together to assist an individual in choosing a career. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Career Onestop (2009), a student who assesses his or her interests in a particular career is establishing a positive pattern of career preparation.

**Heteronormative.** According to Chase and Ressler (2009), heteronormativity can be defined as the “assumption that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation, and therefore anyone who is not heterosexual is abnormal, marginalized, and/or made invisible” (p. 23). In a heteronormative society, individuals are assumed to be heterosexual.

**Homophobia.** The irrational fear of LGBQ+ individuals and those perceived to be LGBQ+ (Chase & Ressler, 2009).

**LGBQ+.** An umbrella term referring to individuals whose sexuality falls outside societal norms (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). In the spirit of inclusivity, the researcher utilizes the word LGBQ+ to mean all non-heterosexual individuals. It can include members of the lesbian and gay community (those individuals who are physically, emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the same sex) or more recent terms such as pansexual (physical, emotional and sexual attraction towards people of any sex and/or gender). It could also include terms such as asexual (having lack of sexual attraction) or polyamorous (physical, emotional and sexual attraction to more than one partner at a time). The researcher uses the acronym to be inclusive of the widest range of sexual orientations possible.
For the purposes of this study, the researcher has elected to remove transgender students. It is important to note that transgender status is not a sexual orientation; it is a gender identity. While sexual orientation can be defined as the type of sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction felt for another (often defined by gender), transgender can be defined as an umbrella term used to describe individuals who do not subscribe to dominant cultural gender (Schneider & Dimito, 2010). Because LGBQ+ and transgender individuals often face discrimination and marginalization, they have been increasingly lumped together in various research studies (Datti, 2009; Schneider & Dimito, 2010). The needs, experiences, and identities of LGBQ+ and transgender individuals are vastly different and thus should be treated as such (Airton, 2009).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation offers a critical examination of LGBQ+ college students in their career development at various institutions (such as public, private, HBCUs, etc.) in the New Orleans, Louisiana region. Chapter two provides the reader with an overview of current literature exploring LGBQ+ students in collegiate contexts and prominent career development theories. It concludes with an overview of current literature detailing known barriers to successful career development. In addition, it provides a detailed exploration of the conceptual framework to be utilized throughout the study. Chapter three provides the reader with an overview of the researcher’s methods grounded in current literature and methodological practices. Findings are presented in chapter four. Finally, the researcher concludes with a discussion of the findings, implications for theory and practice, limitations, and opportunities for future research.
CHAPTER 2

Introduction

Findings from a 2005 research study conducted by Susan Rankin suggested that sexual minority students “encounter unique challenges because of how they are perceived and treated because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression” (p. 17). She defined campus climate as “the cumulative attitudes, behavior, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (Rankin, 2005, p. 17). In the fourteen institutions that participated, 73% of faculty, 74% of students, and 73% of administrators described their campuses as homophobic. This homophobic climate can have detrimental effects on students’ development (Rankin, 2005). If LGBTQ+ students are subject to the stressors of discrimination, they may develop a negative self-concept (Berger, 1992; Weinberg & Williams, 1975) and become less likely to spend time on career related tasks.

This chapter addresses the sociopolitical context and the educational research that has been conducted on LGB individuals and their career development since the 1900s. It opens with a brief overview of the gay rights movement, educational and psychological campus climate research, theories of sexual orientation identity, and concludes with current literature regarding the career development of LGBTQ+ individuals. Furthermore, this chapter helps to establish the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals in educational contexts. It concludes with a detailed explanation of the conceptual framework utilized for this study.

Historical Perspectives of Homosexuality

Colleges across the United States have welcomed more LGBTQ+ students to their campuses as they have become more open regarding their sexual orientation identity (Cegler, 2012; Young, 2011). As Rojas stated in The Organization of Higher Education (2012), “nearly
every significant movement in the past century has had a significant relationship with the university system” (p. 256). These social movements are important because they can change universities and societies (Scott, 2008). Rojas (2012) suggested that the campus revolts of the 1960s led to ethnic and women studies (Olzak & Kangas, 2008). Later, student movements formed around social issues of marginalized student rights, recycling (Lounsbury, 2001) and sweatshop activism (Mandle, 2000). Each of these movements demanded that institutions of higher education change policies and practices (Rojas, 2012). Notably, Rojas (2012) cited that most recently, the gay rights movement encouraged the change, development, and inclusivity of collegiate environments for the LGBQ+ community. The Stonewall Inn riots, identity based developmental theories, and legal mechanisms have served as major milestones that marked a paradigm shift in the manner college campuses contextualize LGBQ+ individuals.

Gay Rights Movement

The start of the gay rights movement in the United States is most often associated with the riots at Stonewall Inn in New York City that occurred on June 28, 1969. According to Paquette (1994), police in New York City raided the Stonewall Inn under false pretenses of liquor law violations among homosexual men who were visiting the bar. The men resisted arrest claiming that they were simply socializing and should not be criminalized for their sexuality (D’Emilio, 1983). Word of this disruption and riots quickly spread on mainstream media and press and the modern gay rights movement was born (Duberman, 1993). After the Stonewall riots, LGBQ+ individuals began to foster cohesive communities that advocated for equal treatment and protection under the law. However, due to the fears instilled in the nation regarding communism during WWII, LGBQ+ individuals were still a target of discrimination throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s (Edsall, 2003; Hall 2010). During this time, the United
States government labeled them as security risks and communist sympathizers because these LGBQ+ individuals were said to lack conformity and were more susceptible to blackmail (Johnson, 2004). In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower signed an executive order barring homosexuals from working in state and federal government.

Beginning in the late 1950s, developments emerged alongside scientific publications that challenged traditional views of sexuality. Most prominent among the publications were the Kinsey reports, in 1948 and 1953, which attempted to describe a person’s sexual experience or response at a given time, ranging from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. Kinsey, professor and sexologist, was the first major theorist to posit that sexuality was fluid and not operating on a binary. Kinsey (1953) argued “there appears to be no other major culture in the world in which public opinion and the statute law so severely penalize homosexual relationships as they do in the United States today” (p. 483). Due to advances in the medical, psychological, and sociological fields, homosexuality began to be viewed as a mental illness that could be treated. Simon Hall (2010) noted that during the late 1960s, “homophile activists adopted the language and ideology of minority rights, engaged in public protest, and were increasingly unapologetic, even celebratory, about the homosexual lifestyle” (p. 540). The deconstruction of sexual orientation identity in the 1970s led individuals to become more open regarding their sexuality within mainstream society. This activism followed a decade of significant changes in the way psychologists and educators understood homosexual identity. In 1974, The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a medical illness from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) IV (Heching, 2016). Consequently, LGBQ+ individuals were no longer expected to be different and/or seek treatment for their homosexual behavior.
The 1990s brought forth many efforts by activists to end longstanding discriminatory policies and practices. For example, efforts to end the long-standing prohibition from gay individuals serving in the military yielded what intended to be a compromise when President Bill Clinton signed the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy (Burrelli, 2010). Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell consisted of a specific regulation that required sexual orientation to be considered personal and private. As such, individuals of the LGBQ+ community were permitted to serve as long as they never disclosed their sexual orientation. According to Herek (2007), the U.S. military has always been situated in heterosexuality as the prevailing and expected norm. As such, Burks (2011) cited that this policy led to a significant increase in the amount of victimization against LGBQ individuals in the military. In 2010, President Barack Obama signed the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act of 2010, which eliminated all restrictions prohibiting gay individuals from serving openly in the nation’s military (Lee, 2010).

In addition to specific actions taken by the Executive branch of government, the strongest expansions in LGBQ+ rights in the United States have originated from legal mechanisms. In 1992, Colorado voters approved an amendment to their state constitution that prevented any city, town, or county in Colorado from taking legislative, executive, or judicial action to recognize homosexuals as a protected class. In 1996, the Supreme Court ruled lesbian and gay discrimination laws unconstitutional in Romer v. Evans, with Justice Anthony Kennedy writing the majority opinion stating that the amendment imposed a special disability which lacked a legitimate state interest. This decision marked the beginning of an era in which the Supreme Court examined the discrimination faced by homosexual people (Sparling, 2016). In 2003, the Supreme Court also heard the case of Lawrence v. Texas, where the Court struck down a Texas statute that prohibited sodomy. In 1998, John Lawrence and Tryon Garner were arrested in their
home after officers responded to a report of the two men engaging in sexual relations with each other, thus violating Texas’s homosexual conduct law. The ruling established a fundamental liberty right to private sexual intimacy between consenting adults. In the 2013 *United States v. Windsor* case, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage for federal purposes as a union between one man and one woman, was unconstitutional. Recently, on June 26th, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same sex couples have a fundamental right to marry.

The speed at which the legal and social climate for LGBQ+ individuals has changed in the United States has few historical precedents (Gates, 2015). As a result of homosexuality being removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) IV (1973), Supreme Court rulings such as *Romer v. Evans* (1996), *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), *United States v. Windsor* (2013), *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), and a major shift in public opinion, many institutions have welcomed the idea of having LGBQ+ students on their campus. In a 2014 report on the National Trends in Public Opinion on LGBT Rights in the United States conducted by the Williams Institute, researchers found that support of the rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people in the United States has increased significantly and rapidly over the last three decades (Flores, 2014). Findings suggested that this increase in support is due to a younger, more supportive generation that has fostered a cultural shift of acceptance. The 2015 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshmen Survey found that 81% endorse the right of same-sex couple to marry (Eagan et al., 2016). Today, being LGBQ+ is viewed more as an identity instead of an illness (Heching, 2016). While many of these significant events have had a positive and lasting impact on the gay rights movement today, there is still significant room for growth. Discriminatory policies still exist in housing, labor and
adoption. The intersection of sexual orientation and religion is still debated. Further advocacy is needed to address these issues to help shape the gay rights movement moving forward (Schwartz, 2010). Thus, it is important to research LGBQ+ students’ career development.

**Campus Climates**

Rankin and Reason (2013) described campus climate as the “current attitudes, behaviors, standards, and practices of employees and students at an institution” (p. 264). Additionally, campus climate is a construct that is comprised of multiple items that attempt to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and standards of a particular group or community. The items that comprise the construct are typically those perceptions of attitudes that are related to a specific group on a college campus. Throughout this study, the researcher is referring to the campus climate of LGBQ+ students.

From 1970 to 1990, LGBQ+ college students often waited until they arrived at college and found other individuals who identified within the community before they came out (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Most were fearful of the social stigma and mistreatment associated with possessing a marginalized sexual orientation. However, the late 1990s have brought a growing number of gay-straight alliances in middle and high schools, increased awareness of this population, and availability of support services. As such, LGBQ+ students are often choosing to come out in middle and high school (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2011; Macgillivray & Whitlock, 2007).

While the United States has seen a significant shift in public opinion regarding homosexuality in the 21st century, discriminatory policies and practices remain in higher education. As Lorri Jean (in Rankin, 2003), Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, stated, “institutions of higher education may appear to be “ivory towers” isolated
from larger society, but they really reflect the problems and bias found in society as a whole.” Although LGBTQ+ students are present on campuses throughout the country, very few institutions appear to be taken proactive steps to provide support to this student population (Fine, 2012). Discrimination in the form of LGBTQ+ jokes and slurs, verbal harassment, unfair treatment, and physical attacks still occur (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, Frazer, 2010; Woodford, Chonody, Kulick, Brennan, & Renn, 2015; Woodford, Kulick, Sinco, & Hong, 2014). Unfortunately, many institutions have not changed to become safer and more inclusive environments for the LGBTQ+ community (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). In fact, as few as 200 LGBT resource centers have been established across institutions today (Marine, 2011). Additionally, Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) highlighted several challenges that threaten a centers’ ability to be inclusive and innovative, which may include budget and staffing restrictions.

Rankin (2005) suggested that campus climate impacts the academic and social development of LGBTQ+ students. Recent studies have investigated the experiences of LGBTQ individuals using qualitative and quantitative techniques (Dilley, 2005; Evans & Broido, 2002; Evans & Heriot, 2004; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003; Renn, 2007). In addition, some studies have highlighted the obstacles and challenges associated with the possession and intersectionality of multiple marginalized identities (such as African American, Korean, and female) and sexual orientation (Patton, 2011; Stayhorne, 2014; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). These studies discussed the implications of navigating multiple identities, which often include the desire to remain closeted to avoid additional harassment, racism and homophobia. Findings also suggested that LGBTQ+ student’s perception of the campus
environment is shaped and influence by their identity (Patton, 2011; Rankin et al., 2010; Stayhorne, 2014).

Evans and Rankin (1998) and Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld and Frazer (2010) suggested that the campus climate for LGBQ+ students consisted of both perceptions of discrimination and the attitudes of non-heterosexual individuals on campus towards the LGBQ+ community. Studies of the experiences of LGBQ+ students have indicated that college campus climates continue to be negative and non-inclusive (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2003; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). For example, researchers have found a significant relationship between membership in the Greek and athletic communities and unsupportive and negative attitudes towards the LGBQ+ community (Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Worthen, 2014). Furthermore, Rankin et al. (2010) found that negative experiences are still commonplace for the LGBQ+ student population. Many of these individuals reported encountering heterosexism in schools, which often included social isolation and interpersonal discrimination (Sherriff, Hamilton, Wigmore, Giambrone, 2011; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, Magley, 2008; Woodford et al., 2015). In a national study of 5,149 LGBT college students (one of the first of its kind), 25% reported being harassed on campus due to their sexual orientation, 30% felt uncomfortable with their overall climate, and 30% seriously thought about withdrawing from their institution (Rankin et al., 2010). Having nationally based data allows educators and researchers to draw conclusions regarding the campus climate for this student population.

Gortmaker and Brown’s (2006) study on out students found that open LGBQ+ students were at a higher risk of victimization due to increased visibility. Findings suggested that as students neared graduation, they became less involved in LGBQ+ related programs and activities. As students begin to explore career options, being open about one’s sexual orientation
may be considered a hindrance (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Research by Tomlinson and Fassinger (2003) found that a positive relationship exists between lesbian students’ perceptions of their campus climate and their career development. The more positive lesbian students’ perception were of their campus climate, the less likely they were to experience a hindrance in their career development.

Despite the increased awareness and support of the LGBTQ+ population through visibility, resource centers, and ally training programs, significant challenges and obstacles remain for the LGBTQ+ community. Campuses can change their policies, procedures, and facilities to be more inclusive towards the LGBTQ+ community (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Fassinger, 1991). Today, many students have organized to form campus-wide organizations and offer educational programming (Beemyn, 2003; Dilley, 2002; Hall, 2010; Malaney et al., 1997; Mayo, 2009; McRee & Cooper, 1998; Walls et al., 2010; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). The 1990s brought more inclusive practices for LGBTQ+ students and employees, which included the opening of resource centers (Fine, 2012; Rankin; 2005; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005) and nondiscriminatory policies and practices (Githens, 2012; Rankin, 2006; Woodford et al., 2013). To further create more inclusive environments, institutions should quickly respond to anti-LGBTQ+ incidents/bias, create dialogue, offer comprehensive counseling and improve the recruitment and retention of this student population in order to create a more inclusive campus climate for LGBTQ+ students (Rankin et al., 2010). This study contributes to the understanding of how campus climates can aid or hinder a LGBTQ+ students’ career development process.

**Homosexual Identity Development**

Throughout the gay rights movement of the late 1970s, developmental models of homosexual identity development were created and validated. These models attempted to
explain how one comes to understand what it means to be an LGBQ+ individual. Typically, these models start with an individual realizing they do not conform to societal expectations and norms of possessing a heterosexual identity and end with an individual reaching identity synthesis. A central point in all homosexual identity development models is the decision for an individual to “come out.” The “coming out” phase of any homosexual identity model is by far the most important an individual can select to be open regarding their sexuality. It is also a critical point in development where individuals can offer support and encouragement. Because heterosexual individuals are born and raised in heteronormative environments, they often do not think about how they came to understand their heterosexual identity (Fassinger, 2000; Striepe & Tolman, 2003; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002). As the United States has become more diverse, understanding how a student confers their social identity has become increasingly important (Evans et al., 2010). While psychosocial, cognitive-structural, and learning style approaches and theories are all an integral part of holistic student’s identity development, social identity development is of particular importance. As Mead (1934) argued, individuals come to understand who they are and form a self-definition by embracing the attitudes of others with whom they interact. Social identity emerges from the interaction of the individual and collective (Jenkins, 1997; Stets & Burke, 2000). In a collegiate context, students are striving to find consistency between their personal identity and their social identity (ascriptions from others). Additionally, “it is a site in which students construct a sense of self that situates them in a particular social location with a set of corresponding social roles” (Kaufman, 2014, p. 37). While sexual orientation is just one aspect of a students’ social identity, it is important that researchers examine the role it plays in career development. Through the work of Vivienne Cass (1979), Anthony D’Augelli (1994), McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and
others, both stage and lifespan models of homosexual identity development were created. The following is a brief summary of well-established sexual orientation identity theories.

**Vivienne Cass.** Cass’s (1979) model of homosexuality development provided six stages of perception and behavior of LGBQ+ identity, which moves from minimal awareness to acceptance. The process of movement through these six stages is complicated and is based on the individual’s needs, desires, and behaviors. These stages include identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis (Cass, 1979). Bilodeau and Renn (2005) discussed that Cass’s model typically begins with an individual using defense strategies to block personal homosexual feelings. Cass’s model is focused on the resolution of the internal conflict of same sex feelings.

Evans et al. (2010) cite that Vivienne Cass’ (1979) model of lesbian and gay identity development was the first to remain in use over a period of time. In addition, Vivienne Cass’s model has been validated through the studies of Brady and Busse (1994), Levine (1997), and Marszalek, Cashwell, Dunn, and Heard Jones (2004). However, critics of Cass’s model, such as Kaufman and Johnson (2004) and Rust (2003) argued that her assumption that all individuals pass through the same six stages is flawed. Fassinger (1998) and Reynolds and Hanjorgiris (2000) argued that this is no longer the case. More recent literature has suggested that an integrated sense of self can be achieved without moving through a period of anger towards heterosexuals (Eliason, 1996; Rust, 2003). In addition, Cass argued that to be mentally healthy, a person must publicly identify as gay or lesbian to be considered active in the homosexual community. Morris (1997) argued that Cass’s participants were not diverse in age, race or ethnicity. Furthermore, the applicability of Cass’s model to women has been challenged in recent years as women demonstrate more variability in their identity formation (Degges-White,
Rice, & Myers, 2000). Furthermore, Cass’s sample lacks generalizability to current society as her sample was based on a gay, Eurocentric, male population (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000).

Anthony D’Augelli. One of the most widely accepted theories in LGBQ+ identity development is Anthony D’Augelli’s life span model. D’Augelli’s (1994) model argued that sexual identity development is a “social construction” shaped by one’s environment and experiences. His model discussed LBG identity development as interactive processes as opposed to the stage model developed by Vivienne Cass. These processes include exiting heterosexual identity, developing a personal LGB identity status, developing an LGB social identity, becoming an LGB offspring, developing an LGB intimacy status, and entering an LGB community (D’Augelli, 1994). Individuals are free to move fluidly through one or all the stages at any period of time and have the ability to shape their own identity. Lastly, D’Augelli (1994) argued that everyone’s developmental path is different. These include feeling different from peers, the onset of same sex attraction, questioning one’s sexuality, first same sex experiences, self-labeling, disclosure to others, and self-acceptance (Savin-Williams, 2015). In practice, D’Augelli’s theory suggested that environmental factors play a major role in the development of an LGB identity (Evans et al., 2010).

D’Augelli (1994) accepted the notion of a lifespan model of identity development, and thus believed that changes can occur over time in attitudes, feelings, and behavior. However, Clark and Caffarella (1999) argued that D’Augelli’s model does not allow for the multiple layers or intersections of identity an individual possesses. Significant research has been conducted utilizing D’Augelli’s lifespan model, including that of Savin-Williams (1995), Kahn (1991), Rhoads (1994), Evans and Broido (1999), Evans and Herriott (2004), Stevens (2004), and Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson (2005).
Ruth Fassinger. Fassinger’s (1998) model of homosexuality development argued that two parallel processes of individual development occur within individuals: one related to individual sexual identity and the other relating to group membership identity. Each of these two processes consists of a four-phase sequence of development: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization (Fassinger, 1998). The research presented by Fassinger (1998) addressed the criticism of earlier stage theory models in which cultural and contextual influences on development are taken into account. Moreover, it offers a more inclusive perspective of individuals in their sexual orientation identity formation. Fassinger’s (1998) revision of this model incorporated gay, lesbian and bisexual identity (as opposed to just the sexual orientation identity of women). Fassinger (1998) stressed the importance of recognizing that gay and lesbian individuals may be in different places with relation to their individual and group identity. Utilizing this model in the researcher’s conceptual framework allows for participants to be in various levels of outness and commitment internally and externally. For example, an individual may have made a commitment to themselves and their family members, choosing to be “out” regarding their sexual orientation. However, the same individual may engage in passing in their work environment. This model allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of sexual orientation.

Career Development

The literature provides support for the idea that students are expected to solidify occupational goals and objectives in college (Gore & Metz, 2008; Johnson, Nichols, Buboltz, & Riedesel, 2002; Super, 1990). However, a lack of readiness, knowledge about process, and options related to occupation are challenges that have been cited when exploring career development (Gati, Krausz, & Ospipow, 1996). Therefore, the need for career counseling related
to the above challenges becomes more salient on college campuses (Yazedjian, Toews, Sevin, & Purswell, 2008).

**Definition**

While there are many definitions that can be utilized to describe career development, Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey (2013) defined career development as “the lifelong psychological and behavioral processes as well as contextual shaping one’s career over the lifespan” (p.12). An important career development related task is to identify a particular career path and the related education and training that is required (Savickas & Super, 1993). In an ideal environment, college students would assess their interests and capabilities with current opportunities to determine if the potential career may be a good match. Unfortunately, some students need additional support in this area as this process may be constrained by real or imagined barriers and challenges, such as those dealing with a LGBTQ+ identity. In this case, such perceived barriers or challenges may lead college students to adjust their desired career options (Datti, 2009).

**Historical Roots**

Prior to the 1930s, terms such as vocational guidance or career guidance were often used in the literature (Herr, 2001). The rise of vocational guidance occurred during the late nineteenth century and was directly associated with a major shift from a national economy based on agriculture to industry. As a result of this shift, national concerns regarding vocational education became more prevalent. These issues included concerns regarding the appropriate level of education for children and placement of adults into an industrialized occupational structure (Herr, 2001). In addition, the public wanted information regarding the types of positions available and the necessary training to secure a job.
In 1909, Frank Parsons (considered to be the father of the vocational guidance movement) wrote his classic book *Choosing a Vocation*. Parsons felt that too many individuals’ talent was being wasted as they found themselves pigeon-holed into factory work. Parsons condemned the use of traditional learning in public school settings and suggested that book learning should be balanced with practical, industrial education (Parsons, 1909). It was through his work that researchers have come to better understand that individual people should be matched with the needs of the occupational structure (Herr, 2001). This later became known as the trait factor approach (Parsons, 1909).

