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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

BIRACIAL MULTIRACIAL LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL  
QUEER STUDENT LEADERS MAKING MEANING OF  
THEIR EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Robert Jason Kunstman

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Leadership, Policy, and Development  
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

May 2017

This Dissertation by: Robert Jason Kunstman

Entitled: *Biracial Multiracial Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer Student Leaders Making Meaning of Their Experiences*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Leadership, Policy, and Development, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

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Accepted by the Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

Kunstman, Robert Jason. *Biracial Multiracial Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer Student Leaders Making Meaning of Their Experiences*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2017.

Five biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer student leaders shared stories about their undergraduate experiences at a prestigious southern university. Critical cultural and constructivist paradigm provided the framework for supporting this narrative inquiry. Through multiple interviews, participants shared stories of their background, educational journey, and the impact they hope to have in the future. Through those interviews, participants also shared stories of their journey to understanding their racial identity, sexual identity, leadership experiences, and experiences centered on the intersections of race, sexuality, and leadership. Stories explored participants' sense of belonging, code switching, functioning in racial and sexual identity specific spaces, experiences of isolation and exclusion, and challenges faced. Additional factors explored considered family upbringing as an underlying factor for participants exploring spaces on campus that aligned with their identities, navigating how to name individual identities, reasons why some participants were not as public about their sexual identity as others, and authentic leadership. This study explored implications and recommendations for academic and student affairs administrators, for student programming, and student organizations. Future considerations for research and implications are also provided.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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To the participants in this study, thank you! The stories you shared with me were a gift and I am truly grateful for the time we spent together. Your stories have inspired me to continue my work as a student affairs practitioner and ensure that the voices of the unheard are revealed through my practice and research.

To my Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership family at the University of Northern Colorado, thank you! To my advisor and chair, Flo, I am grateful for the countless hours you have spent with me helping me grow to becoming a better scholar and practitioner. I know the impact that you have had during my journey will have a lasting impact in our field of higher education. Thank you, Dave, for always listening. To my committee, thank you for always being positive and flexible as I struggled on my journey. Knowing that you all would be in my corner eased any nervousness in this process. To Sonja, thank you for being a significant part of my doctoral journey. We

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

After 40 years, I can finally articulate clearly that I am comfortable identifying as a queer person of color, who is gay and biracial. My journey through this self-discovery has been challenging and exhausting, yet energizing and enlivening. My experience on a college campus, dependent on a particular setting, was often pressure to choose which of my identities was more significant. If I had a better understanding of self, I may have embraced my whole self sooner. The leadership opportunities on and off campus gave me the experience to gain a better understanding of who I am, to grow as an individual, and embrace my whole self. I have imagined that if I was able to embrace my whole self sooner, I would have been a more effective leader and support mechanism for others who shared similar identities as myself.

The process of exploring and understanding the stories of biracial, multiracial, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (BMLGBQ) student leaders has been an expansive and understudied topic (Abes & Kasch, 2007). This topic is important to me because it has allowed reflection on my own experiences as a biracial gay man who was shaped by campus leadership experiences. Sharing the stories of how campus leadership experiences have influenced biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer student leaders has added depth and understanding to an already broad and unknown topic. Particular to this complex research topic have been the intersections of racial and sexual identity. College students with multiple marginalized identities have not had the same

developmental experiences (Schueler, Hoffman, & Peterson, 2009). Educators (faculty, staff, and administrators) rarely take the time to listen to their students' stories (Quaye et al., 2008). If educators had a better understanding of how to hear an individual's story and recognized the uniqueness of each story, they may be able to serve students better (Quaye et al., 2008). For this research, I explored how BMLGBQ students in higher education made meaning of their leadership experiences.

Following in this chapter, I present a framework for the pending research in this study. First, I share the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study. This information highlights that there was a gap in knowledge in regards to the understanding of the influence and impact of campus leadership experiences on BMLGBQ students. Then I share why this research was significant to both educators and BMLGBQ students, since the experiences of BMLGBQ student leaders were largely unknown. Next, I define terminology used throughout this research. Finally, I reflect and explore my own story and positionality as the researcher.

### **Background**

By the year 2042, the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau has predicted that the country would be a "minority majority" country (Guthrie, Jones, Osteen, & Hu, 2013). When this happens, racial and ethnic minorities would become the majority of people, but still considered the minority based on their marginalized and oppressed identities (Guthrie et al., 2013). Specifically, there has been significant growth in the number of biracial and multiracial people living in the U.S. For example, biracial and multiracial people accounted for 2.4% of the population in 2004 and increased to 6.9% of the total population a decade later (Dhooper, 2004; Multiracial in America, 2015). Additionally, it

was also estimated that 3.5% of the population in the U.S. identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ; Gates, 2011). The experiences of people living with multiple marginalized identities, such as BMLGBQ, have often been different than those living with none or one marginalized identity (Van Der Meide, 2002). For BMLGBQ people, these intersections of multiple identities have been prevalent in their everyday experiences. People who have identified with multiple identities, both dominant and subordinate, have been striving for a sense of wholeness (Dhooper, 2004; King & DaCoasta, 1996).