In 1950, a major breakthrough occurred when Robert Hoppock, President of the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA), observed that the traditional view of vocational guidance was “crumbling” (Hoppock, 1950). Instead of individuals being matched with careers based on their personality, researchers began to explore the role of self in the process of career selection. Furthermore, organizations began to believe that knowledge and skills could be taught to employees aspiring into certain career fields. In 1951, following Hoppock’s observation, Donald Super recommended that the 1937 definition of vocational guidance be rewritten. The 1937 definition stated that vocational guidance was “the process of assisting the individual to choose an occupation, prepare for it, enter upon it, and progress in it” (Super, 1951, p. 92). The adapted definition adopted by the NVGA created by Super stated it was the “process of helping a person to develop and accept an integrated and adequate picture of him/herself and of his/her role in the world of work” (Super, 1951, p. 92). This definition shifted the focus away from the practice of choosing a vocation for an individual to the chooser selecting their vacation based on their own characteristics and training. In the process, it diminished the emphasis on matching an individual to a job. Super (1990) was able to reinvent career development as a holistic process
while emphasizing a life span approach to career development. Super (1990) suggested that individuals progress through a number of career related tasks throughout the lifespan which include growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Super’s (1990) definition helped to articulate the interaction of career development and personal development, how an individual processes meaning in their work, and the elements related to career maturity.

Along with the changing definition of career development and support for the NVGA, alternative theories of career development began to be created. The career theories of Holland (1966), Bandura (1986), and Super (1969, 1980, 1990) explored career behavior, occupational interests, behavioral styles and personality types. Building on the foundation of Parson’s trait approach, John Holland (1977) introduced a theory of careers and vocational choice based upon personality types. His basic premise was that one’s occupational preference was in a sense a veiled expression of underlying character. He labeled these six types as Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Holland’s research demonstrated that individuals flourish in career environments where congruence is achieved between personality and environment (Holland, 1997). While Holland’s types provided a mechanism to better understand work environments, it provided little insight into how one develops a specific type. In addition to Holland’s work, Albert Bandura’s (1986) work on social cognitive theory indicated that individuals exercise control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. He proposed that the higher self-efficacy an individual possesses, the more inclined he/she will be to take on a specific task. Therefore, when applied to career development, individuals would be drawn to majors and careers in which they feel they would have a high chance of success. Finally, Donald Super’s (1969, 1980, 1990) career development theory is perhaps the most widely known lifespan model of career development. Super suggested that vocational
development is the process of developing a self-concept. As the self-concept becomes more concrete and realistic throughout adolescence and into adulthood, so does one’s vocational choice. Super (1990) argued that people choose occupations that permit them to express their self-concepts. This ties in to the Social Cognitive Career Theory utilized as the conceptual framework in this study. Ultimately, these career theories led to a wide variety of assessment instruments including the Self-Directed Search, the Vocational Preference Inventory, and the Values Inventory (Whitfield, Feller, & Wood, 2013).

University career services have been evolving since their inception (See Figure 1). According to Teal & Herrick (1962), career services offices were often known as career placement offices. Individuals at these offices were responsible for the placement of college graduates in professional positions. Success was often measured in the amount of college graduate placements in a professional position. These offices were created to help meet the demand for a larger workforce post-WWI. However, due to the influx of students, faculty had to move away from this role thus creating a more professionalized profession staffed by full time professionals (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). The expansion of services towards career development, consultation, and planning followed soon after. Post WWII, a booming economy and the return of a high number of war veterans saw a greater employer demand for college graduates. Utilizing Parson’s trait and factor approach, career service units sought to match individual interests and skills with a specific job (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). In the 1970s, as higher education moved towards a more developmental and self-actualization approach, a slowing economy and increased competitiveness among employers changed the landscape of career services once again (Casella, 1990; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). This paradigm shift forced students to take ownership of their career development, which allowed career counselors
to step back into their role as guidance counselors (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). During this era, success was often measured by the number of appointments and/or attendees at workshops. The next shift occurred in the 1990s, when the advent of the internet increased competition among candidates as well as the availability of internship and job postings. This era allowed career service units to build relationships with employers and facilitate relationships between employers and students (Dey & Real, 2010). The downturn of the economy in 2008 caused career service offices to focus on matching employers with students once again with a focus on internships and experiential learning. As such, senior administrative leaders began to understand the link that exists between career development and the economic norms of a given time period and in the recruitment and retention of its students (Ceperley, 2013).

**Figure 1: Evolution of Career Services in Higher Education (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014)**

**Career Services on Campus**

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was founded in 1979 as a consortium comprised of over 43 organizations and 100,000 professionals to “promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015). CAS
created a set of 34 standards to help meet the needs of various functional areas in student affairs. These standards help guide today’s educational leaders in program development, implementation, and assessment of core functional areas in student affairs. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education state that career service units must address career development and help to prepare students to compete in a global economy. CAS also provided specific components, which must be present in a career service unit. These components include opportunities for students to explore career options, employer servicing, experiential learning, and consultations (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015).

**Structure**

Over the past thirty years, career service offices have transitioned from job placement functions to a more comprehensive unit that offers various programs and services that are staffed by full time professionals (Vinson, Reardon, & Bertoch, 2014). While there are both centralized and decentralized models of career service centers found nationwide, the National Association of Colleges & Employers (NACE) found that 87% of career service units operated under a centralized model. In addition, NACE found that 64% of career services offices reported to the division of student affairs while 24% reported to academic affairs (2011, January). Most career centers typically employ one director, one or more associate and assistant directors, career counselors, and clerical staff. Larger career centers may staff employer relations coordinators, experiential education coordinators, career information specialists, technology managers, and marketing coordinators (NACE, 2011, January). Most directors, associate directors, assistant directors, and career counselors hold master’s degrees (NACE, 2010, January).
Purpose

Today, career service offices provide four core services: career counseling/advising, instructional workshops, job and internship opportunities and networking session with alumni (Schaub, 2012). According to Garis (2014), the following services are considered an integral part of any career service unit:

- Assessment and computer guidance
- Career education and outreach programming
- Career fairs
- Career information
- Career planning classes for credit
- Experiential education and internships
- Individual career counseling
- Job listing and resume review
- On campus interviewing

The desired outcome of these services is to assist students in job placement post-graduation. According to Schaub (2012), students’ demand for career assistance and employers’ expectations has called on career service units to incorporate more industry and academic based advising/preparation into their services. For this reason, career services staff must build relationships with outside constituents as well as coordinate events, such as job fairs, to help connect students with available opportunities (Schaub, 2012). One of the main roles of career counselors is to help students explore their career interests, values and skills (Schaub, 2012). During career counseling, several vocational approaches can be taken, including trait-factor (Holland, 1997), developmental (Super, 1980), social learning (Krumboltz, 1979), and social cognitive (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). For example, a career counselor utilizing social cognitive career theory to help a student determine if a business-related major is the right fit would include understanding why the student has selected such a major as well as prior
experiences (inputs), the ability for that student to perform well (self-efficacy), and the availability of jobs post-graduation (outcome expectations).

The Future of Career Services

According to 4,150 college student responses in the College Career Center Study conducted by Millennial Branding (2014), 57% of respondents think that their career center is never or rarely useful in assisting them in figuring out a career path. In addition, 30% of respondents indicated that their career center never or rarely provided regular career related events. Findings from the report indicated that 46% of students stated they would like to see more career related workshop and classes. In addition, 49% of respondents wanted to learn more professional skills to transition to the workplace. However, 64% indicated that it’s easy or very easy to meet with a career counselor. Conversely, results from the 2015-2016 benchmark survey for colleges and universities conducted by the NACE (2015) found that out of 842 career service centers, nearly all offered career counseling, career workshops, assistance with internship and job placement, career fairs and career libraries. The report also found that communication skills, critical thinking, and professionalism were among the key successful skills needed within today’s workforce. There appears to be a significant disconnect between the services career service units are providing and the needs of today’s college students. Results from this study indicate a need to learn more about the experience of LGBQ+ college student’s career development.

As career service units become increasingly global and virtual in nature, they must adapt to the changing needs of students (Kenyon & Rowan-Kenyon, 2014; Schaub, 2012). According to Stier (2003) students graduating with an undergraduate degree need to possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to participate in a global workforce. Driven by increased pressure and
demand for accountability, many universities have begun the process of reinventing their career services unit (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Instead of being transactional, career services units are expected to reach out and engage the study body population. These things include creating customizable models that are focused on personal and professional development. Dey and Cruzvergara (2014) stated that the assessment focus will continue to be about “destinations and lifelong professional outcomes” (p. 8). They suggested that this paradigm shift will require career counselors to upgrade their skills and knowledge regarding today’s student. In this era, students should be able to engage in meaningful, experiential learning opportunities, connect with mentors, and network with professionals in their field.

**Social Cognitive Career Theory**

One of the most accepted and validated models to understand career interests and goals is Lent et al.’s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory (Gore & Leuwerke, 2000; Smith & Fouad, 1999; Swanson & Gore, 2000). As described in the conceptual framework, SCCT provides a framework for understanding the complex interactions between career attachment, barriers, social support, academic self-efficacy, and career decision efficacy. Lent et al. (1994, 2000) developed a theoretical framework that attempted to explain the dynamic processes through which career and academic interests develop, how career choices are made, and how performance outcomes can be achieved. Anchored in the work of Albert Bandura (1986), this theoretical framework highlights the importance of an individual’s beliefs and thoughts in fostering motivation in career development. Due to the multiple factors this theoretical framework considers, researchers have continued to utilize SCCT and the influence of sociocultural context in the career development process (Lent et al., 1994, 2002).
This theory utilizes social cognitive constructs to conceptualize three components of career development: choice, interests, and performance. Morrow et al. (1996) argued that individuals facing marginalization and oppression, such as those in the LGBQ+ community, have unique developmental needs as they negotiate identities that do not follow heteronormative expectations. This career theory argues that the more self-efficacy an individual possesses in regard to performing a task related to that career, the more likely they will pursue that career option (Russon & Schmidt, 2014). In their model, Lent et al. (1994) described three sources of influence on self-efficacy and outcome expectations. The first is experimental sources, which include personal accomplishments, learning, and interest in a particular field. The second factor includes background characteristics, such as gender, race and sexual orientation. The third factor is contextual influences, which include potential supports and barriers in a particular field. Utilizing the social cognitive career theory allows the researcher to examine the interconnectedness of these factors as well as understand and examine the relationship between LGBQ+ students’ experiences with career development and their choices to enter a particular field of study. The social cognitive career theory considers the personal, social, and cultural context that surrounds an individuals’ career development, which is particularly relevant to marginalized groups such as the LGBQ+ community.

According to Conklin, Dahling, and Garcia (2016), affective commitment to an academic major happens when a student feels a sense of pride, identity and enthusiasm within a field of study. This is an important input within Lent et al. (1994) social cognitive career theory model. Lent and Brown’s (2000) study on career satisfaction proposed that affective states and experiences are important individual inputs that can shape or influence an individual’s self-efficacy, career choice, and expectations. Therefore, students with high affective commitment to
a particular major will also report a higher level of career decision self-efficacy (Conklin et al., 2016). In addition, research by Wessel, Ryan, and Oswald (2008) affirmed that students who have strong emotional ties with their field of study are more likely to develop confidence and persist to degree completion. However, it should be noted that these outcomes can be determined by one’s perceived abilities, demand, and fit within the academic major. Therefore, a student’s sexual orientation may play an important role in how he/she perceives themselves in a particular career path (Ragins, 2004). Possessing a marginalized sexual orientation may impact an individual’s self-efficacy, performance, and outcome expectations as they face additional stressors such as homophobia, discrimination, or barriers in a potential career field (Lent et al., 2000).

Sociologists and educators have examined how social factors (such as race, culture, sexual orientation) affect self-efficacy, beliefs, and outcomes help to determine career development and career pathways (Lent et al., 2008; Thompson, Plaufcan, & Williams, 2007). For example, through gender role socialization, men and women may pursue either traditional or nontraditional types of careers. Furthermore, personality characteristics have been linked to career environments (Holland, 1997). These background contextual factors are variables that help to shape an individuals’ career interests (Lent et al., 2000). These contextual factors may serve as a support or barrier as a student navigates his/her career development. For example, a homophobic occupational environment could be seen as a perceived barrier that would ultimately diminish the likelihood that an individual would develop occupational interests in that area (Carter & Cook, 1992; Helms & Piper, 1994).

Social cognitive career theory takes into consideration the dynamic interaction between person, behavior, and environment. This theory recognizes the “ability of individuals to be
active within their environments while considering the impact of environmental supports and barriers to individuals’ behaviors and beliefs” (Lyons et al., 2010, p. 506). For LGBQ+ individuals, the awareness of these supports and barriers may be more evident as they struggle with a marginalized identity. In SSCT, contextual influences are specifically identified as factors that influence learning experiences, goals and performance. While self-identity is an important part of the career development process, the theory takes into account behaviors, beliefs and environments in the decision-making process of determining a future career. Therefore, SCCT posits that career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations should be considered in designing career counseling models, assessment and interventions specifically among marginalized populations.

**Known Challenges to Successful Career Development of Marginalized Populations**

Beyond creating a welcoming and accepting working environment, employers have a lot to gain from maintaining diverse teams of employees. If the United States wishes to remain globally competitive, it needs to increase the number and diversity of underrepresented students and faculty (National Science Foundation, 2007). According to Cook, Heppner, & O’Brien (2002), most career development theories were developed with white, able-bodied, heterosexual and ethnically homogenous men. Researchers exploring the career development of marginalized populations such as women and people of color have noted the strong influence of perceived opportunities and barriers in the formulation of their career goals (Arbona, 1990; Astin, 1984; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Coogan & Chen, 2007; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Perceived barriers may cause individuals to underestimate their abilities and overlook career options (Novakovic & Gnilka, 2015). McWhirter (1997) noted that the larger social context of racism, sexism, and classism plays a factor in the career development of these individuals. For example,
women and ethnic minorities “are expected to encounter more career barriers than men and White students, whereas Black women perceived significantly greater barriers than White women” (Novakovic & Gnilka, 2015, p. 364).

**Gender**

Stewart, Bing, Gruys, and Helford (2007) have cited an increase in the number of women entering professional careers over the past several decades. However, Swanson and Tokar (1991a, 1991b) found that while perceived barriers to career development among male and female college students were closely related, specific gender differences existed. For example, results indicated that female respondents perceived discrimination and childrearing as greater barriers than men did. Women often had to utilize maternity leave to engage in childrearing while being viewed as the primary caregiver for their family (Coogan & Chen, 2007). As such, they are socialized from an early age to defer career related activities to their significant other. A study conducted by Whiston and Keller (2004) found that the family plays a significant role in the career development of women, providing support and influencing career decision making. In addition, a lack of mentorship (Kittrell, 1998; Krakauer & Chen, 2003) and sexual harassment (O’Connell & Korabik, 2000) are two inequities that exist in employment specifically for females. McWhirter (1997), found that women experienced sexual harassment in the workplace at a higher rate than their male counterparts. Therefore, theories of career development for women need to consider these added complexities. Coogan and Chen (2007) concluded that helping women to deal with gender socialization, integrating and balance life roles, and enhancing their self-concept are beneficial tools for career counselors to aid in the career development of women.
People of Color

A small number of studies have also investigated career barriers among college students of color. Although racial/ethnic minorities and White individuals do not differ in career development interests or aspirations (Arbona & Novy, 1991), youth of color tend to have lower occupational expectations and fewer career choices (Arbona, 1990; Weinstein, Madison, & Kuklinski, 1995). For example, Burlew and Johnson (1992) found that African-American women in nontraditional careers identified racial and gender discrimination, limited opportunities, and difficulty finding methods as barriers in their career development. In addition, research by Falconer and Hays (2006) suggested that peer groups, family, and strong beliefs in self-efficacy were among the major factors that aided in African American career development. Zunker (1994) cited that individuals from different races and ethnicities have limited knowledge of career interests, values, and skills because they have a limited number of opportunities to obtain work experiences. Finally, racial/ethnic minorities are cited as facing incidents of racism and discrimination within the workplace (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). Therefore, applying Eurocentric frameworks of career development to populations whose values and culture do not coincide with the dominant culture is ethnocentric (Leong & Hartung, 2000). Therefore, new theories and models are needed to account for ethnic and racial identities.

Sexual Orientation

The results of a study conducted by Schneider and Dimito (2010) cited that individuals who identify as part of a sexual minority believe that sexual orientation has an impact on academic and career choices. In their study of the academic and career choices of 119 LGBT students, respondents who reported that their sexual orientation influenced their choices a great deal indicated that the influences were both positive and negative. Findings from several studies
indicate there are many barriers to effective career development among LGBQ+ individuals, including social stigmas (Bosson, Weaver, & Prewitt-Frelino, 2012; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010), open discrimination (Lyons et al., 2010), homophobia (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Sailer, Korschgen, & Lokken, 1994; Smith & Ingram, 2004) and a lack of mentors (Mobley & Slaney, 1996; Morrow, 1997; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

**Social stigma.** Individuals with concealable stigmatized identities, such as sexual minorities, often face ongoing, potentially stressful decisions about whether to disclose or conceal their marginalized status (Bosson, Weaver, & Prewitt-Frelino, 2012; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). This stigma is attached to any non-heterosexual behavior. This contrasts with other identities that are less concealable during academic and career related decision making, such as race, ethnicity, or age. As such, disclosure of ones LGB status may further ostracize the person within the community or organization in which the individual is employed. This stigmatization occurs due to a lack of acceptance and education in a highly heteronormative environment. Therefore, some individuals maintain one identity at home and another at work (Pope et al., 2004).

Gottfredson (1981, 2005) proposed that most theories of career development are interested in the “goodness of fit” between the characteristics of the individual and the work environment. In addition, Gottfredson (1981) proposed that LGB individuals must determine whether their sexual orientation will play a role in a work environment, where they may otherwise be a good fit. For example, does the social stigma of a homosexual female police officer turn an individual away from that particular specific career path even if all other factors match?
Environmental influences. The past several decades have seen a shift in demographics of students who are attending institutions of higher education (Rankin, 2005). Higher education is a culture encompassing a multiplicity of sub-cultures – each with its own literacy or discourse. Over the past twenty-five years, research has paid particular attention to underrepresented student’s development and social identities, which include gender (Gilligan, 1982), race (Cross, 1971), and sexual orientation (Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998). In more recent years, individuals of differing sexual orientations and gender identities have become more widely visible and accepted (Datti, 2009). Unfortunately, there are few statistics on the number of LGBT students in educational arenas due to the invisible nature of this identity. However, in a review of population-based surveys conducted between 2005 and 2009 in the United States, Gates (2015) found that estimates of the prevalence of LGBT individuals among adults ranged from 1.7 percent to 5.6 percent in the United States. As individuals of differing sexual orientations and gender identities become more widely viewed and accepted, they are more likely to “come out” in educational institutions (Datti, 2009).

Sue Frank (2003) suggested that “a welcoming and inclusive environment is grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue and evidenced by a pattern of social interaction” (p. 38). While educational institutions recognize that the LGB population in their schools continue to grow, research indicates that acts of discrimination, homophobia and bullying continue at high rates (Rankin, 2005, 2006; Mobley & Dimito, 2006; Stayhorne et al., 2015). These findings are troublesome as students who are victims of these acts have a higher tendency to commit truancy, achieve lower GPAs, or even commit suicide (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2003). In addition, research suggests that LGBQ+ students face substantially more acts of physical intimidation and violence (D’Augelli, 1992; Dilley, 2002). According to Westefeld,
Maples, and Buford (2001), homophobic campus environments can cause gay and lesbian students to self-report feelings of depression and loneliness compared to their heterosexual counterparts. This may detract them from pursuing a particular career path if LGBTQ+ students are fearful homophobia may continue to exist in the workforce. Chung (2011) cited that even anticipated discrimination can play a significant role in the decision about identity disclosure and/or career path.

Biseschke, Eberz, and Wilson (2000) found that college campuses have been difficult environments for LGBTQ+ students. Adding to the various discriminatory bills passed in states such as Mississippi, Indiana, and North Carolina, LGBTQ+ students continue to encounter challenges on Southern college campuses. In fact, three in ten LGBT adults live in the American South (King & Fisher-Borne, 2014). Their report, Out in the South (2014) cited that twelve Southern states have no anti-bullying protections for LGBT students with six of those states having enacted anti-LGBT laws and regulations. Of the over 2,000 postsecondary education institutions in the United States, fewer than 150 offices are devoted to LGBT services. Fewer than 25 of them are in the American South (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, nd). According to Sanlo (2004), the purpose of a LGBT center is to create and define a space that offers programs and services to the social and emotional needs of LGBTQ+ students. If LGBTQ+ students are not receiving these services, it may be difficult for them to personally develop in the university environment. Researchers such as Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, and Robinson-Keilig, (2004) and Rankin (1998, 2004) found that when comparing LGBT students to heterosexual students, LGBT students generally perceive campus climate as less welcoming and find themselves to be targets of harassment and discrimination. In Rankin’s (2005) national study of campus climates for sexual minorities, 36% of 1,669 LGBT
undergraduate students in her sample cited that they had experienced harassment within the past year.

**Discrimination and homophobia on college campuses.** Rhoads (1997) suggested that most students “come out” during their college years. D’Augelli (1992) believed that the “focus on campus climate for lesbian and gay students is particularly important because their personal identities are in their formative stages during their college years” (p. 383). The more out a student becomes, the more likely they are to face harassment and homophobia. In a recent survey of heterosexual college students, Massey (2009) found that discrimination based on sexual orientation remains a socially sanctioned form of prejudice which includes devaluing the gay and lesbian equality movement and aversion to members of the LGBQ+ community. In addition, in a landmark study conducted in 2010 by Campus Pride, over 5,000 students, faculty members, staff members, and administrators who identified as LGBT reported on their experiences as a member of a collegiate community. Although the settings of college campuses have improved for these populations over the years, findings from this report suggested that there is much room for improvement (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). LGB individuals are cited as the least accepted group when compared with other underserved populations and are likely to indicate negative campus climates based on sexual identities (Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010). The findings from these studies are notable because Tomlinson and Fassinger (2003) found that campus climate was the strongest predictor of both vocational purpose and psychological vocational development. Discrimination can therefore impede student’s academic, social, personal and professional development while attending an institution of higher education (Datti, 2009; Rhoads, 1997).
Discrimination and homophobia in the workplace. Given the prevalence of stereotypes and negative attitudes toward homosexuality and a culture of heteronormativity in the workplace, it is not surprising that a great deal of prejudice and discrimination has been documented (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Massey, 2009; Smith & Ingram, 2004). Despite increasing legal protections from work discrimination, many LGBT persons across the world still suffer from discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Chung, Chang, & Rose, 2015). Identification of hostile/homophobic work environments may also be demonstrated through unfair treatment, lack of promotions and protections, and observing/hearing individuals make anti-gay remarks (King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010). The presence of discrimination in a work environment greatly reduces the chances of a LGBTQ+ individual entering a particular career path (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012). In fact, between 25-66% of LGB employees reported discrimination at work related to their sexual orientation (Lyons et al., 2010). Oftentimes, LGB individuals face isolation, alienation, and violence in their work environments (Datti, 2009; Gottfredson, 1981; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Morrow, 1997; Sailer et al. 1994). In addition, many LGBTQ+ individuals are subject to homophobic policies and practices that include lack of protections, health care benefits and accessibility of promotions. Giuffre, Dellinger, and Williams (2008) found that persisting difficulties existed in stereotyping, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment.

In addition, Sailer, Korschgen, and Lokken (1994) cited that the presence of homophobia (both on a college campus and in a work environment) can hinder an LGB student’s career development. Homophobia can be defined as the irrational fear of an LGB individual (Chase & Ressler, 2009). Fear and ridicule often prevent students from talking about being an LGB
individual and career counselors continue to remain silent on the issue because they are not sure how to address it (Sailer et al., 1994). In their 1994 article, one student articulates, “I look back at my undergraduate experience in education, and I wonder if I chose not to teach high school as a result of never being told it was OK to be gay and be a teacher. The messages I perceived from my campus environment were that it is not OK” (p.42). As one can surmise, the decision to disclose sexual orientation identity status may be a challenge both personally and professionally.

It is important to note that the mere perception of discrimination may hinder a LGBQ+ individual’s ability to create both a personal and career identity. Minority stress theory posits that a disproportionate level of stress related to marginalized status is linked to psychological distress (Meyer, 2003). Specific to the LGBQ+ population, minority stress theory “outlines experiences of discrimination, expectations of stigma, internalized heterosexism, and concealment of sexual minority identity as four minority stressors that can promote psychological distress” (Velez, Moradi, Brewster, 2012, p. 532). Depression, health problems, psychological distress, and job dissatisfaction are just a few mechanisms in which this distress can manifest itself (Smith & Ingram, 2004). As such, individuals with marginalized social identities are subjected to chronic levels of stress because of their stigmatized or minority status (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Therefore, any discussion or act of discrimination and/or homophobia in a particular context (whether that be at the local, state, and/or federal level) regarding LGBQ+ individuals may cause a heightened level of stress. For example, discussions or policy/law changes at the state level might influence students’ belief and assumptions that discrimination exists at all levels, in all organizations, across the United States (when that may or may not be true). As posited in minority stress theory, sexual minorities perceived experiences of heterosexism discrimination, expectations of stigma, and internalized heterosexism in the
workforce are linked with negative psychological outcomes (Brewster & Moradi, 2010; Lewis et al., 2003; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). In a career related context, any experience of any sort of discrimination may cause anxiety and job dissatisfaction (Smith & Ingram, 2004).

**Mentors.** One key aspect of learning that may be an effective approach for career development is the concept of mentoring (Gong, Chen, & Yang, 2014). As of 2014, more than 70% of Fortune 500 companies used mentoring to help attract, develop, and retain employees (Kovnatska, 2014). Mentoring is defined as the relationship between an experienced senior employee and a less experienced one (Kram, 1985). Mentoring relationships are reciprocal (Ambrosetti, 2014), take place over time, and involve interaction (Haggard, 2012). Both formal and informal mentoring may exist in organizations. Informal mentoring develops naturally and is maintained voluntarily whereas formal mentoring develops within the organization and has a more formal structure (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Mentoring systems can help individuals succeed in their professional field by improving productivity and helping to learn new skills (Marks, Alonso, Royer, & Kantrowitz, 2001). Fisher (1994) found that a mentoring relationship had a positive effect on job performance, such as raising employee morale and improving work quality. Finally, Ragins and Cornewell (2001) found that individuals are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation status should they perceive they have supportive colleagues, mentors, and friends.

Research suggests that role models can ease the transition into the workforce by aiding in the career development of all students. As indicated by Mobley and Slaney (1996), Morrow (1997), and Schmidt and Nilsson (2006), there are too few role models in various careers who are open about their LGB identities. As students begin to explore occupations, they often become discouraged when they do not see opportunities that are available to them. Having a
mentor in a particular field of study provides support and advocacy. Morrow (1997) stated that organizations are often reluctant to “intervene or make changes because of their own concerns about job security, lack of administrative support, fear of censure by colleagues, ignorance about the importance of these interventions, or their own homophobia” (p. 6).

**Conclusion**

The gay rights movement, along with educational and psychosocial research, has helped to foster a positive shift in the public opinion of LGBQ+ individuals. However, many obstacles and challenges still exist today, particularly in regard to career development of individuals who possess a marginalized sexual orientation. The literature outlined above establishes the presence of LGBQ+ individuals both in collegiate contexts and employment settings, describes their identity formation, and discusses barriers to their success. This study seeks to expand the knowledge of LGBQ+ students in their career development.

**Conceptual Framework**

Merriam (2009) argued that the conceptual framework affects every aspect of the study, from determining how to frame the problem and purpose to how data is collected. The researcher used Lent et al.’s (1994) social cognitive career theory (Swanson & Gore, 2000) and Fassinger’s (1998) theoretical framework on the coming out processes as the basis for this study. The researcher utilized these frameworks to help explain each student’s understanding and experience of their career development based in the context of their environment.


SCCT has been applied to a number of marginalized groups to facilitate understanding of the unique career barriers encountered by these individuals (Au, 2008; Corrigan, 2008; Dickinson, 2008; Flores, Navarro, & DeWitz, 2008; Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Gushue & Whitson,
suggested the utility of this theory for lesbian and gay individuals. Career development can be described as a lifelong process in which an individual makes intentional choices from among the many occupations available in society (Hiester, Nordstrom & Swenson, 2009). Each person undergoing this process can be influenced by a large number of factors, including friends, personal values, and societal context. During this period, college students’ interests crystalize through participation in course work and employment (Hiester et al., 2009).

Lent et al.’s (1994) SCCT is one of the first models that accounts for the personal, environmental, and situational factors that correlate to help inform an individual’s career decisions. In addition, it highlights an individual’s personal attributes that may affect career outcomes (such as sexual orientation). SCCT focuses on several cognitive variables (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals), and on how these variables interact with other aspects of the person (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) and their environment to help shape the course of career development. This theory suggests that career decisions are based on intentional, calculated decisions as opposed to random decision making processes. It also considers the complex identity of a person operating within its environment. Students often hold internships, jobs, and co-operative educational opportunities while they are undergoing a myriad of identity development processes. The researcher has analyzed how sexual orientation impacts a decision to pursue a selected major. The more salient sexual orientation becomes, that is, the more important it is to the individual and the more it guides behavioral outputs, the greater the motivation to ensure that inputs from the environment confirm the identity (Lent et al., 1994). As students make meaning of their sexual orientation, they begin to explore potential careers that will be accepting of this identity.
Lent et al.’s (1994) social cognitive career theory suggests that an individual’s career choice can be influenced by their belief system, which can be refined through four major sources. These sources include personal performance accomplishments, social persuasion, learning, and physiological states. Throughout an individual’s career development, there is a focus on the way self-efficacy, ability, expectations, and goals relate to the person, context, and learning experiences. Lent et al. (1994) also suggested that bringing together conceptually related constructs, such as self-concept, satisfaction, and interest would help explain the process of career choice. This model focuses on how career and academic interests develop over time, career choices are made, and performance is achieved. Furthermore, SCCT postulates that personal inputs (such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) and contextual background factors directly affect learning experiences, which in turn affect self-efficacy leading to actions, interests and goals of a potential career (refer to Figure 2). This model, anchored in social cognitive theory, highlights the importance of the individual in fostering their motivation and career guiding behavior (Lent et al., 1994).

Lent et al. (1994) noted that an individual’s self-efficacy and outcome expectations are significant predictors of academic and career behaviors. The researchers described self-efficacy as people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and implement courses of actions that are required to attain certain performances (Lent et al., 1994). Therefore, if a student has a strong self-efficacy in a particular career interest, they are more likely to select a major that aligns with that particular career choice. High levels of self-efficacy can result from prolonged engagement with previous employment opportunities, internships or interactions with those that work in a particular career field. However, if disclosure of sexual orientation temporarily decreases self-esteem, career self-efficacy may be compromised (Rheineck, 2005). Outcome expectations may
address the supposed consequences of taking a particular course of action (Lent et al., 1994).

Bandura (1986) proposed three categories of outcome expectations: physical (monetary), social (approval or disapproval by peers), and self-evaluative (feelings of satisfaction). Ultimately, the relationships between self-efficacy and outcome expectations impact one another.

Figure 2: Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994)

Identity

As a researcher who studies college student development, it is important to comprehend the importance of identity development among college students. As students enter the collegiate context, they typically grapple with questions of sex, race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and religion (Evans et al., 2010) Many of these identities are conferred in college as students come to understand their social identities and how these identities affect other aspects of their lives, such as career development (Abes et. al., 2007). Anchored in the work of Erik Erikson, inquiry into how individuals come to know and understand their sense of self and their relationships with others underpins much of student development theory (Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012).
The constructivist view of sexual orientation identity development argues that sexual orientation is fluid and can change over time in response to context and interpersonal experiences (Broido, 2000; Brown, 1995; Kitzinger, 1995). In the early 1970s, the focus shifted from the thought process of same-sex attraction as a mental illness to the development of a gay or lesbian identity. Theorists such as Klein (1990) argued that sexual orientation was composed of much more than same sex sexual behavior between two individuals of the same sex. Other factors, such as emotional and social preference, lifestyle, and behaviors must be considered to provide a complete picture of sexual identity (Klein, 1990). Later theorists, such as Vivienne Cass (1979), Anthony D’Augelli (1994), and Ruth Fassinger (1996), sought to provide models of sexual orientation identity development that were focused on both sociological and psychological models. Ruth Fassinger’s (1998) homosexuality development model takes into account both cultural and contextual influences, thus providing the researcher with the best theoretical underpinnings for this study. Viewing sexual orientation identity not solely as an independent event that occurs one time within an individual but rather as a process that can change and develop based on salience creates a more complex model.

**Ruth Fassinger’s homosexuality development model.** Fassinger’s (1998) model examines sexual orientation identity development from both a personal and group perspective. In addition, her model considers cultural and contextual factors that earlier models, such as Vivienne Cass (1979) and Anthony D’Augelli (1994) did not. The researcher has selected this model as one hypothesizes LGB students make decisions on their career based not only on their perceptions of themselves as a member of the homosexual community but also from the social cues they receive from family, friends, and the media.
Fassinger’s (1998) theory of gay and lesbian identity development serves two purposes in the building of the proposed study’s conceptual framework. First, it offers an explanation of LGB identity development. Most students become aware of their differing sexuality in college as they are given the freedom to explore and self-author their own life (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Fassinger, 1998). This comes in contrast to their heterosexual counterparts, who often do not consider their sexuality as society operates in heteronormative contexts. In addition, this study focuses solely on the LGB student population. To understand how a student’s career development may be impacted by sexual orientation, the researcher must first understand the developmental stages an LGB individual progresses through. Without a framework to understand how an individual arrives at acceptance with their sexuality, the results of the proposed study may be meaningless.

Second, this theoretical model allows the researcher to explore sexual orientation identity development from both an individual and group prospective. This involves internal awareness of acceptance of being an LGB individual while the other explores what it means to be LGB in mainstream society. Each of these processes consist of a four-phase order of development: awareness, exploration/commitment, and internalization. Fassinger’s (1998) model allows for an individual to be in different phases of development with each of the two processes, and that development in one branch could influence development in the other (refer to Table 1.2 for a more detailed explanation of these processes).

**Awareness.** The awareness phase involves a recognition that the individual feels different desires and attraction than dictated by heterosexual society (Fassinger, 1998). Oftentimes, this includes emotional, physical, or sexual feelings towards members of the same sex. In addition, growing awareness of sexual feelings are often at odds with powerful societal
heteronormative expectations. Awareness is most likely to cause feelings of confusion for LGB individuals.

**Exploration.** The second phase of Fassinger’s (1998) model of homosexual identity development is the exploration phase. It consists of conscious, intentional evaluation of the issues originating during the awareness phase. During this phase, an active search for information regarding the LGB community is conducted. However, such knowledge may not be entirely relevant to oneself, given that individuals may not consider themselves to really be LGB (Fassinger, 1998). Fassinger (1998) stated that during this stage, individuals’ assessment of attitudes toward being LGB may be highly convoluted and emotionally difficult.

**Deepening Commitment.** The Fassinger (1998) model describes the commitment phase as one in which LGB individuals feel that involvement with a same sex partner is desirable. Gradually, the individual desires intimacy and fulfillment over the emotional obstacles that have been erected by a history of heterosexist and homosexual attitudes common to culture (Fassinger, 1998). The process of developing an LGB identity involves the creation of a relatively coherent understanding of one’s thoughts, feelings and desires. The organization function of identity also affects decisions and goals having to do with interacting with others. This is especially important when considering career decisions. This may take the form of discussions with LGB individuals, attending social events, or sexual interaction with a person of the same sex.

**Internalization.** Finally, Fassinger (1998) described the fourth phase of homosexual identity development as internalization. This refers to the process of increasingly integrating more of one’s desire and love of members of the same sex. The result is a growing sense that most aspects of one’s life are related.
Table 2.1: McCarn and Fassinger’s Model of Homosexual Identity Development (McCarn & Fassinger, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1: Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Has an awareness of feelings of being different</td>
<td>Becomes aware of the existence of difference sexual orientations in people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2: Exploration</strong></td>
<td>Begins to explore strong feelings for same sex people</td>
<td>Explore their position regarding gay people as a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 3: Deepening Commitment</strong></td>
<td>Feels a deepening commitment to self-knowledge, self-fulfillment, and crystallization of choices about sexuality.</td>
<td>Becomes committed to personal involvement with particular group, recognizes oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 4: Internalization</strong></td>
<td>Synthesizes love for same sex people and sexual choices</td>
<td>Identifies as part of the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of this study, the researcher is able to articulate what factors influence both the individual and group identity development. As a result, the researcher is able to comprehend how stereotypes and perceptions are interwoven in the sexual orientation and career development of LGB students. For example, a student’s career development may be influenced by how they are viewed within the workplace as a member of the LGB community. By understanding the process of how an individual comes to synthesis and integrate their sexual orientation into their holistic selves, the researcher is able to offer insights into this unique student population.

**Interconnected Nature of Conceptual Framework**

As complex human beings, identity formation does not occur as a single developmental task. Components of one’s identity could include a sense of self, uniqueness, or sense of affiliation. Individuals gain a sense of social identity by the various groups they associate and operate within. Together, these two identities lead to a self-concept, which is the sum of
knowledge and understanding of him or herself. These processes do not occur in a linear fashion and are often the result of the interaction between an individual and their environment.

The construction of this conceptual framework is further intertwined by the simultaneous developmental tasks a student goes through during the collegiate years. Mobley and Slaney (1996) suggested that LGB individuals experience greater career indecision and confusion than heterosexual individuals. The authors also argue that the college years are a challenging time as students are exploring their sexual orientation concurrently with academic and career developmental tasks. As such, it is necessary for the researcher to explore both sexual orientation and career development related models in relation to this study (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

Currently, no career developmental models exist that take into account an individual’s sexual orientation in the decision to pursue a particular career (Chung, 1995; Morrow, 1996; Pope, 1995). By utilizing the SCCT, the researcher has been able to discover if sexual orientation (a personal attribute) plays a key role in the career decision making process among college students. In addition, the researcher utilized Fassinger’s (1998) model of LGB identity formation to determine if students encounter more or less barriers in choosing a career based on current positioning in her developmental model. Dealing with the stresses of revealing one’s sexual identity to a world in which it may be perceived unfavorably often means putting on hold other self-actualization activities such as career exploration.

Currently, there is a lack of research regarding the career development of LGBQ+ students (Datti, 2009; Degges et al., 2002; Chung, 1995; Morrow, 1997; Schneider & Dimito, 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of career development among LGBQ+ students. As a result, the researcher to discovered the intersection between
sexual orientation and career development. The findings of this proposed study will help higher education professionals better assist LGBQ+ students in their career development.
CHAPTER 3

Introduction

Through a qualitative, phenomenological analysis, the researcher explored the experiences of LGBQ+ college students in their career development throughout the New Orleans, Louisiana region. Few models have considered the role sexual orientation has on the selection of a career field (Chung, 1995; Schneider & Dimito, 2010). By collecting data directly from current LGBQ+ students, the researcher utilized firsthand accounts of their career development process. Currently, no such model exists that is published.

For this research study, the researcher utilized document review, interviews, and reflection journals as the primary sources of data collection. The use of different data sources allowed the researcher to examine evidence from various sources to build a coherent analysis. Participants identified across the LGBQ+ spectrum displaying various level of “outness.” For the purposes of this study, “out” refers to the degree in which a participant is open regarding their sexual orientation to their family, friends, colleagues, etc. Due to the sensitive and often hidden nature of sexual orientation, it was important that the researcher developed a personal relationship and rapport with each of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By interviewing individuals who had first-hand experience with the research question, the researcher was able to explore the experiences, motives, and opinions of the challenges LGBQ+ college students face in their career development (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2013). This approach is consistent with the research exploring the career development of LGBQ+ students conducted by Datti (2009), Morrow (1997), and Pope (1995) who utilized qualitative methods as their primarily mechanism for data collection.
Research Question

The research question is the fundamental part of any research study (Merriam, 2009). It helps to guide the selection of methods, data collection and data analysis. As such, the following research question was explored in this study.

- What is the experience of LGBQ+ college students in their career development?

Phenomenology

Clark (2000) stated that phenomenological inquiry seeks to develop insights from participant’s perspectives at a given point in time in their lives. According to Todres and Holloway (2004), only those individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (in this case, being LGBQ+ and undergoing career development) can communicate to the outside world the true essence of the experience. This approach was created by German philosopher Edmond Husserl who believed that experimental scientific research was too rigid to study human experiences and phenomena (Crotty, 1996).

This study utilized the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective which focuses on interpreting the meaning that individuals extract from their lives and experiences (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). This study sought to understand the career development of LGBQ+ individuals by using both deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive analysis allows the researcher to begin with preliminary career development theories to test, revise, analyze and ultimately edit based upon observations and data collected from participants. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) posit that deductive reasoning is narrow in nature and is concerned with testing existing theories. Inductive analysis is more open and exploratory in nature beginning with observations, detecting patterns, and formulating hypothesis for further exploration (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; MacLure, 2013). Oftentimes, in qualitative research, both
methods are utilized in a circular model that continually cycles from observations to theory and back to observations (Van Manen, 1997). Primary methods of data collection included semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and document review. While the researcher entered this study with a conceptual framework, it was utilized as a guide to inform inquiry rather than a model or theory to prove correct or incorrect. As with all phenomenological research, it is important that the researcher recognized that any understanding of career development must be negotiated and created with participants. In phenomenological research, it is the researcher’s responsibility to ensure that no bias framework under which the data is analyzed (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

**Site Selection**

According to Datti (2009), geographic location plays a significant role in the career development of LGBQ+ individuals. Some areas of the country are less hostile towards the LGBQ+ community and thus may attract these individuals to that area. While anti-gay policies and political rhetoric are not limited to the southern region of the United States, it seems to have a great acceptance there (Barth & Overby, 2003). The greater traditionalism, conservatism, and evangelicalism found in the South may influence sexual behavior and sexual identification (Valentino & Sears, 2005; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Given the entrenched racism, homophobia, and religious ties that exist in the South, members of the LGBQ+ community may face unique challenges (Ford, Brignall, & VanValey, 2009; Tsang & Rowatt, 2007). In particular, conservative viewpoints of Christianity have taken harsh anti-homophobic stances, which has resulted in institutionalized homophobia (Rhoades et al., 2013).

In addition to the longstanding homophobia in the South, the Louisiana legislature approved a constitutional amendment in 2004 defining the definition of marriage as between one
man and one woman and prohibited civil unions across the state (Hill, 2013). The amendment added a provision to the constitution that defined marriage as the “union of one man and one woman, require state officials and courts to recognize only marriages of that nature, prohibit the state from recognizing any legal status that is identical or substantially similar to that of marriage and prohibit state officials and courts from recognizing a marriage that was conducted in another state” (Act 926, 2004). In addition, LGBTQ+ individuals faced no protection from discrimination in their jobs, were unable to adopt children and had limited access to health care benefits (Hill, 2013). More than 4% of the American workforce identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender with approximately 88,400 of them living in Louisiana (Mallory & Sears, 2015). Louisiana currently does not have a statewide law that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. While there are some liberal areas of the state, such as Baton Rouge and New Orleans, much of Louisiana has always been hostile to its LGBTQ+ population (Hill, 2013). However, beginning in 2014, a number of Supreme Court rulings cited the 4th and 14th amendments, which stated that states couldn’t justify unequal treatment of a particular group (Obergefell v. Hodges; United States v. Windsor). In addition, in April 2016, Democratic Governor Jon Bel Edwards signed an executive order prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in state agencies (Executive Order No. JBE 2016-11; Chokshi, 2016). However, this order does not protect employees who work in public sectors. It also prohibits businesses from discriminating in the services they provide. This nullified the previous executive order signed by previous governor Bobby Jindal in 2015, which did not provide any protections based on sexual orientation identity. However, great uncertainty exists regarding the future of LGBTQ+ rights in the United States under the new federal government administration (Vollman, 2017).
Today, New Orleans is considered a liberal city within the state and the conservative South for many reasons. First, New Orleans is composed of a high non-white population percentage, which correlates with political liberalism (Fussell, 2007). Second, New Orleans has a historical cultural connection to Europe and Catholicism which focuses on less government control. Third, its role as a port of call for sailors led to flourishing and acceptance of vice cultures (Perez & Pamquist, 2012). Coupled with these factors, a number of support systems exist for the LGBQ+ community in New Orleans, which make it a prime site selection for this study.

According to Perez & Pamquist (2012) “the last twenty years in the New Orleans gay community have been a time of ripening and harvesting” (p. 133). In fact, a recent Gallup poll ranks New Orleans, Louisiana as the fourth largest metropolitan area with the highest rate of LGBTQ+ residents at 5.1% (Newport & Gates, 2015). In their book, *In Exile: The History and Lore Surrounding New Orleans Gay Culture and Its Oldest Gay Bar* (2012), Perez and Pamquist (2012) discussed the monumental progress that has been made in New Orleans over the past decade. In addition to gay bars that have traditionally been instrumental in the creation of safe spaces for the LGBQ+ community nationwide, New Orleans has seen significant growth in the LGBQ+ community. These places, such as Café LaFitte in Exile and Good Friends Bar have served as places where individuals can be themselves and interact with others in the LGBQ+ community. The LGBQ+ community has also seen a rise in the number of attendees at various LGBQ+ events, the creation of Ambush gay magazine, the formation of the Big Easy Metropolitan Community Church, the GLBT Community Center, and the creation of a NoAids Task Force (Perez & Palmquist, 2012). The growth of the LGBQ+ community as well as the unique liberal environment within a conservative state makes this an ideal location for this study.
Situating the study within New Orleans allows the researcher to draw from a diverse group of institutions and potential participants. Attempts were made to include the following institutions included Delgado Community College, Dillard University, Loyola University (New Orleans), Nunez Community College, University of Holy Cross, Southern University (New Orleans), Tulane University, and Xavier University (New Orleans). Recruitment from these institutions allowed the researcher to gain a variety of student experiences from public, private, HBCU, research and religiously affiliated institutions. The researcher chose to leave out The University of New Orleans as the researcher serves as a full-time staff member and primary advisor to their LGBQ+ organization. Recruitment from these institutions served two purposes. First, it allowed the researcher to be confident that any themes that emerged from the data were representative of the student experience in career development as opposed to institutional type. Second, it provided insights into how career development was being addressed at various institutional types. In addition, recruitment of participants from a wide variety of institutional types allowed the researcher to draw upon various student identities and characteristics (Creswell, 2013). This ensured that the sample was representative of college students in the United States today.