Finding a sense of wholeness has often been negatively affected by various influences. The experiences of BMLGBQ people have often been a product of intersecting forms of racism and heterosexism (L. D. Patton, 2011). Students with multiple marginalized identities have often experienced multiple levels of oppression (Schueler et al., 2009). Dependent on the situation, these students have had to choose which identity was impacted based on the setting or context (Schueler et al., 2009). If educators learn and understand the intricacies of the intersections of identity, diversity, and leadership, they may be able to help students better navigate systems that oppress and marginalize (Guthrie et al., 2013). Socially constructed identities that have been similar and different within these intersections frequently have caused tensions among the identified groups, both through sexuality or race that could not be ignored (Crenshaw, 1991). It is necessary to take into account the multiple intersections of social identities “when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). Crenshaw (1991) suggested “that intersectionality offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (p.

1296). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people of color, whether they were out or not, have most often experienced racism before they experienced heterosexism as a source of oppression (Van Der Meide, 2002).

Stereotypes have often led to behavior and actions that were prejudicial and/or discriminatory. Rooted within stereotypes, these behaviors and actions have often created unsafe psychological and physical spaces for students on campus. Stereotypes created by non-White communities have often been unexamined and inaccurate (Van Der Meide, 2002). For instance, it has often been assumed that communities of people of color lack sophistication, which has inherently been based upon unexamined assumptions of these non-White communities (Van Der Meide, 2002). In fact, it has also been assumed that non-White communities were culturally and religiously backwards (Van Der Meide, 2002). Some of these unfounded assumptions have been furthered by groups, such as people involved in the anti-gay movement, which has worked for two decades to create a division between people of color and the LGBTQ community (Cahill, 2009). A recent example has been the misconstrued notion that Proposition 8, an anti-gay marriage bill in California passed with overwhelming numbers because Black voters in that state did not believe in gay marriage (Kaufman, 2011). Media and prominent White LGBTQ community members blamed Black voters, when exit polls later revealed that 59% of Black voters voted against Proposition 8 (Kaufman, 2011). University and college campuses often have represented what was happening in the greater community. When incidents like “blame the Blacks” (Kaufman, 2011) have occurred in communities, students need to find communities where they feel safe. For these reasons, BMLGBTQ

students have been creating physical and virtual spaces where they could validate and define who they are as individuals (Guthrie et al., 2013).

Physical and psychological spaces on campuses have been significant aspects for underrepresented students (Guthrie et al., 2013). Historically, predominantly White college and university campuses have offered a history of spaces that were inclusive for some students but were often more exclusive to historically-oppressed students (Guthrie et al., 2013). If educators had a better understanding of how “campus environments affect the development of diverse student leaders,” they may have a better understanding of how to develop our future community leaders (Guthrie et al., 2013, p. 58). Providing space on campus has been a way to begin breaking down barriers of assumption and create awareness of an often-neglected student group. Some practitioners and researchers have advocated for space on campus that supports and serves minoritized student needs by disrupting privilege and addressing the intersectionality of identities (L. D. Patton, 2011). This type of space on campus could take the form of course offerings, student organizations, identity-based services offices, or experiences established for the specific support of minoritized students (Bergerson & Huftalin, 2011). When considering the campus experience, there have been five categories of environmental influences that have impacted a student’s openness to difference: demographic differences, interpersonal relationships, curricular interventions, campus environment, and educational programming (Bergerson & Huftalin, 2011). If educators were able to understand the importance of a student’s individual identity, from their initial stages of understanding through their growth and development while in college, they may be able to better meet their psychological and physical needs.

Finally, educators must also understand the result of the intersections of a student's multiple identities (Guthrie et al., 2013). The process of beginning to understand self has been a foundational characteristic in a student's development as a leader (Guthrie et al.). If an educator could understand the journey a student may take in developing their multiple marginalized identities, they could support and empower students through this process both as individuals and as future leaders on campus and within the greater community. If an educator could consider leadership as another identity comingled with BMLGBQ identity, it could increase the complexity of understanding. With the rise and increase of diversity among student groups growing in higher education, "it is important to consider the intersection of leadership development and diversity of college students" (Guthrie et al., p. 3).