Participants

To meet the criteria for this qualitative research study, the individuals selected were between 18 – 24 years old and enrolled at an accredited institution of higher education. In addition, students must have identified as a part of the LGBQ+ community. The researcher conducting this study elected to utilize sophomore, junior, and senior classification (over 45 credit hours) to gain a better understanding of how an individual’s LGBQ+ identity impacts their career development. These students were more likely to be connected to their chosen major,
involved in professional organizations related to their major and/or future career, and have participated in an internship/practicum based programs. Furthermore, upper class students have often engaged in service learning activities (Gardner & Perry, 2012), undergraduate research activities (Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour, 2006), and senior seminar and capstone courses (Padgett & Kilgo, 2012) as a way to explore and solidify career directions. Plunkett (2001) argued that students should have moved from the career exploration to career identity phase by the time students reach their senior year.

Selecting a major and career path is a crucial decision in the life of an undergraduate student. The researcher intentionally recruited and selected students over 45 credit hours as a means to collect more reliable data. Moving from high school to college can be personally and psychologically disruptive (Mattanah et al., 2010). First and second year students often have a bumpy transition to the collegiate environment, engaging with the institution as they did in high school. These include feelings of homesickness accompanied by a new educational environment and social network (Koch, 2001; Koch, Foote, Hinkle, Keup, & Pistilli, 2007). In addition, Harvey, Drew, and Smith (2006) argued that students must learn how to renegotiate the learning environment of their institution, which requires autonomous learning. William Perry, student development theorist, provided further insight into students’ cognitive development. He argued that students must learn that methods utilized in high school are no longer sufficient and shift from a dualistic learning style to one of multiplicity and relativity (Perry, 1970). In the dualistic period, students exhibit “rigid, inflexible attitudes towards knowing” and possess “no inclination for critical inquiry” (Long, 2012, p. 47). As students grow and develop during their later college years, they move to the multiplicity and relativistic periods of development, where they find strategies for seeking and analyzing various viewpoints while creating a value system and
ideology through which they construct the world around them (Hunter et al., 2010; Perry, 1970). Because first and second year students (those under 45+ credit hours) are transitioning to the collegiate environment and are often not thinking about career development or related tasks, the researcher elected to remove them from the study. However, there may be value in exploring first year student populations and their experience in career development in the future.

The researcher also sought to explore the experiences of current, traditional-aged college students. Recent literature has indicated that the current generation of students, often defined as millennials, are optimistic, civic minded, and high achieving (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Keup, 2008). Furthermore, they are cited as enthusiastic learners who strive to be involved, have an extraordinary drive, and increased experience with diversity in regard to personal identity and society at large (Brooks; 2001; Keeling, 2003; Newton, 2000; Pryor, Hurtado, Sharkness, & Korn, 2007). Millennials are traditional aged, classified as between seventeen to twenty-four years old (Pryor et al., 2007). Where older generations may be more inclined to stay in the closet regarding their sexual orientation, the millennial generation is more likely to openly discuss topics of diversity.

In addition, millennial students overwhelmingly hold a unique vocational view of higher education because they assume that a college diploma leads to securing a career, which is different from previous generations (Keup, 2008). Keup (2008) suggested that “new students are often intolerant of courses or activities not directly related to their intended major or career path, and complain bitterly about what they refer to as “irrelevant general education courses” (p. 32). The fact that today’s students are entering college for the primary purpose of career training or graduate school studies should come as no surprise as attendance costs continue to rise (Keup, 2008). This new vocational outlook is uniquely characteristic to the millennial generation and
thus the purpose of limiting the participants in this study to those that fall within the traditional student definition.

By selecting participants that were between 18 – 24 years old, the participants in this study could speak more tangibly regarding their career development. This helped to ensure a sense of belonging to their chosen career field. Vincent Tinto (1987) proposed that for a student to persist to graduation, both social and academic integration must be achieved. The more integrated a student becomes to the institution, the more likely they are to be retained after each year of study. Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) found that feeling connected to the college or university is not based on the result of a single experience. The researchers found that acceptance by peers and faculty within their major was the most important factor among the level of connectedness at the institution. In addition, Lent, Brown, and Gore (1997) described academic self-concept as the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that students have about their academic capabilities, skills, and performance. The higher the academic self-concept is for a student, the more likely they are to persist in their chosen major.

The selection of sophomore, junior, and senior students, between ages 18-24, who felt a sense of belonging to their major made them ideal candidates for the study. It enhanced the likelihood that participants had some level of experience with how sexual orientation does or does not impact their career selves. Nontraditional age students attending institutions of higher education are likely to engage in tasks that are similar to those in with which they have had previous experience and therefore already display higher levels of career development (Healy, Mitchell, & Mourton, 1987). Undergraduate students experience difficulties in these decision-making processes believing they have too many options, not viewing enough options, or feeling ill prepared to make a potential lifelong decision (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). By
conducted this study, the researcher hoped to help professionals in higher education understand the difficulties current, traditional age college students face as well as to develop and implement strategies to minimize student distress and to accomplish these development milestones (Fouad, Ghosh, Chang, Figueiredo, & Bachhuber, 2016).

**Recruitment Strategy.** Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, purposeful recruitment methods were utilized. The researcher began with posting a call for participants on various social media outlets (Facebook and Twitter) and local listservs. Additionally, the researcher placed a call for participant flyer in local coffee shops and libraries. However, some difficulty was experienced in gaining approval to hang signs. Finally, the researcher shared information regarding the study to instructors of Sociology, Psychology, and Women and Gender Studies courses at the sites selected for this study. The researcher was able to attend one class hosted by Delgado Community College on one of their satellite campus to discuss the study and recruit potential participants. Unfortunately, the class was composed largely of first and second year students and therefore, they did not meet the requirements for participation. However, the researcher encouraged them to help spread the word to friends. Furthermore, locating and utilizing gatekeepers was instrumental to the success of this study. These gatekeepers (advisors of LGBQ+ student organizations) were able to identify students who were eligible to participate and share the researcher’s contact information. However, not all institutions had a formal LGBQ+ organizations or advisors. In these cases, the researcher identified identity based organizations and reached out to them (examples include Progressive Black Student Union, Gender Equity Club, etc.). Throughout participant recruitment, the researcher was fortunate to attend two student organizational meetings to explain the details of the study. The researcher
also utilized a process known as snowball sampling, a technique where existing study participants recruit future participants who met participant criteria (Creswell, 2013).

**Sample.** For this study, 9 student participants responded to the researcher’s call for participants for semi-structured interviews and journal reflections. Participants ranged in age from 19 – 24 years old, identified across the LGBQ+ spectrum, and held various racial identities. Participants ranged between 67 - 130 earned credit hours and represented a wide variety of majors. According to Creswell (2013), this number of participants is a reasonable range to ensure saturation of the topic. Saturation is reached when fresh data no longer reveals new insights. By keeping the sample size small, each experience was examined thoroughly. According to Creswell (2013), the researcher must utilize proper methods to discover the core phenomenon, conditions, strategies and consequences of the topic being studied.

While the researcher rigorously attempted to recruit participants from all sites selected for the study, ultimately only three institutions were represented. These included two private institutions and one public HBCU institution. It is interesting to note that no participants attended any of the community colleges selected for the site of this study. The American Association of Community Colleges (2017) cite the average age of a community college student to be 29 years old, often attending classes while raising a family and working full time. The researcher speculates that for these reasons, community college students either did not meet the requirements for the study or simply did not have the time to participate.

**Data Collection**

According to Creswell (2013), Merriam (2009), and Rubin & Rubin (2012), data can be collected through words spoken by participants, recorded observations, or extracted from several types of documents. Creswell (2013) stated that by collecting data through multiple forms, the
researcher can uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights that are relevant to the problem under investigation. Over the course of the Fall 2016 semester, the researcher interviewed students who choose to participate in the research study. In all cases, the researcher assured the participant that the interview would remain both confidential and anonymous. All field notes, recordings, transcriptions, journals, etc. were locked in a filing cabinet behind a locked door. All materials relating to the study will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study. To ensure confidentiality, participants could select their own pseudonym. No compensation was offered for participation in the study.

**Interview Protocol.** Before data collection began, the researcher filed for and received institutional review board (IRB) approval. The purpose of the IRB board was to ensure the study followed all necessary procedural and ethical guidelines that protected the rights and welfare of all human participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study (Merriam, 2009). Once approved, the researcher utilized an informed consent form (Appendix A) and a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) to ensure that participants met the qualifications as well as their desire to participate in the study. The demographic questionnaire asked potential participants to respond to questions dealing with age, classification and sexual orientation identity.

**Document Review (Phase 1).** The researcher conducted a document review and analysis of the policies, procedures, forms and other written artifacts pertaining to the research study. Examples included institutional policies and informal documents and forms found at career service units from the sites the participants represented. According to Merriam (2009), the documents contained clues into the phenomenon under investigation. The data gathered from the documents provided information, verified emerging hypotheses and offered a historical understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 2009).
Anti-discrimination policies. Policy is often a reflection of the institution’s values and climate (Dirks, 2016). Drawing from sixty interviews from a national study on LGBQ+ student success, Pitcher, Camacho, Renn and Woodford (2016) found that LGBQ+ students often find their support from policies, programs, and services. While literature is limited as to how anti-discrimination policies improve the experience for LGBQ+ students, scholars maintain that it does open campus dialogue regarding this population (Beemyn & Pettit, 2006; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). All three institutions had a published anti-discrimination policy with clear reporting mechanisms. While concise, these polices mentioned the value that diversity brings to the educational environment. All three institutions cited sexual orientation as a protected class in employment practices and educational programs, activities and services. It is important to note that all three anti-discrimination policies mentioned complying with federal and state laws addressing discrimination.

Websites. Since the 1960’s, institutions of higher education have used websites to promote themselves, often including individual pages for various departments on campus (McDonough, 1994). Often, these websites promote themselves with visual and textual representations of themselves which communicate both explicit and implicit messages (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). For this study, the researcher examined the three institution’s career services websites to learn if sexual orientation identity was represented or discussed as part of career development. While all three institutions had a page(s) dedicated to career services, none of them discussed identity in any form. Furthermore, these webpages were limited to a listing of the services provided (resume review, networking, resume review, etc.) and provided few, if any, visual representation of students. However, Loyola University’s career services website, stated
that their goal was to help “students discover who they are how that translates into career opportunities and success.”

**Materials.** The researcher gathered materials such as brochures, advertisements, and forms from career service units on the participant’s respective campus. These documents demonstrated clues as to the types of services offered and the type of student they serve. According to Woodford and Kulick (2014) and Strayhorn (2012), such representations promote a sense of belonging as well as acceptance for those in the LGBQ+ community. Unfortunately, none of the materials gathered from each career unit involved any representations of same sex couples or made any mention to varying sexual orientations. In all cases, marketing materials included an overview of the services and programs offered to students. Two institutions struggled to put together materials for the researcher due to a lack of funding for such items. The third institution had several materials available, but few mentioned anything regarding identity, including sexual orientation. Pictures on materials were often in black and white. No intake forms were gathered at any of the career service units.

**Semi-structured Interviews (Phase 2).** The researcher conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews. DeMarrais (2004) defined an interview as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p.55). Interviewing is important because the researcher may not always be able to observe behavior or feelings. The researcher met the participant at a location of their choosing and utilized open-ended questions. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 – 60 minutes. Utilizing this interviewing method, the majority of the interview was guided by a list of questions to be explored (Appendix C). There was no predetermined order for the questions that were asked and all questions were used flexibly. However, specific data was required from all
respondents (Merriam, 2009). This included the demographic questionnaire, previous places of employment, as well as questions regarding coming out as LGBQ+, career and major exploration, sexuality on the job, and identifying potential future employers.

**Journal (Phase 3).** Third, participants were sent an online reflection journal utilizing Qualtrics survey software two weeks after the initial interview (Appendix D). This reflection journal allowed participants to debrief on the interview process, make notes regarding thoughts or actions that did not emerge during the formal interview, and helped to contribute to the researcher’s understanding of their career development. No poignant data was gathered from the reflection journal as responses lacked substance. In studies where topics are sensitive, it can be difficult to assess students’ deeper understanding of career development. Journaling meshes with transformative learning and self-authorship constructs, allowing for critical self-reflection. Incorporating students’ ideas into the study may provide additional insight (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Seven of the nine electronic journal reflections were returned to the researcher. Even after several reminders, Klaire and Ant, did not return an electronic journal reflection.

**Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2013), data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. It often involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read. Merriam (2009) stated that “data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 176). During this stage, the researcher searches for patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising. Oftentimes, these emerge after the researcher manipulates the data. This allows the researcher to
“work from the ground up” allowing an inductive, emergent design to unfold (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Ultimately, these understandings constitute the findings of a study.

As mentioned above, data analysis began with bracketing the assumptions regarding career development. In doing so, the researcher became aware of the viewpoints and assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. These included assumptions about the way all students come to understand what it means to be a member of the LGBQ+ community, the researcher’s own experiences, and the way career development does or does not occur. In addition, Moustakas (1994) suggested seeking as many meanings as possible to construct the best themes in researching the phenomenon. According to Creswell (2013), the aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced. Moustakas (1994) presented a step by step method for analyzing data in a phenomenological study that include listing and preliminary grouping, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing the constituents, and developing a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience (p. 120-120). Utilizing these methods, Moustakas (1994) stated that the goal of data is to “determine what an experience means for the persons who had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13).

**Coding Scheme.** According to Merriam (2009), data analysis “is the process of making sense out of the data” (p. 175) and “involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said” (p.176). The researcher utilized three phases of coding: open, axial and selective. In the first phase, open coding, information was categorized into segments. The researcher transcribed all interviews and journal reflections. The researcher read through all transcriptions for accuracy and to have a better understanding of each student’s sexual
orientation and career development. Throughout the process, the researcher took notes in the margins. This allowed the researcher to write down annotations next to the bits of information that were relevant to the phenomenon. Next, the researcher put these significant statements in a Microsoft excel document, with each significant statement having its own line. Additionally, data from both participant interviews and journal entries was merged into one document. Tabs were created for each participant in an effort to better understand each individual case. In the second phase, axial coding, categories were formed by going beyond descriptive coding and interpreting and reflecting on meaning (Merriam, 2009). Categories are “conceptual elements that span many individual examples” (Merriam, 2009, p.181). During this portion of the coding process, the researcher began identifying larger categories, assigning a code word or phrase to each significant statement, which described the meaning of the text. The researcher coded all participant interviews in this manner before looking for commonalities across and between each participant. Color coding the various categories became a crucial aspect of the coding process as it allowed the researcher to see categories emerge across participants. These categories were reduced to four themes and were established based on recurring ideas, language, and experiences. After this stage, the researcher revisited all categories and assigned them to one of the themes. In the last phase, selective coding, a core category, proposition, or hypothesis is created. During this stage, specific spoken words are utilized as quotes to justify each theme. In phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) suggested analyzing significant statements and generating meaning to gain the essence of the experience. This coding scheme is consistent with Merriam’s (2009) guidelines for analyzing data for a phenomenological study.

Next, the researcher analyzed the data from all sources and wrote a detailed description of each student’s career development. The initial write up included transcriptions and field notes
to generate larger themes. The researcher identified similarities within each case while looking for common themes that transcend the data (Yin, 2013). The researcher read and organized the data into themes to collect outcomes. The researcher concluded the study with a broad interpretation of findings and implications (Creswell, 2013).

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of the research is completely reliant upon the researcher (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth. This involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher utilized different methods to ensure trustworthiness of the study’s outcomes.

**Researcher identity.** It should be noted that the researcher identifies as a member of the LGBQ+ community which therefore impacts his positionality as a researcher. During the collegiate years, the researcher struggled with identity development surrounding his sexual orientation. As such, several other developmental tasks, such as career development, did not occur until late in his college career. While the researcher entered college with a firm decision to declare a criminal justice major and excelled in coursework, it wasn’t until senior year when he realized that his chosen career field may not be the best fit. At this point, the researcher engaged in various career related activities, such as participating in an internship program and meeting with several career counselors, which allowed him to explore other career options. It is important to note that these characteristics may have influenced the research design, implementation and analysis of this study. However, the following steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness as well as limiting any researcher bias that may have resulted from the researcher’s identity.
**Credibility.** Credibility is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the “inquiry in such a way that the probability that findings will be found to be credible is enhanced” (p. 296). To achieve credibility, the researcher utilized triangulation of data that involved using multiple data sources (Denzin, 1989; Patton, 2002). These sources included a document review of nondiscrimination policies, career service materials/websites, and written interviews and journal reflections. This triangulation assured validity of the research and helped to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon. This technique helped to ensure that data collected was rich and well developed. Also, member checks were conducted with all participants in which conclusions are “tested with members of those stake holding groups from whom the data were originally collected” (Patton, 2002, p. 314). This gave participants the opportunity to assess intentionality and an immediate opportunity to correct errors and facts. No participant responded when given this opportunity. Lastly, the researcher engaged in several debriefing sessions with peers and colleagues to allow for an opportunity for scrutiny of the research project. These fresh perspectives challenged the assumptions made by the investigator. Engaging in reflexivity and self-reflection was a defining component of this study. Reflexivity requires a critical awareness by the researcher about their own views and positions and how they may have influenced the design, implementation, and/or interpretation of the research findings (Greenbank, 2003).

**Transferability.** Transferability is an important aspect of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability shows that the findings have applicability in other contexts. Thick description is one way to confirm transferability. Thick description offers a detailed account of field experiences and participants, and incorporates them into the study’s findings (Holloway, 1997). Denzin (1989) stated that in thick description “the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (p.83). Thick
description was necessary throughout this study to capture the phenomenon of career
development among queer students. By interviewing several participants and taking detailed
field notes, this helped the researcher to convey career development and the contexts which
surround them. Furthermore, the researcher was able to capture the meaning behind the
experiences that the LGBQ+ participants discussed. Given their marginalized voice and identity,
it was important to the researcher to accurately capture the meaning behind their experiences. As
such, the researcher kept detailed notes throughout the interview of context, body language and
spoken and written words. This was paramount in data analysis as it allowed the researcher to
have a contextual understanding of the events surrounding each student’s identity and career
development.

**Dependability.** Dependability helps to demonstrate that the findings are consistent and
could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audits help researchers to evaluate the accuracy of
the data collected and evaluate whether the findings, interpretations and conclusions are
supported by the data. The researcher kept a detailed log throughout the research design,
including dates, times, settings and other pertinent information. Furthermore, the researcher in
this study discussed the research methods in great length throughout this chapter. This allows for
others to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed. Prior to IRB
approval, the researcher had a methodologist verify and critique the research design.
Modifications were made based on feedback.

**Confirmability.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that confirmability discusses the
degree to which the outcomes of a research study are shaped by the respondents and not
researcher bias. Confirmability is the degree to which the study’s findings are the result of the
experience and ideas of the participants, rather than those of the researcher. Keeping an audit
trail and engaging in peer debriefing helped to increase the likelihood of confirmability. The researcher’s peers and colleagues reviewed the researcher’s data analysis to ensure the findings were a result of the data collected. These individuals have experience working with student organizations and researching LGBQ+ topics.

**Ethical Considerations**

Due to the sensitive nature of sexual orientation identity, the researcher has an obligation to protect the identity of participants. The researcher does not want to disclose the sexual orientation of its participants for any reason as it may cause unnecessary stress or negative effects. As such, the researcher has made every effort to ensure confidentiality such as allowing the participant to select a pseudonym, keeping interview recordings and transcriptions in a locked cabinet, and ensuring confidentiality of the data collected.

Because participants of this study may be at various stages of their sexual orientation identity status, it was also important that the researcher had a knowledge of the campus and community resources that are available to them. Discussion of the various components of identity development may trigger additional thoughts and feelings that require processing and/or support from various on campus offices. Since the researcher was not available or properly trained, referrals to the campus and community resources were given to participants.

**Conclusion**

Schram (2003) stated that a phenomenological study is one that examines people’s conscious experiences. By designing a phenomenological study that utilized proven methods, it allowed the researcher to study those things (such as career development) that are “blocked from sight by the theoretical patterns” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p.658). This chapter has outlined the detailed methods that occurred throughout this study, including site selection, participant
selection, recruitment and sample, as well as data collection, coding and finally, trustworthiness. Using Merriam (2009) and Van Manen (1997) approaches to a phenomenological study, this research study incorporated data from career service documents, interviews, and journal reflections from nine LGBQ+ participants at three institutions in New Orleans, Louisiana to study their career development.

A document review, interview, and journal reflection were all utilized as sources of data collection. In addition, all interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Consistent with phenomenological research, the researcher utilized open, axial, and selective coding in the data analysis phase (Merriam, 2009; Van Manen, 1997). Additionally, the researcher utilized numerous methods to ensure trustworthiness. Throughout the study, the researcher bracketed assumptions and engaged in peer debriefing. As a result, the researcher was able to create findings based on the data collected, which is presented in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

Through this study examining how LGBQ+ college students come to understand how their sexual orientation impacted their major and career selection in the collegiate context, many themes emerged. As the researcher examined the data, notes were recorded for possible coding to be utilized. Through this coding process, the following four themes emerged: the participant coming out process, awareness of intersectionality of identities, navigating their career as an LGBQ+ individual, identifying potential employers and the role of career counselors. Chapter four opens with a brief description of each of the study’s participants followed by a detailed explanation of each of the themes identified.

Participants

Over the course of the Fall 2016 semester, nine students meeting the qualifications for the study served as participants in the study (Table 4.1). Participants ranged in age from 19 – 24 years old, identified across the LGBQ+ spectrum, and held various racial identities. Participants ranged between 67 - 130 earned credit hours and represented a wide variety of majors. They were enrolled full time at a private or HBCU institution. Below is a brief description of each participant.

Table 4.1: Participant Demographics
Samantha. Samantha is a twenty-year-old mixed race student who identifies as a queer, bisexual female. A triple major in English, gender studies, and psychology, she has earned 84 credit hours and is classified as a junior. Her employment history includes service industry work but most recently she has served as a building manager at her college campus. Moving from the East Coast, Samantha desired a change from her upbringing. She recognized she was LGBQ+ during her freshman year of high school, coming out to her friends during her senior year. Samantha believed that her sexual orientation had somewhat of an impact on her decision to pursue gender & sexuality studies, but not English and psychology.

Aaron. Aaron is a twenty-year-old Asian American student who identifies as a homosexual male. A double major in cell & molecular biology and linguistics, he has earned 79 credit hours and is classified as a junior. His employment history includes various positions such
as a coach, camp counselor, and various paid student leadership roles (such as an Orientation Leader) on his college campus. He also completed an internship at a national health organization. Aaron knew he was gay early in life but chose not to come out until his sophomore year of college. He is not out to his parents. Aaron believes his sexual orientation played no impact on his decision to pursue his major or career.

**Klaire.** Klaire is a twenty-two-year-old White transfer student who identifies as a greysexual female. Greysexual individuals may only experience sexual attraction on one or two occasions and under very specific circumstances. Majoring in gender & sexuality studies, she has earned 80 credit hours and is classified as a senior. Her employment history includes a paid call center position on campus as well as several LGBQ+ organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) of Louisiana and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) New Orleans. Klaire knew she was not heterosexual when she found herself interested in a female student during her freshman year of college. She is out to her mom and the university community. Klaire stated that she believed her major reflected her sexual orientation but did not say one way or the other if it influenced her decision.

**Alicia.** Alicia is a twenty-one-year-old White student who identifies as a bisexual female. Double majoring in political science and Latin American studies, Alicia has earned 106 credit hours and is classified as a senior. Her employment history includes several research positions within public service organizations within New Orleans. In addition, she has held various paid positions on her college campus. While Alicia is open about her sexual orientation, it is not common knowledge. She is out to her family but they are not very accepting. Alicia believes her sexual orientation had no impact on pursuing her major or career interests.
Mary. Mary is a nineteen-year-old White student who identifies as a lesbian female. Double majoring in neuroscience and musical theater, Mary has earned 71 credit hours and is classified as a junior. Her employment history includes positions as a camp counselor and assistant teacher. She also has several paid positions on her college campus that include working in a research lab and recreation center. Mary knew she was a lesbian during her freshman year of high school and came out to her parents shortly after. Mary believes her sexual orientation played no role whatsoever in her decision to pursue her major and career interests.

Jennifer. Jennifer is a twenty-four-year-old Afro Caribbean transfer student who identifies as a bisexual female. Majoring in criminal justice, she has earned 93 credit hours and is classified as a senior. Jennifer’s employment history includes serving in the United States Marine Corps and various sales associate positions within the city. Jennifer knew she was bisexual at an early age, but due to cultural values, remained closeted until age 18. She is out to her parents. Jennifer believed that her sexual orientation did not impact her decision to pursue her major or career interest.

Beth. Beth is a twenty-one-year-old white student who identifies as a queer, gay, agender individual. Agender individuals do not identify themselves as having a particular gender. Double majoring in Spanish and public health, Beth has earned 130 credit hours and is classified as a senior. Beth’s employment history is limited to an emergency medical technician and paid campus employment in admissions. Beth came out to her parents during her sophomore year of high school and to everyone else during her junior year of high school. Beth believes her sexual orientation had no impact on her decision to pursue her major or career.

Christina. Christina is a twenty-year-old Black student who identifies as a queer female. Majoring in music industry studies, Christina has earned 86 credit hours and is classified as a
junior. Her employment history includes various paid positions on her college campus. Christina is out to the university community and recently came out to her mom. Christina believes her sexual orientation did not impact her decision to pursue her major or career interests.

**Ant.** Ant is a nineteen-year-old African American student who identifies as a gay male. Majoring in business analytics, Ant has earned 67 credit hours and is classified as a junior. An athlete and a conference assistant at the institution he attends, Ant has limited time for paid employment and internships. He is out to the university community and his parents. He believes his sexual orientation had somewhat of an impact on the decision to pursue his major and career.

**Introduction to Findings**

Data analysis indicated that these nine LGBQ+ students experienced career development in unique but similar ways. All students had undergone a coming out process in relation to their sexual orientation among self and others. While little to no impact on a student’s decision to pursue a major or career path was found to be based on sexual orientation, students knew that their sexual orientation would be a factor in their professional lives, including their relationship with colleagues and future employment climates. Participants were acutely aware that not all individuals or employers were LGBQ+ affirming or accepting. As such, this may have impacted their decision regarding their level of outness. Finally, students were able to articulate several mechanisms to identify queer friendly employers as well as offer insights into the skills college career counselors should possess to be effective with LGBQ+ students. Only one student, Christina, visited the Career Services center on her campus on a regular basis. This may suggest that either LGBQ+ students feel they do not need those services or they feel excluded from this particular functional unit. The findings below suggest that significant growth must occur in career service units across institutions of higher education.
“All of this has been a process”: Coming Out

Among the themes generated from this study, the disclosure of sexual orientation identity to oneself, family, friends, coworkers and others was a topic discussed throughout all interviews. All participants had a distinct way of contextualizing their coming out process, ranging from being out in high school to waiting until college for disclosure to self and others. Like many participants, Alicia described her coming out experience by stating “all of this has been a process.” Mary described this process by articulating “well, obviously, I have to like, come out to someone every day.” Participants in the study described their process in terms of recognizing they were not part of the dominant culture (heterosexuality) both to their self and then to others. Participants in this study confirmed that the process of coming out is not linear given the fluidity of sexualities. Findings from this study are consistent with Fassinger’s (1998) coming out model of a private and public identity. This includes being out in their personal lives, such as home and family life, but not in their public lives, such as communities or workplaces. Furthermore, participants in the study described the intersectionality that existed between sexual orientation and other components of their identity.

The decision to come out at work is a complex one. Disclosure of sexual orientation may help an individual to achieve congruence in their public and private identities, establish closer relationships with coworkers, and avoid negative cognitive effects (Creed & Scully, 2000; Fassinger, 1995; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Additionally, research has found that the more open an individual is regarding their sexual orientation, the more likely they are to be committed to the organization, integrated into their workgroup, and experience less job anxiety (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). However, fears of discrimination and heterosexism may prevent disclosure in an organizational environment
(Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Furthermore, stigma in the workplace can lead to stereotyping, social isolation, and stifled advancement opportunities (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). Therefore, the motivation for coming out at work has potential positive and negative effects for an individual who identifies as a member of the LGBQ+ community. Participants in this study discussed coming out to themselves and others in the context of their personal and professional lives.

**Self.** Many participants in the study recognized their non-heterosexual identity in high school or college. Students in the study developed an awareness of difference regarding sexual orientation between those around them but did not necessarily always disclose immediately to friends and family. All participants in the study, except Klaire, expressed a strong knowledge of self and were committed to an LGBQ+ identity.

Aaron identifies as a gay male but is currently not out to his parents. He is fearful that his sexual orientation may cause his family to reject him, causing them to no longer wish to provide financial and emotional support to him. In the quote below, Aaron experienced inner turmoil, doubting himself before finally accepting his sexual orientation.

> So I kinda knew [pause] pretty early on that I knew that I liked men. Um, for a long time I thought I was bisexual. Um. Or. But I think ultimately I was just really doubting myself. And I didn’t really come out until sophomore year of college.

It was clear through our interview that Aaron was self-aware of his sexual orientation but was not fully committed to it until sophomore year of college. As one can see from the above quote, he associated his LGBQ+ sexuality with something that was unwelcomed, often having feelings of uncertainty. It was not until he became comfortable in the collegiate environment that he began to identify as gay. Aaron first had to accept that he was a non-heterosexual individual before disclosing to other individuals.
Jennifer articulated her coming out as a process that conflicted with her cultural values. While she knew from an early age she was bisexual, it wasn’t always accepted or expressed to others. Jennifer stated, “well, growing up in the Caribbean, it’s not something that…I guess is celebrated or accepted I would say.” LGBQ+ individuals face legal and punitive action in several Caribbean cultures, such as those found in Jamaica.

Christina first came out to herself and told a close friend during her freshman year of college.

So, when I first got here, uh, my freshman year, funny this is I came out to my best friend who is also queer but he’s at ULL. I texted him. I said, I think I’m bi.

And he said, me too. We are like, okay, we can do that.

Christina’s experience is not unique in that she first recognized that she was non-heterosexual followed by disclosure to her best friend, someone whom she respects and trusts.

As articulated by the participants above, admitting and understanding LGBQ+ identity to themselves prior to disclosure to others was an integral piece of the coming out process. Furthermore, recognizing and admitting LGBQ+ identity status has been linked with higher levels of authenticity which allow individuals to build a coherent and integrated sense of self (Ragins, 2004). Often, individuals recognized there was something different about the nature of their sexual attractions than their heterosexual counterparts. To gain a better understanding of these feelings, many turned to popular culture and media. Fear of isolation and rejection, as described by Aaron and Jennifer, are some of the primary reasons participants chose not to disclose to others. Instead, often LGBQ+ individuals choose to keep their sexual orientation to themselves through much of their adolescent and young adult life (Flowers & Busto, 2001). However, doing so may cause psychological stress, difficulty navigating identity based tasks and feelings of inferiority (Smart & Wegner, 1999; Pachankis, 1997; Pachankis & Goldfried, 2006).
Chaney and Dew (2003) and Guigliamo (2006) posit that self-disclosure often leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness until an individual chooses to disclose to others.

Eight of the nine students who participated in the study accepted their sexual orientation with one participant lacking acceptance and expressing resentment. It should be noted that one participant in the study, Klaire, was aware that her sexual orientation was different than that of heterosexual individuals, but was struggling with acceptance. Klaire stated, “I might be greysexual but this is not how I want to live my life and I didn’t find any sort of asexual community, I never found someone who is as miserable as I am.” This suggests that Klaire may be at a different stage in the coming out process than other participants.

It should be noted that several student development theories account for a stage of self-disclosure and self-acceptance in the coming out process (Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). These stages can be characterized by a conscious awareness of difference, confusion, and feelings of low self-worth. All participants described these feelings throughout data collection and discussed two disclosure processes, one pertaining to themselves and one to others.

**Group.** Throughout interviews and journal reflections, students in the study expressed disclosure of sexual orientation status to a group of people, including friends, family, coworkers, and others. Students in the sample were at various stages of disclosing their sexual orientation to individuals other than themselves. Although disclosure may suggest positive levels of identity integration, doing so requires individuals to acknowledge that their sexual orientation is nonheteronormative and misaligned with expectations from society (Marrs & Stanton, 2016).

Many participants struggled to tell others about their sexuality. In the context of work, disclosure of one’s sexual orientation may cause changes in relationships, including possibly
negative reactions from former friendly or supportive colleagues (DeJordy, 2008). Like many participants, Aaron struggled to find out if he would be able to trust the individuals he chose to share his sexual orientation with. He stated he often asked himself, “Can I be honest about my sexuality with this person?” While open regarding her sexuality at school, Alicia articulated that her sexual orientation is not public knowledge. She stated, “It’s not the first tidbit of information I share with them. If it comes up, I put it out there. I’m not like, hi, I’m Alicia, and I’m bisexual. [laughter]. So, I think a lot of people know, but I wouldn’t say that it’s common knowledge if that makes sense.” However, to remain silent requires individuals to keep important aspects of one’s life separate from coworkers, therefore creating an atmosphere of inauthenticity. Like several other participants in the study, Aaron and Alicia were always in the position of having to determine when interacting with a new colleague. This dilemma may add a level of anxiety that exacerbates work related concerns that could lead to a lack of engagement within the work setting (DeJordy, 2008). Mary discussed difficulty in disclosing her sexual orientation to her family. She stated that while her dad “never really talked about it,” her mom “tries to be more supportive, but I think she just doesn’t know what to do a lot of the time.” Through interviews and journal entries, the participants in this study felt a feeling of insecurity surrounding disclosure of their marginalized sexual orientation identity.

In addition, several participants had little involvement in the larger LGBQ+ New Orleans and campus communities. Beth outright stated, “I truly don’t do any extra curriculars besides live my life, which is full of queer people.” Alicia also does not feel a part of the LGBQ+ community on campus. She states, “for a while no, I kinda felt like this was my own process and I hadn’t ever really felt connected…cause I hadn’t been out. And then, also, I was also, hadn’t been a part of a community at [university name].” Findings from this study suggest that not only
are students struggling to come out to others due to a fear of rejection, but they aren’t taking part in the LGBTQ+ larger community (such as student or community organizations). However, students did talk of other supports they found, primarily with peer groups on their college campuses.

It became apparent through analysis of the data that the participants were at different levels of disclosure regarding their sexual orientation status to others. In all cases, participants had disclosed their sexual orientation to several people within their community, including family, friends, coworkers, or other community members. However, participants acknowledged the difficulties and negative consequences of their disclosure. In addition, all participants were out on their respective college campus, regardless of if they were out to their family. However, several were not involved in LGBTQ+ community organizations.

While participants navigated the coming out process (self and group), they were also aware of the myriad of other identities they possessed. This led to conversations regarding the intersection of various identities, including race, gender, and sexual orientation, among others. This led to the development of another major finding of this study.

“I feel this weird half for everything”: Intersectionality

Participants were acutely aware of the intersectionality that existed between their sexual orientation and other components of their identity, such as race and gender. Intersectionality can be defined as the process in which individuals negotiate competing and harmonious social identities as well as the interactive processes that occur within an individual (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Few-Demo, 2014). Examples can include race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Warner and Shields (2013) stated that while “the individual experiences these intersections as a coherent, individual social identity, intersections also reflect a complex operation of power
relations among social groups” (p. 803-804). These intersections shape the way an individual views and operates in today’s society. However, this intersection of identity may also oppress them from a societal standpoint based on the convergence of these identities. For example, holding a conservative, White, Christian religious, and gay sexual orientation identity may pose challenges. The theoretical underpinning of intersectionality underlies the assumption that identities cannot be experienced and/or studied in silos. Therefore, LGBQ+ individuals may also be faced with the maintenance of multiple identities affecting their career development (Chen & Vollick, 2013).

The concept of intersectionality was born out of the rejection of unitary and multiple approaches (Hancock, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001). The unitary approach focuses on a single category of difference and universalizes the experience of those who fit into that category. Hancock (2007) argued that by solely focusing on one identity, individuals and researchers tend to believe that “one category reigns paramount among others and is therefore justifiably the sole lens of analysis (p. 68). The multiple approach is based on an approach where categories of difference are understood as parallel to one another. Intersecting identities involves the idea that the identities an individual possesses can alter their experiences (Dente, 2015). Thus, there is no one experience that can be common to all LGBQ+ individuals, all women, or all African Americans. Crenshaw (1989) believed that different types of identities overlapped to shape unique experiences of discrimination. Intersectional approaches reveal and address multiple identities, exposing different types of discrimination and disadvantages that happen as a consequence of the combination of identities. In the context of work, intersectionality provides leaders with a framework to explore diversity, promote greater understanding of how converging identities contribute to inequality, and help to avoid the perpetuation of inequality within
organizations. Therefore, exploring dimensions of intersectional identities allow organizations to consider the ways identities intersect with patterns of oppressive policies, behaviors and practices.

Furthermore, intersectionality examines how multiple social identities intersect at the level of individual experience (micro level) to reveal multiple interlocking social inequity at the macro social level (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). Collins and Chepp (2013) stated that the “core idea of intersectional knowledge stresses that systems of power…cannot be understood in isolation from one another; instead, systems of power intersect and coproduce one another to result in unequal material realities and the distinctive social experiences that characterize them (p. 60).” Findings from the study illuminated the multiple identities an individual participant possessed, an acute awareness of the various structures of oppression and the interaction among them. Thus, during data analysis, the researcher examined the non-homogeneity of the sample, the location of individuals within various power structures, and the unique effects of identifying with more than one group.

One participant, Samantha, discussed that her sexual orientation forced her to address multiple components of her identity. She stated that her sexual orientation:

…kind of forced me to grapple with the fact that I’m also a woman and that I can’t keep that under wraps and how I also…that’s also a form of oppression. And then, race. OMG. High school was fun. It was just me dealing with everything. Mixed race and bisexual too. I don’t have a real voice in the community or within the…especially being raised by a white woman. And then, also within the queer community, I felt like I don’t have a real voice. I feel this weird half for everything. So, after going through that, the only thing I could completely identify with was womanhood.
Samantha discussed her challenges with identifying as a mixed race, bisexual woman. She mentioned multiple components of her identity, at times being sarcastic, as to her feeling of oppression in our society towards individuals who are not heterosexual, White males.

Intersectionality has the ability to shape people’s individual and social identities (Shields, 2008). As such, participants in the study were acutely aware of how various components of their identity would impact their experience within their future places of employment. For example, some participants described being able to conceal their sexual orientation, a concept described earlier as “passing.” Interestingly, participants felt that they would be discriminated against based on other aspects of their identity as opposed to their sexuality. However, for those that intended on being out in their professional careers, individuals described how their sexual orientation would interact with their other identities (race, gender, etc.) to make them more susceptible to discrimination. Aaron stated,

And I think..um..to me…my sexual orientation is not a defining part of my identity. I think my race, I think my field of study, and I think that my world views are a lot more defining of who I am as a person.

Aaron is not only aware of the types of identities he possesses, but also of the various forms of discrimination that could occur. Furthermore, Aaron believes he could “pass” in a particular work place by hiding his sexual orientation, if needed.

Ant and Christina both discussed the double negative they encounter identifying as both African American and a member of the LGBQ+ community. Intersectionality is a tool that allows individuals to think systematically about oppression in a broad context and emphasizes individual experiences in an effort to understand privilege and power. Being a member of both communities can sometimes be difficult to navigate. Ant stated, “like, me being black and being
gay at the same time, it’s kind of like a double negative.” Christina agreed, “I think it will be my race. It’s two communities where the Black community can be really homophobic and the LGBT community can be pretty racist.” These statements are congruent with findings from Balsam et al. (2011) and Samo, Mohr, Jackson and Fassinger (2015) that individuals of color with marginalized sexual orientations face higher rates of discrimination and lack of acceptance from either community.

It became apparent through analysis of the data that the participants recognized the intersectionality that existed between many aspects of their identities. In all cases, participants felt they belonged to different communities, struggling to find acceptance. Furthermore, some participants felt they could pass as heterosexual in certain situations to fit in. This finding suggests that participants were not only acutely aware of the many identities they possessed, but also the privileges and stereotypes associated with each one.

“Careers look different to queer students”: Navigating Career as a LGBQ+ Individual

Students in the study discussed how their sexual orientation impacted their decision to pursue their major and career interests, the impact it had on their professional career, and the benefits and challenges associated with identifying as a member of the LGBQ+ community. While participants believed their sexual orientation had little impact on their major selection, they discussed at length some of the challenges they would face in their career as an LGBQ+ individual. These included levels of “outness” in relation to how they experienced the work environment, with a focus on professional relationships and homophobia. In addition, students discussed both the benefits and challenges associated with identifying as a LGBQ+ individual in the workplace. These findings should be considered when discussing the career development of LGBQ+ students.
**Impact on Major Selection.** Participants in the study indicated that their sexual orientation had somewhat to no effect on the decision to pursue their major or career interests. Aaron, Alicia, Mary, Jennifer, Beth, and Christina all believed their sexual orientation did not impact their decision. Aaron stated, “I don’t think it had any impact [laughter].” Jennifer, who openly spoke about how she didn’t know what it meant to be non-heterosexual until after she had declared her major, said “actually, no. When I pursued it, well, like I said, when I was young I did know that I liked men and girls and boys, but I didn’t know what that [sexual orientation] meant.” Samantha and Ant believed that their sexual orientation had at least somewhat of an effect on their decision. Samantha wrote in her journal entry,

> My sexuality had a large part in determining my majors, especially gender and sexuality studies. I wanted to know more about queer theory and its history, so that it would help me make more sense of the future. However, my psychology major had more to do with interest in pursuing a career in business.

Klaire did not say one way or the other, but stated that she hoped she would be employed by an LGBT advocacy group.

No participants in the study concluded that their sexual orientation had a direct impact on their major or career interests. This is somewhat surprising as Schneider and Dimito’s (2010) findings found that students’ sexual orientation impacted their decision to pursue their major and career interests. However, students expressed an awareness of the various challenges associated with possessing a marginalized sexual orientation in a career.

**Impact on Professional Career.** Throughout data analysis, it became apparent that participants recognized their sexual orientation impacted their future career. There were three subthemes that emerged, including level of outness an individual planned to display,
relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and the amount of homophobia/discrimination present in the workplace. In all cases, participants recognized that their sexual orientation would impact their relationship with their employer. However, all participants believed their sexual orientation would not affect their level of job performance. Participants in the study believed there were few benefits associated with openly identifying their sexual orientation. However, Alicia, Aaron, Jennifer, Christina, and Ant all suggested that being LGBQ+ helped to increase the presence of LGBQ+ individuals in a particular organization, therefore raising the amount of diversity in a given field. In addition, they suggested that being LGBQ+ increased their relatability a company may have towards the LGBQ+ population, thus giving the organization a wider appeal of consumers. Christina stated,

Yeah, I think with, especially with like music, say I’m like a performance artist or even like a producer, cause even a lot of producers have a lot of fans…that’s someone that they [LGBQ+ individuals] can identify to. It would give the younger fans someone to look up to. Like, and then, I hate thinking about this but on the business side, that’s more fans you can appeal to. Like, not only are you a producer, and you produce in this certain genre, but your also queer in a way they [LGBQ+ individuals] can identify and relate to you as.

In the quote above, Christina articulates that identifying as a queer individual allows her to be more relatable to those in the queer community. She also discusses being a role model for younger LGBQ+ individuals. Similar to Christina, Alicia states that since she identifies as someone who is a part of the LGBQ+ community, she is more relatable to individuals that share her identities.
I think that it [sexual orientation] have some benefits if only that often, a nonprofit, like, the nonprofit surrounds LGBTQ+ advocacy, and because of that, I’d already been participating in those conversations.

Alicia feels that as a result of her experiences as a bisexual female and the knowledge she possesses surrounding the LGBTQ+ community, she will be more prepared for a career in a nonprofit sector surrounding LGBTQ+ advocacy. Both Christina and Alicia articulated that being an LGBTQ+ individual added a level of relatability to a particular subset of the population.

Many participants waited until the researcher directly asked them how their sexual orientation would impact their professional career. Samantha stated that “I don’t think at this point, that outside a queer institution, it would actually help me that much to be queer.” Findings suggest that the students in this study viewed their level of outness, relationship with colleagues and supervisors, and homophobia/discrimination as three distinct entities as opposed to a complex, intertwined system that interacted and intersected with one another to determine the impact on their professional selves.

**Level of outness.** For LGBTQ+ individuals, the decision to disclose one’s sexual orientation in the workplace is a major psychological decision (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). On one hand, it may be appealing to avoid negative reactions by “passing” or only coming out to select individuals. However, these individuals may face elevated levels of stress and disengagement (DeJordy, 2008). On the other hand, it may be appealing to come out at work. This allows individuals to be more authentic versions of themselves, often having increased levels of self-confidence and higher levels of job satisfaction (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, 2004). Seven participants in the sample stated they would be out and open regarding their sexual
orientation at work, as long as they felt safe to do so. These included Samantha, Klaire, Mary, Jennifer, Beth, Christina, and Ant. Samantha stated,

I’m gonna probably do better in the workplace if I choose to work in a place that tends to be more open and I’d probably just keep it [sexual orientation] on the down low until it got to be a certain point.