### **Statement of Problem**

Identity development has been the "process of becoming more complex in one's personal and social identities" (McEwen, 2003, p. 205). Identity development could be considered a major outcome for students during the undergraduate experience (King, 2011). Theorists (e.g., Ang, 2001; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1990) noted that researching topics around social identity could be problematic and ambiguous. Students' ambiguity "is in a constant state of negotiation and interpretation: ever changing, always contested, sometimes contradictory, and continuously repositioned by the specificities of place, time, history, culture, and experience" (Diggins, 2011, p. 1). There must be more research completed and the development of best practices to support LGBTQ, students of color, and those who identify with both social identity groups (Renn, 2000).

This research explored the experiences of BMLGBQ student leaders on a university campus. Although there has been ample research about the individual and siloed experiences of biracial and multiracial students, LGBTQ students, and student leaders in a higher education setting, little has been known about the intersection of experiences of student leaders who live with these multiple identities and how their identities show up in how they lead. Furthermore, there was scant research on the intersections of race and student leadership development and even less research on the intersections of sexual identity and leadership development (Arminio et al., 2000; Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008; Kezar & Moriarity, 2000; Pascarella & Terezini, 2005; Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). This gap in the literature was what this research has begun to address.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this critical cultural constructivist study was to make meaning of the campus experiences of biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer (BMLGBQ) college student leaders. Research questions were initially based on the idea that the experiences of BMLGBQ student leaders were unique experiences from other student leaders not navigating multiple marginalized identities. The research questions gave insight into the experiences of BMLGBQ student leaders during their undergraduate career.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions that evolved in this study were:

- Q1 How do BMLGBQ undergraduate student leaders make meaning of their experiences?

Q2 How do BMLGBQ students make sense of their multiple marginalized identities in the context of their leadership role?

### **Significance of Study**

The concept of *double consciousness* is a term that was originally applied to African Americans. It entailed an understanding of one's self through the eyes of others and was relatable to the experience of BMLGBQ students and other individuals who fell outside of dominance (Du Bois, 1953). Educators have had a responsibility to create opportunities for students with marginalized identities, and in particular BMLGBQ students to determine themselves through their own eyes. Educators have had a responsibility to ensure that students with multiple minoritized identities experience inclusion on college and university campuses. More importantly, educators have needed to understand how they could empower students with campus leadership experiences and give them the tools and opportunities to breakdown systems of oppression that continue to exclude students in various personal and professional communities. Findings from this research has begun to fill a gap in order to provide educators the tools to create mechanisms of support for BMLGBQ student leaders and other students with marginalized identities.

In order to ensure a safe and secure campus climate, institutions must exhibit and be proactive in their "commitment to diversity and social justice by visibly, systematically, and proactively addressing issues of harassment via their policies and programs" (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 267). If educators are leading by offering opportunities that cultivate multicultural sensitivity and affirming environments, then they have been allowing students to have space for their own personal construction of self (Guthrie et al., 2013; Zaytoun, 2005). "Fundamentally influenced by heritage, race,



experiences of oppression, privilege, and other social positions” (Zaytoun, 2005, p. 9), students have then been able to direct their own experience and gain the skills to influence others as leaders themselves. Understanding, listening, and learning from “students enables them to develop their voices and recognize their roles in contributing to inclusive campuses that are welcoming of diverse learners” (Quaye et al., 2008, p. 43). The significance of this study was revelation of the stories and experiences of the five BMLGBQ student leaders on college and university campuses. Closing this gap in literature for higher education and student affairs educators would create more welcoming, supportive campus environments for this marginalized group.

### **Terminology**

Common understanding of terminology and use of language is instrumental to understanding the foundation of the national dialogue currently underway. As a current practitioner, I have experienced the terminology used in social justice work as often evolving. For the purposes of this proposal, the following definitions offered a foundation of the content and a larger understanding of the current use of the language in the area social justice work. These are just a few terms, which set the tone for the dialogue within higher education, change-making conversations, social justice, and this study.

*Biracial* is a person “who identifies coming from two races. A person [whose] biological parents are of two different races” (Diversity & Social Justice: A Glossary of Working Definitions, n.d., p. 2).

*Bisexual* is a “person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to two genders” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 40).

*Coming Out* is a journey that a person undergoes to understand their sexual orientation identity development over time and ability to be public with others (GLSEN, 2013).

*Dominant* is systematically advantaged by society because of their group membership (Tatum, 2000).

*Identity/Social identity* “is how we understand ourselves . . . identities develop over time, intersect with each other, and help give meaning to our lives” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 41).

*Gay* is a person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to a person of the same gender. This term is often used to identify man-to-man attractions. Gay is a term that is often used as an umbrella term for the LGBTQ community (GLSEN, 2013).

*Heterosexism* is a “system of oppression that benefits straight/heterosexual people at the expense of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 41).

*Lesbian* is a “person who is female-identified and who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some other females” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 41).

*Minoritized* are the people who signify “the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities” (Harper, 2012, p. 9).