Mary echoed those sentiments, stating, “It’s uncomfortable being closeted.” Jennifer describes her level of outness, stating

…knowing me, I’ve just always been an out and open person and when I realized who I am, who I was, and you know, I was able to be out and open with that also. I don’t think it [sexual orientation] means anything. I don’t think anything is going to hinder it [sexual orientation].

It should be noted that two of the participants, Aaron and Alicia, said that it depended on their specific employer on whether or not they would choose to disclose their sexual orientation. They seemed to display a level of caution when disclosing their sexuality. Aaron stated, “Well, it’s not that I would be out, it’s just that I wouldn’t be closeted.” Alicia stated, “Um, I think ideally I’d like to be more [out]. I’d like to be able to feel that way. I would like to…but I don’t know if I’m going to reach that point.”

In all cases, the participants recognized that there may be a correlation between their level of “outness” within the organization and how they were treated. Beth stated, “but, with people with different identities, belonging to one or more marginalized groups, I think there are spaces that are not accepting and not interested in being respectful.” Beth is acutely aware that it is not always safe to be out in some work settings, fearing harassment and discrimination.

Additionally, Beth recognizes that some individuals may have various opinions regarding
LGBQ+ individuals, ranging from ignorance to acceptance. Many participants in the sample recognized that different workplaces place a higher or lower value on members of the LGBQ+ community. For example, Jennifer stated, “you may not get a lot of opportunities as your straight counterparts may because of that [sexual orientation], which is very sad, but true.” In this quote, Jennifer acknowledges the differences in opportunities that exist for heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Participants were not naïve to think discrimination no longer existed with recent advances in the LGBQ+ movement.

None of the participants stated they would be completely closeted in the workplace environment. Aaron captured the essence of participant thought process, “I wouldn’t walk into a job and say…Hey! I like men. But if someone was like, hey, are you seeing someone or I was talking about previous relationships, I would have no qualms about saying the word boyfriend.” Aaron discusses his ability to “pass” but also not hide his sexual orientation should someone ask. Participants grappled with the decision to be true to their identity as a member of the LGBQ+ community knowing the potential impact it could have on their career. Students in the study discussed their relationships with colleagues and supervisors as well as the homophobia and discrimination they could face as out members of the LGBQ+ community. The participants felt the more “out” they were in their work place, the greater the impact it would have on their relationship with colleagues and supervisors as well as the amount of homophobia and discrimination they would experience.

**Relationships with colleagues & supervisors.** Disclosure of sexual orientation has been identified as one of the most critical challenges faced by workers who are LGBQ+ (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). Participants in the study exercised caution when determining whether to disclose their sexual orientation to colleagues and supervisors. In fact, many felt that that they
needed to understand the opinions of their colleagues and supervisors. Mary stated she wanted to “kinda gauge where someone’s opinions are at before you do anything.” Aaron was afraid of telling his coworkers and supervisors due to potential homophobia. He stated “so…I don’t think career wise I’ll have any issue but I think relationship wise I could see the potential of a strain or a sticky relationship forming.” To the participants in the study, disclosure of sexual orientation to a colleague or supervisor meant that they may either be ostracized or embraced within an organization.

In addition, many participants in the study highlighted the fact that sexual orientation was an invisible identity, meaning that they could decide whether to disclose to a particular individual at any given time. Invisible identities are those identities that may not be readily apparent to an outsider (i.e. religion, sexual orientation, gender). As such, LGBQ+ individuals are able to pass as heterosexual. Jennifer articulated this by stating,

Um, honestly…the fact that I’m a black women has come up more than my sexuality because you can see it on someone. So like, ya, the issues I’ve had surrounding my identity have been more about me being a black woman than me being queer. But also, I feel like, to a certain extent, I can hide it because I’m bisexual and I’ve been dating a man since I’ve been here.

Jennifer is easily able to hide her sexual orientation as she is currently dating a man. However, she cannot remove her skin color or her gender as those are visible, outward identities that cannot be concealed.

The students in this study had to decide to come out to individual coworkers and supervisors while anticipating reactions. The students in this sample recognized the double-edged sword of sexual orientation identity disclosure in their career. In the workplace, it is
expected to have some degree of knowledge regarding coworker’s personal lives and it may be considered a critical element in building trust. Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, and Evans (1995) have found that one of the most fundamental motivations for individuals to excel in the workplace is a need to belong to an organization with strong social support. Disclosing one’s sexual orientation may increase trust, build a supportive network, and open opportunities for advancement. However, at the same time, they may face ridicule or discrimination from non-supportive coworkers and supervisors.

It is interesting to note that many participants also discussed the perceived difference in attitudes towards LGBQ+ individuals between younger and older generations. Many felt more comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to those that were in their generation. For example, Aaron stated,

So, I think colleagues wise, most of them will likely be contemporary with me in terms of age so in our generation it’s not a big issue compared to like…my parent’s generation…But my supervisors would most likely fall under the generation where it might be a little taboo.

Beth also stated,

Just because they [older generation] don’t understand. I don’t think the culture they grew up in was as accepting. And maybe not just as accepting. I think they pride normalcy and any deviation from that is some sort of social threat.

In their interviews, Aaron and Beth discussed levels of acceptance of among younger and older generations. Dilley (2010) argued that the generations prior to the millennial generation saw sexual orientation as taboo and a topic not to be discussed. He also argued that with the advent of innovative technology and increased presence,
socialization (either online or person) has become a fast way for the millennial generation to find relatable role models while building communities (Dilley, 2010). Students in this study felt they could be more comfortable and relate more easily with their peers regarding their sexual orientation. This has larger implications for organizations, as they must adapt to a new and more diverse workforce.

Finally, several participants in the study, including Samantha, Aaron, Alicia, Beth, Christina, and Ant all believed that it should be the level of education and qualifications that one brings to their career, as opposed to their sexual orientation, that should determine their relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Aaron stated, “Um, so I think the most impactful thing to me in my career is gonna be my qualifications, right?” Furthermore, Ant stated, “really, I think it’s the skills I learned throughout college that will ultimately affect my relationships with these people.” This suggested to the researcher that the students in this sample are unaware of the value relationships have in a workplace.

Participants in the study seemed to hold a naïve view of how intertwined homophobia/discrimination, level of outness, and relationships with colleagues and supervisors are in the workplace. In addition, it was apparent that many had not given much thought to how their sexual orientation impacted their career development or how their sexual orientation would play a role in their future career. Samantha conceptualized this by stating,

That I’m disappointed. That I knew what the study was but that I didn’t actually think about it much beforehand and actually sat down and talked to myself and be like, okay so like, I’m actually gonna have to do this in life and that I’m very likely going to have to disclose on a regular basis when applying to jobs.
While being open regarding one’s sexual orientation may bring feelings of acceptance and self-worth, closeted workers may employ energy draining strategies to hide their sexual orientation. These may include changing pronouns or leaving out specific portions of a story to conceal the gender of a significant other. Students were articulate in their desire to gauge the level of LGBTQ+ acceptance within their organization before disclosure. Students cited such things such as nondiscrimination policies, diversity trainings, and working with a diverse population to determine if it was safe to come out of the closet.

*Homophobia/discrimination.* Throughout data analysis, the topic of homophobia and discrimination in the work place was repeatedly cited as an area of concern among LGBTQ+ individuals. Homophobia can be defined as a range of negative thoughts or actions towards members of the LGBTQ+ community (Chase & Ressler, 2009). Discrimination was most often discussed in the sense of harassment or lack of advancement opportunities (i.e. promotion). In addition, students felt there was a lack of protections for LGBTQ+ individuals in their career. This is consistent with Table 1.1 where twenty-eight states, including Louisiana, do not offer protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation (Movement Advancement Project, 2016). Regardless of their level of outness and their relationship with their colleagues and supervisors, participants mentioned they would ultimately leave an organization before it became too toxic of an environment. Christina stated, “…like if I can’t be myself or I’m not happy….I would just have to go.” This captures the essence of student’s fears regarding homophobia and discrimination and the workplace. Students in the study felt employers had a responsibility to address this type of behavior and offer professional development surrounding diversity, but would not be afraid to leave should it go unaddressed.

A theme consistent among all participants in the study was the potential
barriers that existed in a work environment because of their sexual orientation. Most notably was the threat of homophobia and discrimination LGBTQ+ individuals may experience in their career, which often took the shape of lack of promotions or unfair distributions of work assignments. Beth believes there are still places that “it is still dangerous” to be a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Ant echoed these sentiments, suggesting that he could easily be attacked for identifying as gay. He stated “people could easily attack you for whatever reason, either for like homophobia or them just like them having a lot of spite because you are gay.” Findings from this study were consistent with much of the literature from Datti (2009), Mobley and Slaney (1996), Morrow (1997), and Schnedier and Dimito (2010). The expectation of being discriminated against is particularly important in people with invisible stigmatized identities because they may not know exactly how others will react when they reveal the identity (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010).

Few participants had direct experience with homophobia and discrimination and thought of it as something that could happen to them rather than something they’ve already experienced. Alicia stated that “I’m still young and a lot of the jobs I’ve had at entry level, it hasn’t been an issue. I don’t know if that’s something I’ll face later on.” Samantha stated that she “believes that I will encounter barriers in the future as I apply to more jobs.” When the researcher pressed further as to where these notions of homophobia and discrimination developed, many students recalled stories of friends that had negative experiences in their career. Mary stated that she would “definitely [talk to] people who have worked there.” This could suggest that peers may play an integral role in the career development process of LGBTQ+ students.

Many individuals were concerned about whether their sexual orientation would limit their chances of obtaining a job in their chosen career field. Students felt that the more open they
were in their career, the greater the impact it may have on the level of homophobia and
discrimination they would face. Alicia stated, “I have been concerned that my sexual orientation
would affect my chances of receiving a job.” Mary echoes these sentiments stating that “besides
workplace hiring and discrimination…I really don’t think so [regarding benefits of being out in
her career]. Probably less freedom to talk about your personal life. I mean, you could just not
get hired.” As a marginalized group, LGBQ+ individuals are vulnerable to employment
discrimination and receive very little protection. Participants in the study looked to identify
employers and organizations that did not openly discriminate. Many aspired to work in
advocacy or non-profit related fields.

“Being queer friendly”: Identifying Employers & The Role of Career Counselors

Through analysis of the data, the researcher found that LGBQ+ students looked to
identify LGBQ+ friendly employers and believed that college career counselors are in a unique
position to help identify these organizations for students. Participants in the study articulated a
number of methods they utilized to identify LGBQ+ friendly organizations, such as researching
websites, exploring office culture, and talking to people in their respective career field. Ant
stated, “I don’t want to enter a job field that is not LGBT friendly and then all of a sudden I don’t
like my workplace and not be comfortable where I am.” In addition, participants agreed that
career counselors need a unique skillset to assist the LGBQ+ population in their major selection
and career development.

Identifying Employers. Participants in the study identified LGBQ+ friendly employers using a
variety of methods. Christina articulated the sentiments of all participants by stating “If it’s an
employer who I do not know whatsoever, I guess I’d have to do some research.” This included
multiple methods, including researching websites, looking at non-discrimination policies,
exploring office culture, and talking to individuals in their respective career paths. Beth articulated this by stating,

And more often than not, there is identifiable representation to see that like this person is here, I’m assuming this person is somehow like me [as a member of a marginalized gender or sexual orientation group]. Um, and I’m able to see that they are able to be here and perform well and I can apply that to me. Um, I also like to hear about people’s personal experiences, especially as it pertains to people like me.

Beth discusses conducting her research by identifying and talking to other LGBQ+ individuals that work for the company. In the quote above, Beth indicates she likes to hear about the personal experiences of her peers. Mary conducted her research by looking at an organization’s website to decide whether an organization was LGBQ+ friendly.

Um, you know, like, generally look at their website. Technically in Louisiana there is a no job discrimination law against queer people as far as I know so places that actually have that in their like, you know, we do not discriminate based on race…blah blah blah blah blah blah…or have sexual orientation or gender identity definitely means they purposely put that as opposed to have to by law.

The quote above suggests that Mary was looking for nondiscrimination policies for people in the LGBQ+ community. Samantha stated, “Google. That would be my go to if I didn’t know someone who already knew something about it.” Samantha describes the importance and expansion of the internet in recent years, allowing individuals to retrieve information instantly. Aaron described exploring workplace office culture by looking for visible symbols or representation of the LGBQ+ community.
If they talk about their boyfriend and they are male. Like, that’s a pretty obvious example. Like, some people have pictures of their family in their offices. You can look at that. A lot of places in higher education specifically in higher education that I know of will have the LGBTQIQ Safespace triangle on their window, so that’s a pretty obvious indicator.

Aaron took a more traditional approach, looking for visual representations while interviewing for a particular position at a company. Many of the participants had various mechanisms for identifying LGBQ+ friendly organizations, however none of them included visiting their Career Services unit or a career counselor.

Participants discussed the mechanisms utilized to identify LGBQ+ friendly organizations. This suggests that students are acutely aware that potential employers have different levels of acceptance and value among towards LGBQ+ employees that may or may not be clear at first. However, the methods discussed above were all self-directed. Participants suggested that career counselors currently did not, but could play an integral role in helping to identify LGBQ+ friendly organizations.

**The Role of Career Counselors.** Participants in the study believed that college career counselors are in a unique position to help LGBQ+ students in their career development. They believed a specific skillset was needed to assist LGBQ+ individuals, including having a knowledge of sexual orientation identity development and knowledge of LGBQ+ friendly employers. Klaire stated that career counselors need to understand that “there are so many reasons why the typical career that they would point students in would not work for queer people.” Furthermore, Aaron wanted career counselors to “have a knowledge of the queer community so they can use it to their disposal.” These sentiments are consistent with all
participants throughout the study that felt career counselors could do a better job identifying LGBQ+ friendly employers.

In regard to identity development, Jennifer stated,

So basically, you can’t treat a queer person like a straight person because they don’t have the same opportunities and they don’t go through the same struggles. So like, I feel like a counselor needs to understand. Even like me, I feel like I need to understand it or it’s a struggle. So, I feel like they need that, they need that training, that education, that knowledge. Ya. Training and knowledge of the queer community.

Jennifer’s quote above highlights the difference in identity development between heterosexual and homosexual couples that career counselors should be aware of. For heterosexual individuals, their sexual orientation falls within the dominant paradigm established by a culture of heteronormativity. Christina also acknowledged that sentiment, by stating “they kind of need to have empathy because you never know where the person is coming from and why they want to major in that. It’s like a sense of open-mindedness they need to have.” Ant believed “they need to be open minded, that’s my biggest thing.” Possessing a sense of empathy and understanding of the struggles faced by the LGBQ+ community were among the top skills identified from this study.

Furthermore, participants believed career counselors should be aware of LGBQ+ friendly organizations. Samantha believed that career counselors should not only be aware of specific needs of the LGBQ+ population, but also which organizations may be more accepting. She stated career counselors should “know which ones [organizations] are safe to work at or have benefits. You know, I guess just knowing which businesses are more accepting of that [being LGBQ+].” By doing so, career counselors would be able to assist students in their major and
career selection. Furthermore, Alicia thinks students would find it “helpful if they [career counselors] could go over, if they had a means of what is queer friendly, like do that.” Mary suggested developing a system where “former students report back about their workplaces and kind of rank them” to assist career counselors of various workplace cultures and values. This suggest that career counselors must be aware of which fields may be more open and accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals.

It should be noted that only one of the nine participants, Christina, regularly sought career guidance from a member of the Career Services team on her campus. While other participants were aware that Career Services were available on their college campus, they did not take advantage of their services. Participants chose only to visit Career Services when required for a class assignment. However, none of the participants in the study outright stated that the reasons they did not attend their Career Services unit on their respective campus was linked directly to their sexual orientation.

Conclusion

Findings from this study helped to identify the role sexual orientation has on the career development of LGBTQ+ students. The researcher provided support for these findings from the data analyzed in interviews and journal entries. Participants discussed their coming out process, intersectionality of their identities, the impact sexual orientation had on their major and career selection, how they identified LGBTQ+ friendly employers, and the skills necessary for career counselors on college campuses.

All students in the study underwent a coming out process with themselves and others. It was often described as an emotional, ongoing process with lasting effects on the individual and their communities. This finding was consistent with many of the sexual orientation identity
formation models to date (Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998). While sexual orientation had little to no impact on students’ major selection in college, findings suggested that it did impact their career development with respect to their professional selves. The more out a student was anticipating being in their career, the greater concern they felt when considering their relationships with colleagues and supervisors as well as the level of discrimination they may face within the organization. This finding suggests that students are acutely aware of not only their sexual orientation but the varying degrees of acceptance an organization may have on LGBTQ+ individuals. Students also cited the lack of protections for members of the LGBTQ+ community within various states and careers. Furthermore, participants in the study discussed coping mechanisms and strategies for dealing with these concerns, including leaving an organization. Finally, participants suggested that they had many mechanisms for identifying LGBTQ+ friendly organizations. One such mechanism, utilizing career counselors, called on counselors to understand the various forms of work discrimination, their effect, and the various forms of coping strategies that correspond to the individual needs and self-efficacy of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Chapter 5 will offer a discussion of these findings, implications for policy, and limitations of the study. Furthermore, it will offer a critical analysis of the interaction of these findings and the impact that sexual orientation has on LGBTQ+ individual’s career development. It will conclude with offering a summary of this phenomenological study as well as opportunities for further research.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of LGBQ+ college students in their career development. Through this study, the researcher examined the impact sexual orientation had on major and career selection. Because sexual orientation identity and vocational identity development often occur at the same time, these processes may exert influences on each other (Chen et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1997; Morrow, 1997). The results of this study suggest that the experiences and preconceived notions of being LGBQ+ in a particular career influence career choice and behavior. Furthermore, the findings provide suggestions on the role career counselors could play in the career development of LGBQ+ students. This chapter will offer a discussion of the findings coupled with recommendations, implications for theory and practice, and conclude with opportunities for future research.

Coming Out

Results from this study indicate that the process of coming out is still a significant developmental task. Despite recent legislation, executive action, and a push for inclusivity on college campuses nationwide, challenges in identifying as a LGBQ+ individual remain (HR Focus, 2013). Coming out is described by Rust (2003) as the “process by which individuals come to recognize that they have romantic or sexual feelings towards members of their own gender, adopt a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity, and then share these identities with others” (p. 227). This process can be emotional and often begins with individuals who are deemed safe, such as allies, friends, and family members. Alicia felt the process was “complicated” while Jennifer described it as a “painful, hard time.” Klaire suggested that the process was “especially alienating because there wasn’t anyone else in the group that was questioning things.” However,
many LGBQ+ individuals have fears of rejection, isolation, and discrimination that often prevent them from disclosing their sexual orientation status to others (Chaney & Dew, 2003; Guigliamo, 2006; Flowers & Buston, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1995). Samantha stated, “people are like, no, don’t worry about it [sexual orientation], they are totally okay with it but it’s never 100% true.” As a result of heterosexism and these fears, LGBQ+ individuals often face the challenge of selecting if, when, and who to disclose their identity status.

Coming out in the workplace has been identified as one of the most difficult decisions made by LGBQ+ individuals (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, Singh, and Cornewell, 2007). According to Creed and Scully (2000), people who disclose their sexual orientation usually do so to support a coherent sense of self-identity, find support from others, build relationships with others, or to influence social change. Those who choose to pass often do so to intentionally manage their public identity and to avoid potentially negative outcomes associated with coming out (DeJordy, 2008). Participants in this study discussed the interesting dichotomy that exists between those two factors. Mary wrote, “I like to go into situations and gauge a person’s opinion before I give them that sort of opinion.” LGBQ+ participants displayed varying degrees of outness regarding their sexual orientation in private and public settings. As such, participants were constantly assessing their environments and interactions before displaying levels of their authentic self. For example, Beth felt that there were still places it was “dangerous” to be out. However, Ant stated, “I rather be authentic than lie to someone.” Fassinger’s (1998) model accounts for this dichotomy by allowing individuals to be at different stages of development in regard to their sexual orientation development in their private and public selves.

Identity development models have long provided a framework for individuals to conceptualize the process LGBQ+ individuals must go through as they move from initial
awareness and confusion to pride (Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998). These models help to articulate the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal implications LGBQ+ individuals may face with a marginalized sexual orientation. All models suggest that coming out is a fundamental component through which identity integration and authenticity can be achieved (Hunter, 2007; Matthews, 2007; Marrs & Stanton, 2016). However, not all models suggest a linear trajectory. Participants in the study provided support for the notion of an identity model that fluctuated between self and group while weaving in and out different stages of development. Furthermore, interviews with participants revealed that they are already thinking about their sexual orientation and the coming out process in relation to their future places of employment. Several participants, such as Alicia, were unsure of the impact it would have on their professional career. Participants discussed organizational culture and climate, as well as relationship with colleagues and supervisors, as the determining factor of the level of outness they would display in their future career. Other participants, such as Klaire, sought to be careful in the personal life experiences they shared with other individuals (both at home and work). Ant and Mary were nervous about interviewing and were hesitant about putting LGBQ+ related things (such as projects and volunteer work) on their resume. These examples demonstrate that students are already thinking about their sexual orientation in regards to their professional selves.

Findings from this study are consistent with Fassinger’s (1998) coming out model of a private and public identity (See Table 1.2). In all interviews, participants discussed a process of coming out to themselves and to others. This involves internal awareness of acceptance of being an LGBQ+ individual while exploring what it means to be LGBQ+ in mainstream society. Parallels between Fassinger’s (1998) coming model can be drawn. First, participants articulated a need to come out to themselves. This meant having an awareness that their sexual orientation
was not heterosexual. Through analysis of the data, the researcher concluded that, apart from Klaire, all participants in the study are in Fassinger’s (1998) deepening commitment stage. These individuals had a relatively coherent understanding of one’s thoughts, feelings, and desires towards members of the same sex. In addition, it took the form of discussions with LGBQ+ individuals, attending social events, or having sexual interactions with other members of the LGBQ+ community. Second, also consistent with Fassinger’s (1998) model, many participants explored the idea of having to disclose their sexual orientation to family, friends, coworkers, and others. Participants often discussed their fear of backlash, discrimination, or homophobia because of disclosing their marginalized orientation. Through analysis of the data, the researcher concluded that all participants were in the exploration phase of Fassinger’s model. This consisted of conscious, intentional evaluation, and an active search for information regarding the LGBQ+ community, particularly in the workplace. Fassinger (1998) stated that during this stage, individuals’ assessment of attitudes toward being LGBQ+ may be highly convoluted and emotionally difficult. This was demonstrated in almost every interview with each participant.

Fassinger’s (1998) model allows for an individual to be in different phases of development with each of the two processes, but that development in one branch could influence development in the other. The findings from this study suggest that participants are in the deepening commitment stage of self and exploration stage of group. This can prove to be a challenge to LGBQ+ individuals struggling to find congruency between their private and public selves. Meyer (2003) suggested that decisions about disclosure and concealment are made while considering “fear of discrimination on one hand and a need for self-integrity on the other” (p.682). Failure to disclose creates a level of inauthenticity that could generate stress and dissonance (DeJordy, 2008). However, disclosing sexual orientation status allows individuals to
create higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). This is especially poignant in an individual’s career where they must face questions regarding disclosure on a regular basis with coworkers, supervisors and others.

Surprisingly, the concept of intersectionality arose among several of the participants in the study. Intersectionality can be described as a framework for describing how multiple social identities intersect at the level of individual experience (Davis, 2008). It also captures the idea that social identities constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another creating both oppression and/or opportunity for the individual (Ashmore, Deaux, McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). Participants in the study discussed possessing other visible identities, such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Specifically, individuals discussed the intersection between those identities and their sexual orientation status. Possessing multiple, marginalized identities compounded their perceived level of prejudice and discrimination when thinking about their career selves. According to Veenstra (2012), these identities have various degrees of inequality associated with them thus having an enhanced effect on the experiences of oppression an individual may face. As a cisgendered, White, female individual, Mary felt that she is “catered more so” than a “queer person of color.” Christina stated that her identity as a cisgendered, black, lesbian individual caused individuals to be both “homophobic and racist.” As such, participants often articulated the need to hide or “pass” their sexual orientation as they anticipated facing unfair systemic structures such as racism and sexism within their organization. Being open and out regarding their sexual orientation compounds these systematic structures.

Within the last decade, the concept of intersectionality has received increasing attention in psychology and other fields (Cole, 2009b; Earnshaw, Bogard, Dovidio, & Williams, 2013;
Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010; Townsend, 2008). However, despite an increase in research on individuals with multiple identities, progress in this scholarly area has been hampered by a focus on variables related to a single identity (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Bilge, 2013; Bowleg, Burkholder, Teti, & Craig, 2009; Cole, 2009b; Collins, 2015; May, 2015). This approach, applied in a flexible manner, allows researchers to study how an array of identities and associated power dynamics shape individuals’ life experience (Davis, 2008). As such, the intersection of identities with sexual orientation should be incorporated into future coming out models. The intersection among various identities may provide insight into different experiences with power and privilege in relation to the coming out process. However, some researchers find it especially difficult to navigate studies from an intersectional approach citing concerns regarding causality and diminished exploration of particular identities in favor of broader samples (Cole, 2009a; Warner, 2008). Furthermore, researchers find it difficult to utilize the concept of intersectionality in quantitative contexts because experiences of multiple identities cannot be measured by statistical interactions (Bright, Malinsky, & Thompson, 2016; Dubrow, 2008). Future research should explore paradigms and research designs for incorporating intersectionality of identities utilizing both qualitative and quantitative means.

Researchers must continue to develop models of sexual orientation identity development that address the experience of LGBQ+ individuals. Because most individuals are presumed to be heterosexual, an unfair burden will continue to be placed on LGBQ+ individuals regarding timing of disclosure and potential implications (Adams, 2011; Manning, 2009). Investigating the coming out process will help individuals possess a better understanding of the unique needs of LGBQ+ people. Heterosexual allies, equipped with the coming out process of LGBQ+ individuals, can help to educate others, speak out against homophobia, and be a role model of
acceptance (Ji & Fujimoto, 2013; Marine, 2014; Rostosky, Riggle, Black, & Rosenkrantz, 2015)
In addition, by better understanding the coming out process, organizations can take necessary steps to foster environments, which are supportive and encouraging of different sexual orientations. Organizations may create support groups, offer trainings, and encourage the intersection of identities to diversify their workforce (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012; Morrow et al., 1996). By doing so, LGBTQ+ individuals can demonstrate congruency in their personal and vocational self, thus promoting higher rates of self-confidence and workplace satisfaction (Prati & Pietrantoni, 2013).

**Selection of a Major**

The researcher hypothesized at the beginning of the study that sexual orientation would impact a LGBTQ+ individual’s major selection and career interest. Much of the literature to date has found that students often make decisions about future careers based on self-efficacy and real or imagined barriers (Lent et al., 1994; Russon & Schmidt, 2014). Because LGBTQ+ individuals continue to experience challenges on campus and in their career, the researcher believed that these students would have lower levels of self-efficacy and higher levels of perceived barriers; therefore, having an impact on a student’s decision to pursue a particular major or career path (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002; Lent et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2007 Ng et al., 2012; Rheineck 2005). The researcher further hypothesized that these perceived career barriers that would cause LGBTQ+ individuals to underestimate their abilities and overlook career options (Novakovic & Gnilka, 2015). Surprisingly, participants in the study indicated that their sexual orientation had somewhat to no effect on their decisions to pursue their major or career. This finding could have resulted for several reasons.
First, LGBQ+ individuals are coming out of the closet as early as high school, having more time to come to terms with their sexual orientation. Coming out often occurs first to self around 15-16 years of age, then to others at 17 years old, and finally to parents between 18-23 years old (Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006). Participants in the study roughly followed this same time line. By coming out at a younger age, LGBQ+ individuals can develop strong support systems with adults and peers, access information that reduce stereotypes, and learn about influential LGBQ+ leaders (Bernal & Coolhart, 2005; Riley, 2010). These mechanisms can help LGBQ+ individuals negotiate challenges associated with their identity, including discrimination and homophobia, thus making them more confident in their decision-making skills (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

Second, homosexuality has become more accepted in the workplace, allowing gays and lesbians to be more open about their sexuality at work. Several participants felt the millennial generation was more accepting of LGBQ+ individuals. Many college-educated heterosexual adults are very accepting of their LGBQ+ counterparts, count them among their friends, and expect that employers treat them with respect (Baunauch, 2011; Broido, 2004; Flores, 2014; Jones, Cox, & Navarro-Rivera, 2014; Marine, 2014). Results from the Pew Research Center survey indicated that 54% support same-sex marriage as compared to 31% in 2004 (Pew Research Center, 2014). In addition, support for laws and policies that permit same-sex couples to create families through marriage or adoption is more likely among millennials (Dimock, Doherty & Kiley; 2013; Jones et al., 2014). Baunauch (2011) and Silver (2013) argued that these changes in attitudes and opinion have changed as the millennial generation reaches adult age and replaces older generations. Between 1950 and 1980, LGBQ+ individuals were forced to live secret lives, often remaining “in the closet” to protect a heterosexual persona. Intolerance and
anti-sodomy laws prompted LGBQ+ individuals to stay closeted and invisible much of the time (D’Emilio, 1983). However, given a recent drastic shift in public opinion, coupled with executive and legislative actions, equality for LGBQ+ individuals have increased, allowing the United States to dismantle structures that promote heteronormativity (Hall, 2010; Orzechowicz, 2016). Mary captured the sentiment of participants in the study stating, “I don’t think that at this point in our history that I would be denied a job or anything.” Aaron stated, “my supervisors would most likely fall under the generation where it might be a little taboo, but like, they know that if they out against about it [sexual orientation] they are gonna be labeled as a homophobe.” While hostile environments still exist, organizations are adapting to become more “gay friendly” (Giuffre et al., 2008). Seidman (2002) has noted that the number of organizations that have emerged as prejudice against LGBQ+ individuals has lessened. For example, organizations have created inclusive diversity councils, LGBQ+ networks, integrating LGBQ+ individual’s voices in training and development, and creating specific unions that represent LGBQ+ individuals (Bell, Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Surgevil, 2011; Johnston & Malina, 2008). In a study conducted by Giuffre et al. (2008), respondents reported that gay friendly organizations made them feel safe and supportive. These settings attempt to eradicat homophobia and openly recruit individuals from varying backgrounds (Giuffre et al., 2008; Seidman, 2002; Johnston & Malina, 2008).

The third and most profound hypothesis may be that students are surrounded and immersed in supportive environments that allow them to express themselves in an authentic way. An open and accepting climate, in addition to available support systems, may facilitate the search of self-identity. Savin-Williams (2015) argued that today’s LGBQ+ adolescents may not feel homophobic stigmatization to the extent of previous generations. According to Yost & Gilmore, (2011), the increase in LGBQ+ rights and recognition has had an enormous impact on younger
generations. Millennial students can be out, develop communities, and seek out role models (Cox, Vanden Berghe, Dewacle, & Vincke, 2009; Friedman & Morgan, 2009; Higa et al., 2014). While no federal law currently protects LGBTQ+ students, many institutions include “sexual orientation” in their non-discrimination policies (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). In addition, institutions have enacted more inclusive mission statements, open recruitment of diverse students, and dedicated resource centers dedicated to marginalized populations (Cegler, 2012; Hackimer & Proctor, 2014; Miceli, 2005; Windmeyer, 2006; Woodford, Kolb, Durocher-Radeka, Javier, 2014; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). If students are raised in supportive environments, they may not feel the tensions and challenges associated with a marginalized identity, including homophobia and discrimination (Darwich, Hymel, & Waterhouse, 2012; Hackimer & Proctor, 2015; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russel, 2010). LGBTQ+ individuals who are supported by peers, parents, and educators may have less of a chance of being negatively affected because of their sexual orientation. Alicia stated that being on a college campus, knowing that other LGBTQ+ existed, “made me feel like I really belonged.” Students’ perceptions of their school environment have been linked to students’ academic and social success (Birkett et al., 2009; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Therefore, when it comes to selecting a major or a career path, they unknowingly and often wrongly assume that other environments may be LGBTQ+ friendly.

Finally, it is important to remember that sexual orientation is an invisible identity that can be hidden. The option to hide one’s sexual orientation is often used strategically within organizations to protect themselves from homophobia, discrimination, and inadequate protections (Creed, 2003). LGBTQ+ students were more acutely aware of identities that they couldn’t hide, such as age, race and ethnicity. Aaron captures this idea by stating, “I can hide my
sexual orientation, but I can’t hide that I’m not white.” According to Dworkin & Dworkin (1999), visible attributes are more easily accessible to use in the decision making, stereotyping, and categorizing at work than those that are visible. The researcher hypothesized that because LGBTQ+ individuals can hide their sexuality, it would not impact their career related decisions. Current research is focused almost exclusively on visible social identities (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005; DeJordy, 2008). This is because visible identities are derived from the fact that they are visibly marked on the body itself, determining the way we perceive and judge others and are judged by them (Alcoff, 2006). Findings from the study also suggested that participants chose their major based on their interests and desire to be authentic while cultivating an openness in relationships with colleagues. This suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals would rather be true to themselves than to pretend to be someone they are not. While results of this study indicate that sexual orientation did not impact an LGBTQ+ individual’s selection of major or career path, it did have an impact on the way they were thinking about their professional selves in their career, particularly as it related to relationships with colleagues and discrimination in their career.

**Level of Outness in Relation to Career Development**

Findings from the study suggested that the more open an LGBTQ+ individual was with their sexual orientation, the more they perceived homophobia and discrimination to occur from coworkers and supervisors. While findings from Giuffre et al. (2008), Seidman (2002), and Johnston and Malina (2008) suggest that organizations may be more open and accepting towards LGBTQ+ individuals since the turn of the century, it does not mean that all organizations are free from discrimination and harassment towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Additionally, it does not mean that the perception of the levels of homophobia and discrimination LGBTQ+ individuals have of coworkers or employers have changed. Homophobia and discrimination can manifest itself in
access to jobs (hiring, salaries, etc.) and treatment in the workplace (harassment or violence). Participants felt that the more open they were, the less accepted they would become amongst colleagues. This was especially true if they were new to an organization, as they were unaware of workplace culture and varying opinions of homosexuality. According to Quinn and Chaudoir (2009), anticipated discrimination results in a loss of confidence and self-esteem. Participants who were open with their sexuality worried they would encounter heightened levels of discrimination, lack of assignments or potential termination from their place of employment. This is consistent with literature from Chung (2001), Chung, Williams and Dispenza (2009) and Lyons, Brenner, & Fassinger (2005). Results indicated that anticipated discrimination moderated the relationships between LGB employees’ disclosure of their sexual identity and job satisfaction. However, that did not seem to deter seven of the nine participants from stating they intended to be fully out in their career.

To disclose that one is a member of the LGBQ+ community is to announce an association with a group that has been historically devalued and even persecuted by society at large (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). Furthermore, many participants in the study identified barriers to success, including coming out to self and others, discrimination and homophobia. These can be thought of as barriers to assessing and succeeding in various careers. Fassinger (1995) and Griffith & Hebl (2002) have suggested that disclosure of sexual orientation leads LGBQ+ individuals to achieve congruence in their private and public self, establish closer relationships with coworkers and supervisors and avoid negative cognitive effects. Disclosure may also reduce stigma while helping to educate others about the LGBQ+ community (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002). However, negative influences surrounding disclosure, such as discrimination and harassment, can occur (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002; Ragins,
Some participants in the study suggested concealing the identities and genders of their partners, concealing pictures of significant others, and choosing not to bring their partner to organizational gatherings as mechanisms to pass in their workplace. Participants felt that they would first have to be closeted or selective with whom they disclosed their sexual orientation. Interestingly, participants in the study felt that it should be their qualifications, rather than their identity, that should determine their relationship with colleagues and supervisors. Aaron stated, “so I think the most impactful thing to me in my career is gonna be my qualifications.” The LGBQ+ individuals in the study suggested they did not want to work in a homophobic work environment and would take the necessary action steps to prevent it. This included meeting with supervisors should discrimination occur and follow the necessary Human Resource policies and procedures for addressing such issues. Ant said he would take cases of discrimination to his “supervisor or whatever. But if the supervisor feels the exact same way as the other person, then what’s really going on? I may have to make a couple phone calls to the higher ups to tell them.” Many students in the study stated they would ultimately leave the organization should they not be able to be comfortable in their work environment.

This study provided insight into student thoughts and attitudes regarding coming out in the workplace along with their perceived levels of homophobia and discrimination. The question of coming out at work was a complex one, with many participants citing a variety of factors, including timing, culture, and fear of backlash (Datti, 2009; Mobley & Slaney, 1996; Morrow, 1997; Schnedier & Dimito, 2010). Students who participated in the study were acutely aware that the level of outness they displayed in future career fields would impact future relationships with their employer. Such attention is warranted as organizations become aware of the importance of growing diversity. Additionally, organizations should pay greater attention to
their policies and procedures, which may have a direct impact on job satisfaction and organizational outcomes (Everly & Schwarz, 2015; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). Future research should be conducted to determine the experience of LGBQ+ individuals coming out in the workplace.

**Implications for Theory & Practice**

The following study provided a framework for understanding the implications for theory and practice associated with student’s sexual orientation and career development. Findings provided support for theoretical implications utilizing the conceptual framework of the social cognitive career theory (SCCT). In addition, the researcher provides recommendations for policy and practice on college campuses when working with LGBQ+ students in their career development.

**Implications for Theory: Career Development Theory & Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Career counselors help students to acquire skills to investigate careers and achieve future goals while helping them to understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, and training (ASCA, 2004). Everyone seeking career counseling brings a unique set of personal characteristics and life experiences (Swanson & Fouad, 2010). Because work plays a central role in most people’s lives, career counselors need to understand the crucial impact these characteristics and experiences have on LGBQ+ individual’s implementation of career goals. While possessing a LGBQ+ identity did not have a direct impact on the individual’s selection of major, it is evident that it impacted the way they thought about their future career. This should be taken into further consideration as the researcher explores the theoretical implications on current career development theories.
Results from this study indicate that sexual orientation bears no relation to the type of career an LGBQ+ individual selects. Therefore, current models should move away from pigeon-holing an LGBQ+ individual into a particular career because it appears to be more LGBQ+ friendly. Instead, participants in this study articulated facing several perceived barriers once they were already in an organization. This is not to suggest that identity does not play a factor in career development but rather it impacts the way LGBQ+ students perceive themselves in future careers. Findings suggest that LGBQ+ individuals are thinking about their level of outness in relation to their interactions with colleagues and supervisors and the potential level of discrimination they may encounter in their career. New career development models should take into account environmental differences and congruency (Holland, 1997; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2013). This environmental information is important, as behavior is dependent on both personality and the context of the individual (Button, 2003; Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000; Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Congruent environments may provide an opportunity for individuals to use their skills and interest in a manner that is conducive to the organization. Therefore, it is important that career counselors be aware of these perceived barriers in each career field to help develop coping strategies for LGBQ+ individuals in college.

Future career developmental models for LGBQ+ individuals should recognize identity development as a core function of the career development process. While sexual orientation identity development did not have a specific impact on an individual’s choice of major, the process of coming out at work was discussed at length in the interviews. Incorporating the coming out aspect of sexual orientation identity into future models may help LGBQ+ individuals start to think about potential implications of being out in a future career. By doing so, LGBQ+ individuals can be more confident in their career related decision making processes.
Additionally, incorporating sexual orientation as part of career development models allows educators to explore issues related to both identity development and career development simultaneously. The process of identity development is important to consider because it can influence how LGBTQ+ individuals will react to their environments and develop cognitively, interpersonally, and interpersonally (Evans et al., 2010). This may help counselors to determine if the individual is feeling the effects of the bottleneck hypothesis while seeking support navigating the intersection of sexual orientation and career development. The bottleneck hypothesis suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals cope with career development and related tasks at a slower pace than their heterosexual counterparts because they are simultaneously dealing with a marginalized sexual orientation (Datti, 2009). Failing to include identity development puts educators at risk of not meeting students’ needs by ignoring issues such as level of outness and discrimination, two themes that emerged from this study. If students are struggling with such identity related tasks in college, they surely will have to navigate these facets in a future career. Participants in the study echoed those sentiments and suggested that all career counselors should be aware of identity development models.

Second, specific attention is given to the social cognitive career development as it served as the conceptual framework for this study. Lent et al. (1994, 2002) proposed that demographic and individual differences variables (such as sexual orientation) interact with background and contextual variables to influence learning experiences that play a role in the formation of self-efficacy beliefs. These background and contextual variables help to explain why an individual does or does not pursue an area in which they have a strong interest and can serve as perceived barriers to entry to a particular career field. In the case of sexual orientation, it appears to impact an individual once in their career as opposed to decisions regarding major sooner. Counselors
should work to help clients consider factors such as timing and manner of coming out. For instance, clients who are uncertain about colleagues and supervisor responses may wish to spend more time thinking about the disclosure. Counselors can also help clients who no longer wish to pass think through the advantages and disadvantages of coming out directly (Griffin, 1991; Lipkin, 2003).

While sexuality did not impact an LGBQ+ individual’s decision to pursue a particular major, it did impact the manner in which they thought about the experience in their future career. Participants in the study felt that the more they disclosed their sexual orientation to others, the higher the amount of perceived discrimination they would encounter in their career. This led to lower levels of self-efficacy within their given career path (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002; Lent et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2007 Ng et al., 2012; Rheineck 2005). The social cognitive career theory was proven to serve as an effective model of career development for LGBQ+ individuals as it takes into account personal inputs (such as sexual orientation) in career development. Under this model, career counselors should work to identify foreclosed options, reevaluate and modify efficacy beliefs (Swanson & Foad, 2010). In the case of LGBQ+ individuals, counselors should work with students to identify underlying assumptions of coming out in the workplace, exploring relationships with colleagues and supervisors and determining levels of discrimination previously experienced. Finally, counselors should work with clients to help evaluate whether their perceptions of barriers are based on a realistic appraisal of the environment. Findings from this study suggest that students would greatly benefit from a counselor who utilizes the SCCT model of career development as it takes into consideration their LGBQ+ identity, perceived barriers and potential future careers (Lent et al., 2004).
Finally, the researcher would like to note that educators and counselors should be cautious in the use of theory in practice. While theory can provide a view of how students grow and develop in and out of the classroom, there are limitations to its use. Evans et al. (2010) and Parker, Widick and Knefelkamp (1978) described three cautions in utilizing theory. First, theories are descriptive and do not indicate what behaviors or actions are best for students. Second, students are unique individuals and therefore theory cannot be applied universally. Finally, educators must avoid the tendency to view students as inert individuals who can be manipulated to take desired directions.

**Implications for Practice**

**Campuses.** Institutions across the nation must embrace an inclusive and accepting LGBTQ+ culture. Sue Rankin (2003) suggests that “a welcoming and inclusive environment is grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue and evidenced by a pattern of social interaction” (p. 38). While educational institutions recognize that the LGBTQ+ population in their schools continue to grow, research indicates that acts of discrimination, homophobia and bullying continue at high rates (Rankin, 2005, 2006; Mobley & Dimito, 2006; Stayhorne et al., 2015). Discrimination has been shown to be associated with negative outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals, including depressive symptoms (Huebner, Nemeroff, & Davis, 2005), psychological distress (Diaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004), and participation in risky behaviors (Diaz et al., 2004). These negative environments may cause developmental delays among students, particularly in relation to their identity. Because college degree attainment is a significant milestone in the United States, it is critical that educators work to support students’ retention, integration and success (Sanlo, 2004). LGBTQ+ students facing discrimination and harassment are at risk for negative school attitudes and lower grade point averages than heterosexual students (Birkett et al., 2009;
Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2003). This may discredit some LGBQ+ students from employment if employers require minimum grade point averages. Several policies and practices should be implemented to help LGBQ+ students reach their full academic, social and personal potential.

One way to affirm the existence of LGBQ+ students is through the creation of nondiscriminatory polices that include sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. According to Strayhorn et al. (2015), policymakers across various levels and sectors have an opportunity to formulate, enact, revise, and remove policies that affect the academic and social success of LGBQ+ students. Protections against harmful behaviors or attitudes against LGBQ+ individuals create a welcoming environment and establishes inclusion. Chun (2011) argues that the development of policy protects individuals from marginalized communities from differential treatment. In addition, nondiscrimination policies provide recourse for LGBQ+ individuals who may experience discrimination and harassment on campus. These policies and procedures may help to keep an LGBQ+ student on the path towards college degree completion, ultimately securing a high-level job after graduation. A collaborative effort taken by policymakers, administration and students would foster an environment that communicates the values and beliefs of education. Making a strong statement about the institution’s commitment to diversity and inclusion would help to create conditions that support success for all LGBQ+ students.

Statements and policies that are inclusive of sexual orientation provide LGBQ+ individuals with recourse should they be discriminated against as well as reaffirms their acceptance and inclusion within an organization. As such, it may prime LGBQ+ students to look for these related policies and procedures in future organizations in which they consider working.
Finally, the future of the United States workforce may have a better understanding and appreciation of the purpose of such nondiscrimination policy in workplaces. It would help to create a generation of allies towards the LGBQ+ community. Ant stated, “I need to know my company is going to take my side in that situation [discrimination] and suggested that companies “put stuff in place to make sure nothing like that happens.” One such example of nondiscriminatory policy enactment is the Equality Act of 2015 introduced in the 114th United States Congress by Representative David Cicilline in July 2015. This bill, if passed, would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include protections that ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It has not yet been reintroduced in the 115th Congress. While the introduction of this Act is monumental, more work is needed to offer protections to the LGBQ+ population and educational institutions should start to enact their own non-discriminatory policies.

While nondiscrimination policies are an important first step towards the inclusion of LGBQ+ individuals, bullying should be addressed as well. Types of bullying include physical, verbal, psychological, and ostracism. Findings from this study suggest that students encountered this type of harassment growing up within their community. Klaire found her experience at her institution to be “weirdly alienating” while Christina’s mom “didn’t understand.” Mary’s experience “wasn’t great” once she came out of the closet. These experiences highlight the struggles LGBQ+ individuals experience coming out. According to the Human Rights Campaign (2015), about one quarter of LGBT students from elementary to high school are victims of bullying while at school. Furthermore, LGBT minority students report more bullying and sexual harassment than their heterosexual peers (Saewyc, Poon, Wang, Homma, & Smith, 2007). Research also suggests that homophobic bullying is pervasive, insidious and starts early.
(Mallon, 2001; Solomon and Russel, 2004). As Strayhorn et al. (2015) suggested, high rates of bullying in elementary, middle, and high school among GLBQ youth is troublesome because of the association that is created between schools and bullying. This may lead to lower levels of self-efficacy and higher dropout rates, thus potentially impacting the type of careers LGBQ+ individuals are qualified (Chung, 2011). To limit the amount of bullying that occurs on school grounds, educators should take proactive approaches such as increasing education and the creation of non-toleration policies. If it is allowed and condoned in school settings, individuals may believe that it is acceptable behavior in work settings.

It is imperative that educational institutions provide the support and resources for LGBQ+ students do be successful. One such avenue for this is through the creation of LGBQ+ student organizations and resource centers. These organizations seek to create a safe haven for those individuals who identify as part of the community and provide a presence (Walls et al., 2010). In addition, individuals can discuss similar experiences (such as coming out) in a nonthreatening environment (Beemyn, 2003; Tatum, 1997). Typically, these organizations are supported and funded by the institution. Institutions having LGBQ+ student organizations have been linked to better campus climates and lower rates of LGBQ+ victimization (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). Furthermore, these organizations can assist in the career development of LGBQ+ students. First, it allows LGBQ+ students to understand the value of support systems with an organization. Through positive experiences, LGBQ+ members may be empowered to start similar types of organizations once they reach their career. Second, it allows LGBQ+ individuals the opportunity to explore their identity in relation to a group of individuals, a central component of Fassinger’s (1998) coming out model. Recall that findings from this study suggest that LGBQ+ students are acutely aware of the level of
outness they will have to display within their career and the impact it has on their professional selves. Third, LGBQ+ student organizations allow for contact and education to occur in the collegiate environment with heterosexual individuals (Beemyn, 2003). Once these allies have moved to their professional roles, they may become role models of acceptance to the LGBQ+ community.

Findings from this study suggest that students are not involved in LGBQ+ organizations. One student participant, Klaire, went so far as to say that her institution “doesn’t really have a lot of LGBTQ student community.” Institutions must not only sustain these organizations, but also advertise to the LGBQ+ student population the benefits of community involvement. Foundational career theories have discussed the importance of social context in the development of career identity, specifically noting that social context surrounding one’s development can be a driving force (Savickas, 2005; Super, 1990). Furthermore, this social support has been demonstrated to be an important to the career development of LGBQ+ individuals (Procidano, 1992; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). Findings from the study suggest that many of the organizations at the selected sites were very non-inclusive, catering only to white gay and lesbian individuals. Samantha felt that the organization “had a lot of empty promises” and was comprised of “upper-class, white women who were all very privileged.” That sentiment was echoed in the interviews of many of the participants in the study. Institutions must ensure a diverse group of students are participating in the organization while ensuring an inclusive environment. Providing a safe space for sexually marginalized students to discuss experiences of discrimination, share coping strategies and enact change may assist in developing positive coping mechanisms and identity development (Walls et al., 2010; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014).
Finally, education can often serve as an effective tool for creating more open and accepting environments (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). One such program, Safe Space, has helped to raise the awareness of LGBQ+ individuals in communities across the United States by training individuals to be better allies (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2008). By participating in this program, students, faculty, and staff are given the opportunity to learn more about themselves and others. Some of the students who participated in this study mentioned this training in their interview stating it was informative. Aaron felt it was “a pretty obvious indicator” of LGBQ+ acceptance in a workplace. Other avenues of education come through in service opportunities, new student employee orientations, and professional development seminars. By establishing a rapport on a college campus or workplace as an individual who is knowledgeable and supportive of the LGB community, individuals may choose to disclose their sexual orientation identity. By doing so, educational institutions and employers can better meet the needs of these students (Morrow, 1997).

**Educators and Career Counselors.** Higher education professionals and career counselors must have a better understanding of the LGBQ+ community, identity development processes, and potential obstacles associated with possessing a marginalized identity. Findings from this study suggest that students want educators and employers to have a better understanding of the coming out process. Jennifer stated that “counselors need to understand it [sexual orientation] or it’s a struggle. I feel like they need that, they need that training, that education, that knowledge.” By knowing where a student may be in their identity development, educators may better support these students. For example, professionals working in higher education may be able to suggest programs, activities, and services that would facilitate a LGBQ+ individual’s movement to the next stage of development (an example may be moving
from the awareness stage to exploration stage). Alicia stated that “it’s good for career counselors to be aware of…like, potential mental health outcomes and like just general and safety and wellbeing with these [LGBQ+] students.” Counselors must be able to help their clients articulate and explore what drives them towards passing or coming out in the workplace (Marrs & Stanton, 2016). The decision to come out is likely to have a lasting impact on the individual (Elliot, 1993; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008; Reynolds & Hangorgiris, 2000; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2011; Ward & Winstanley, 2005). Additionally, educators may be able to display higher levels of empathy while providing LGBQ+ students with the tools and skills necessary to overcome potential barriers associated with coming out to friends, family and colleagues. It may also increase the amount of awareness surrounding the concept of heterosexism inherent in the United States. Breaking down these systemic structures would prove to be beneficial for all identities. Possessing a knowledge of LGBQ+ identity development may help educators to more effectively support this population (Chung, Chang, & Rose, 2015; Meyer, 2003). This may include formal and informal education as well as a review of scholarly literature. Equipped with this new knowledge, career counselors and educators may be able to provide information regarding relevant non-discrimination legislation or skills for coming out in the workplace.

Secondly, findings suggest that the career development of LGBQ+ individuals is different from heterosexual individuals. Morgan (2013) argues that sexual minority individuals are often challenged by a culture of heteronormativity where they must recognize and accept differences before self-identifying as a member of the LGBQ+ community. Furthermore, recent studies have offered evidence of both patterns and variations while exploring homosexual and heterosexual identity (Archer & Grey, 2009; Boratav, 2006; Konik & Stewart, 2004; Morgan & Thompson, 2011; Striepe & Tolman, 2003). Jennifer stated, “a straight person doesn’t have the
same opportunities and they don’t go through the same struggles [as LGBQ+ individuals].” In the collegiate setting, LGBQ+ individuals are already thinking about their sexual orientation in relation to their future relationships with colleagues and supervisors as well as the amount of discrimination and homophobia they may experience in their work environment. Such topics are simply not an issue for heterosexual individuals as they were born and raised in a heterosexist environment that coincides with the dominant culture (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006; Simoni & Walters, 2001). As such, career counselors need to be proactive in their approach to understanding the career development of LGBQ+ students. Providing LGBQ+ students with the skillsets to address these topics (such as coming out in the workplace and dealing with harassment) and working to identify LGBQ+ friendly employers are important aspects of helping LGBQ+ individuals to solidify a career in which they display high levels of job satisfaction. Alicia stated, “having resources are important. They [LGBQ+ students] are able to feel that they have resources going into their career.” While this study provides a framework for such a career development model, further research needs to be conducted.

Finally, educators must be proactive in their approach to fostering career development opportunities for LGBQ+ individuals. Some examples would include offering workshops and seminars on identifying LGBQ+ friendly employers, reviewing local, state, and federal policies and laws in the workplace surrounding discrimination and intentionally including representations of various identities in marketing of their programs and services. One student in the study, Jennifer, suggested a LGBQ+ panel of out new professionals in various careers. This would allow students to ask current LGBQ+ individuals of their experiences with coming out in the workforce. Findings from the document review indicated no visual representations of same sex couples or mention of identity related developmental tasks. Creating brochures and
advertisements that are inclusive of sexual orientation reaffirms commitment to equality and acceptance (Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000). As results of this study suggests, students may not seek out career counselors should they not feel valued and accepted.

It is interesting that all the participants in the study shared such strong opinions of the skills career educators and counselors needed to assist the LGBQ+ population. In a 2016 study conducted by Gallup-Purdue of over 11,000 college graduates representative of all 50 states, 52% stated they visited their career service office on their college campus at least once but only 17% found it to be helpful. Unfortunately, no data was available regarding the rate at which LGBQ+ students visit their career service office. All participants in the study, except Christina, did not attend Career Service units or functions on a regular basis. This suggests that LGBQ+ individuals are not meeting with career educators/counselors, attending programs or utilizing services hosted by Career Services because they believe counselors lack the knowledge and awareness of marginalized sexual orientations. Moving forward, career counselors should become more knowledgeable regarding LGBQ+ identity and career development by examining the literature, attending professional development seminars, and becoming actively involved in professional organizations. Providing more opportunities for LGBQ+ individuals that are directly related to their concerns surrounding their sexuality in their career may increase the amount of LGBQ+ students that utilize career services functions on college campuses.

**Identifying and Creating LGBQ+ Friendly Organizations.** Students in the study believed that educators must possess a strong knowledge of LGBQ+ friendly career organizations. Aaron stated that educators should “have the knowledge of the queer community so they could use it to their disposable” in helping him select a career that may be appropriate for him. Participants felt that by educators possessing a strong knowledge of the issues facing the
LGBQ+ community, they could be proactive in assisting students. Through interviews and journal reflections, the researcher found that students utilized a variety of methods to identify LGBQ+ friendly employers. These methods included searching the internet, exploring office culture and talking with peers. Students looked for sexual orientation listed in nondiscrimination policies with clear reporting guidelines. On interviews, students suggested seeking out other LGBQ+ individuals who worked for the company/organization in an effort to determine acceptance level. Students also discussed looking for visual representations of same sex couples through mechanisms like SafeSpace stickers. These mechanisms were consistent with the findings from a study conducted by King et al. (2008). However, nondiscrimination policies may not always be readily available and a one day on site interview may not be enough to assess organizational climate and culture (Barron & Hebl; 2010; Martinez & Hebl, 2010). To aid in this process, career counselors could be more proactive in their approach in identifying LGBQ+ organizations utilizing a variety of methods. Students could be more confident in the decisions they are making regarding particular careers and organizations, as opposed to having to guess and search for information regarding LGBQ+ friendly environments. This could include utilizing resources specifically designed to rate LGBQ+ friendly workplaces (such as Human Rights Campaign Equality Index) or viewing websites and brochures to determine LGBQ+ acceptance levels. This Index is a national benchmarking tool that evaluates corporate policies and practices related to LGBT employees (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). In addition, career service units could have former students report back on workplace culture and climate surrounding LGBQ+ individuals. This would generate a growing database of LGBQ+ friendly employers.
Finally, LGBQ+ individuals in the study believed that employers had a responsibility to offer protections and educate others regarding various sexual orientations. An LGBQ+ supportive workplace likely has formal policies for supporting this population, such as same sex partner benefits as well as nondiscrimination and zero tolerance policies (Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, and King, 2008). Most often, students suggested offering diversity trainings to educate others in their workplace, creating organizations that support and advocate for the LGBQ+ community and offer protections in nondiscrimination policies. These diversity trainings may offer ways to be a supportive employee, colleague and supervisor and include a diversity element that educates employers about different perspectives (Bezrukova et al., 2012; Lindsey, King, Hebl, & Levine, 2015; Shipherd, 2015). Currently, over two thirds of human resource managers report using diversity trainings in their companies (Esen, 2005). Additionally, informal or formal LGBQ+ networks allow marginalized members of an organization to network and share similar experiences and has been shown to influence the career development of gay and lesbian individuals (Morrow et al., 1996). These mechanisms may lessen the amount of stress faced by an LGBQ+ individual in their workplace. Findings from this study are consistent with those found in others studying the LGBQ+ population and the mentoring relationship (Croteau, 1996; Lyons et al., 2005; Morrow et al., 1996; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). By displaying an openness towards the LGBQ+ community, higher levels of job satisfaction and job outcomes would be obtained. Ant captured the sentiments of the population sampled by stating “it is very important for me to be comfortable in my workplace.” Future research should be conducted on the experience of LGBQ+ individuals that may contribute to vocational and satisfaction based outcomes.
Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be discussed in the present study. First, the scope of this study is limited by geographic location (New Orleans, Louisiana) and sexual orientation identities (LGBQ+). The career development of students may be drastically different given a different population or geographical region. While the researcher did identify participants as belonging to specific subpopulations, future research is needed to examine if specific variables in career development exist. The intersection of identities of the participants in this study is of particular interest and future research could examine these identities further. Furthermore, only two of the participants identified as male. While the researcher tried to recruit students from all institutions, ultimately only three were represented. Further research will need to be conducted at a wider sample of institutions in Louisiana to construct a more complete picture of the experiences of LGBQ+ students in their career development. The New Orleans context of this study is unique given its greater acceptance of LGBQ+ individuals compared to other major metropolitan areas in the South that harvest racist, homophobia, and religious ties. The number of LGBQ+ support systems, the political liberalism, and high non-white population all make New Orleans a unique site selection for this study (Fussell, 2007; Perez & Pamquist, 2012).

Second, due to the often hidden nature of sexual orientation, gathering participants proved to be difficult. LGBQ+ populations can be a challenge to sample because it is difficult to define conceptually and individuals typically resist disclosure (Meyer & Wilson, 2009). While the researcher utilized gatekeepers and snowball sampling to recruit participants, the sample size was limited to nine. To overcome this limitation, the researcher utilized advisors of LGBQ+ organizations and social media as the primary means of participant recruitment. The researcher had various levels of success with both gatekeepers and student organization executive boards.
While some were very welcoming and accepting, others feared an outsider attending their meetings. Additionally, the researcher posted copies of the study in various public locations in the city as well as contacted several faculty members in psychology, sociology and general studies to offer a class visit describing the study. However, particularly at the community college level, most of the faculty members that responded taught lower level classes and therefore the forty-five completed credit hour required for participation made students ineligible to participate. However, persistence and referrals from others allowed the researcher to gain the number of participants necessary to gain saturation of the data.

Third, this study examines the experience of LGBQ+ students in their career development at one specific time. According to Super (1990), the life span approach to career development suggests a process that consists of multiple transitions and shifting needs for information and reassessment of roles, commitments and identities. It would be beneficial to collect data from these participants after each year of study to draw upon a more complete picture of career development among this population. New experiences relating to sexual orientation in their career may change their views. While one interview and journal entry provided adequate data to complete this study, prolonged engagement with participants would have been beneficial in establishing a relationship and increasing the likelihood of obtaining richer data. The journal entry as a means of data collection provided little insight into career development as students commented very little. The researcher did not receive two of the nine back and answers seemed to lack substance. Future researchers should keep this in mind when developing methods. Additionally, participants in this study self-selected to participate in this study in the Fall 2016 semester. When conducting interviews and journal entries, participants may tend to give responses that are deemed more socially acceptable as opposed to those that are
an accurate depiction of their experience (Creswell, 2013). Since sexual orientation is often not discussed in work related contexts, participants may have felt ashamed of their experiences or fearful of current power dynamics. To combat this limitation, the researcher assured the participant confidentiality of the data and the importance of research.

Finally, the major selection and career development of LGBQ+ should continue to be studied for the foreseeable future. As organizations become increasingly diverse, researchers should examine the experience of LGBQ+ individuals within particular organizations. Participants from different career fields (hard sciences vs. liberal arts) and level of interaction with career service units may be areas of interest for future researchers. Moreover, researchers could undertake a critical analysis of the level of outness an individual displays in relation to their perceptions of homophobia and discrimination in the workplace, job satisfaction and career outputs. Additionally, researchers could explore the role heterosexual allies play in supporting an LGBQ+ individual at work. An examination of the role of nondiscrimination policies and diversity trainings should be undertaken to determine the role these mechanisms play in reducing harassment and discrimination in organizations. Enhancing one’s understanding of the contributions LGBQ+ individuals make to the workforce may provide opportunities for more inclusion. Finally, those individuals studying the career development of LGBQ+ individuals may examine how peers influence career development. As one can see, numerous opportunities for future research surrounding the topic of LGBQ+ career development exist.

**Conclusion**

The LGBQ+ population will continue to grow on college campuses for the foreseeable future (Renn & Reason, 2013). Educators need to take proactive approaches to meet the developmental and career needs of these students. Schneider and Dimito (2010) found that 64%
of students felt that being LGBT had at least somewhat influenced their academic and career choices. Potential strategies for educators include openly talking about coming out in the workplace, discussing employment discrimination, and helping students to overcome negative stereotypes and perceptions (Pope, 1995; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). While their sexual orientation may not be a factor in their major selection, findings from this study certainly indicate it has an impact on their career selves. By understanding the career development process of LGBTQ+ students, institutions can be proactive in fostering positive career development opportunities.

One proactive approach to helping students navigate their sexual identity orientation and career development is to encourage educators to understand how these developmental tasks are intertwined. By understanding Fassinger’s (1998) model of sexual identity development, educators will be able to discuss with students what it means to be “out” and the impact that it may have on their future development. Decisions involving choosing a major or a career path should be discussed throughout the students’ collegiate experience. In addition, higher education professionals must have a better understanding of the coming out process and the obstacles LGBTQ+ students face in their career. Gottfredson (1981), Lyons et al. (2010), and Morrow (1997) suggest that LGB students must be looked at as a community of individuals with unique characteristics, needs and personality traits. By possessing those traits, career counselors can better meet the needs of these students and identify concrete and viable options for the student (Morrow, 2006). Career counselors may also be able to help the student find a mentor, network or discuss potential internship opportunities. In doing so, they can promote student academic success and encourage students to engage in behavioral and adaptive components of career exploration and planning (Fouad, Ghosh, Chang, Figueiredo, & Bachhuber, 2016).
Finally, an integrative model to career development must be developed and utilized to meet the needs of the LGBQ+ community (Chung, 1995; Morrow, 1996). Career counselors and higher educational professionals often perform a disservice to LGBQ+ students when they choose to look at sexual identity and career identity development as separate entities (Morrow, 1997). Creating an integrative model would allow career counselors the ability to assist students in their career development by taking into account a variety of factors, including various elements of identity, the environment, and social stigmas. This current study has provided the framework necessary to develop one.
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LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear [Name],

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Christopher Broadhurst, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations at the University of New Orleans (UNO).

I am conducting a research study in an effort to examine the career development of LGBQ+ students. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the impact a LGBQ+ sexual orientation has on a student’s career development. The study will examine how LGBQ+ students explore their identity and its relationship to their understanding of their career development.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve the following:

➢ A 60 minute, semi-structured interview, with a follow up interview if needed
➢ A 15 minute, online reflection journal

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. No compensation is being offered for your participation in this study.

There are limited foreseeable risks to you if you agree to participate in the study. As a participant, you may be asked to disclose information that you may consider personal and/or sensitive surrounding your sexual orientation. However, your confidentiality will be protected by the use of a pseudonym. Interviews will occur in a private location. Although the interview with you will be audio recorded and transcribed, they will be stored on a password protected hard drive. In addition, local campus and community resources will be provided to you at the conclusion of each interview. There are no feasible alternative procedures available for this study.
The results of the research study may be published, but neither your name nor your institution’s name will be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your participation in it, before or after your consent, will be answered by Michael Hoffshire at (517) 898-2844. You may also contact Dr. Christopher Broadhurst, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations at the University of New Orleans at (504) 280-1278.

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, Dr. Ann O’Hanlon, at (504)-280-3990.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be offered to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

____________________________             _______________________________________       ________
Subject’s Signature                                                       Printed Name

Date

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

These elements of Informed Consent conform to the Assurance given by the University of New Orleans to the Department of Health & Human Services to protect the rights of human subjects.

I have offered the subject/participant a copy of this signed consent document.

Signature of Investigator: ______________________________________________________

Printed Name: ____________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Pseudonym: ____________________________________________________________

Age: _______

Sex: _____________________________________________

Gender: ___________________________________________

Pronoun(s): _______________________________________

Sexual Orientation: ______________________________________________________

Major: ________________________________________________________________

Minor/Concentration: _____________________________________________________

Race: __________________________________________________________________

Academic Standing (Circle):
Sophomore     Junior     Senior
Internship & Work Experiences (List Most Recent First):

Business Name ____________________________________________________________
City/State ________________________________________________________________
Position Title ____________________________________________________________
Dates Employed _____________ - _____________

Business Name ____________________________________________________________
City/State ________________________________________________________________
Position Title ____________________________________________________________
Dates Employed _____________ - _____________

Business Name ____________________________________________________________
City/State ________________________________________________________________
Position Title ____________________________________________________________
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Business Name ____________________________________________________________
City/State ________________________________________________________________
Position Title ____________________________________________________________
Dates Employed _____________ - _____________

Business Name ____________________________________________________________
City/State ________________________________________________________________
Position Title ____________________________________________________________
Dates Employed _____________ - _____________
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Coming Out & Institutional Selection

• How did you make your decision regarding the institution of higher education you would attend?
• How would you describe your sexual orientation?
• Can you describe your “coming out” process?
• How did you come to understand what it means to identify as a member of the LGB community?

Career & Major Exploration

• When you were growing up, what types of job(s) and/or career(s) did you want to have?
• What impacted your decision about what major to declare?
• What impacted your decision to pursue your career interest?

On the Job

• Thinking about your future career, what do you think will impact your professional relationship with colleagues and supervisors?
• Thinking about your future career, what types of things do you think will impact your ability to perform well?

Intersection of Sexual Orientation & Major/Job/Career Selection (questions may not be asked if participant discusses in areas above)

• How do you think your sexual orientation impacted your decision to pursue your major & career interests?
• How do you think your sexual orientation will impact your professional relationship with colleagues and supervisors?
• What assumptions do you have regarding your future career, especially how it relates to your sexual orientation?
• Do you believe there are benefits associated with identifying as LGBQ+ in your career? If so, please describe them.
• Do you believe there are challenges associated with identifying as LGBQ+ in your career? If so, please describe them.

**Identifying Internships/Jobs**

• In what ways do you identify a potential employer as LGBQ+ friendly?
• What has been your experience with Career Services on campus, if any?
• What skills do you believe Career Counselors need to be equipped with in order to assist a LGBQ+ individual in their career selection or major process?
• Is there anything you would like to mention that you haven’t already related to these topics?
Appendix D

Journal Questions

• How has your sexual orientation impacted your decision about the major you declared in college?

• What benefits, if any, has your sexual orientation had on your major selection or career path?

• What barriers, if any, has your sexual orientation had on your major selection or career path?

• What do you perceive as being the biggest challenge in your future career field as it relates to your sexual orientation?
Vita

Michael Hoffshire, M.A. currently serves as the Assistant Director of Student Success at the University of New Orleans, where he has worked since 2012. He was born and raised in Dighton, Massachusetts. He obtained his BS in Criminal Justice from Roger Williams University in 2009 and a MA in Student Affairs Administration from Michigan State University in 2011. Since beginning his PhD in Educational Leadership at the University of New Orleans in fall 2013, Mr. Hoffshire has had the opportunity to create and facilitate training workshops, present at national conferences, and co-author journal articles and a book chapter. His research interest includes first year student success and the experience of LGB students in collegiate contexts.