*Multiracial* is a person “that comes from more than one race. An individual who’s parent’s are born from more than one race” (Diversity & Social Justice: A Glossary of Working Definitions, n.d., p. 5).

*Oppression* is “systems of power and privilege, based on bias which benefit some social groups over others” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 42). Oppression can take various forms,

intentional and unintentional, conscious and unconscious, and/or visible and invisible (GLSEN, 2013).

*Privilege* is “a right, license, or exemption from duty or liability granted as a special benefit, advantage, or favor” (Diversity & Social Justice: A Glossary of Working Definitions, n.d., p. 6).

*Queer* is an “umbrella term used to describe sexual orientation . . . that does not conform to dominant societal norms” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 42).

*Racism* is a “system of oppression that benefits White people at the expense of people of color” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 42).

*Sexual Orientation* is “the inner feelings of who a person is attracted to emotionally and/or physically, in relation to their own gender identity” (GLSEN, 2013, p. 42).

*Subordinate* is systematically disadvantaged by society because of their group membership (Tatum, 2000).

### **Researcher’s Story**

A researcher must know who they are before they can begin to understand others. In order to participate in this research, I had to understand my own identities and how they influenced who I am. In this section, I explore the process I used in selecting a research topic through my own experiences. There were many salient memories and experiences that informed my identity and this journey of reflection highlighted those for others in order for the reader to understand my perspective in undertaking this inquiry.

#### **Growing Up in Miami**

Growing up, I was fortunate to be surrounded by so many people who loved me. My mother emigrated from Cuba in 1961. The maternal side of my family originated

from Spanish descent. My biological father identified as Black. I always knew about my biological father, but he was not a part of my upbringing. My mother was never afraid to talk about him and shared pictures of him. His pictures reminded me of the character Isaac on the television show, the Love Boat. My “step” father was my father (he will only be referred to as father). He was the one who raised me, along with my mother, and adopted me. He was also a White man from Cincinnati, Ohio. I was an only child and my first cousins were like my little sisters. All of my cousins and I were all half Cuban and half something else. I was the only one on my mother’s side of the family that was part Black.

When she was 13, my mother ran away from home in Miami with her two older sisters and traveled the country. At 16, my mother met my biological father in California and in 1976; I was born across the country in Norwood, Massachusetts. She became a 17-year-old mother. My birthdate was supposed to be the same day as the bicentennial celebration of the U.S., but my mother said I was as stubborn in the womb as I am today and was born two days late on July 6th. In my early teens, I recall my mother sharing with me that everyone tried to convince her to have an abortion because raising a half Black child would be impossible. The only person at the time that supported her was her paternal grandmother. My mother, biological father, and I lived together with my two aunts until I was a little over a year old. Then my mother removed herself from a verbally abusive relationship and moved to Puerto Rico with her father for a short time to figure out our life together.

One of my aunts relocated to Tampa and my mother followed. She worked as a bartender where she met my father. My father continued to go to the bar every night and

eventually, my mother asked him out on their first date. My parents started dating when my mother was 19 and my father was 35. Eventually, they moved in together and through a series of circumstances, moved to Miami. One of my most vivid memories growing up was their wedding day, December 12, 1981, in my grandmother's home. Every Cuban family member crammed into her house and my great-aunt and great-uncle's house next door. There was a large party in both front yards that had family and friends from everywhere. The ceremony was small and in the living room. I vividly remember everyone being ushered outside for a surprise and it was my tardy grandfather arriving in a taxi. My mother and father were not religious in anyway, but family was extremely important.

While growing up in Miami, I was surrounded by Cubans. In fact, I thought the predominant Spanish culture of the U.S. was Cuban and Puerto Rican. Most of my mother's family lived in Miami, with the exception of her father and stepmother who lived in Puerto Rico. I spent 11 months of the year in Miami and 1 month in Puerto Rico with my grandparents every year as a child. One of the clearest memories was when I first realized how visually different I appeared when I was in Puerto Rico. I recall sitting in the backseat of the car and crying. My (step) grandmother, a blonde hair blue-eyed German looked back and asked me, "What is wrong?" I remember telling her I wished I looked like everyone else in our family. She affectionately looked at me and said, "You are perfect the way you are . . . why do you think I sit out in the sun every day? It's because I want to look like you."

Neither my mother nor my father raised me in a hyper masculine way. They did not force me to participate in sports and continuously encouraged me to seek out my own

path. I learned how to play the trumpet and they drove me to orchestra practices every weekend. I was part of the Boy Scouts and they drove me to every meeting and camping trip I attended. They did not necessarily stay and participate, but they made sure that they could hold doors open for me when possible. My mother would always say, “He’s a good-looking man, don’t you think?” I always recalled saying, “Ok mom, that’s strange, but I guess so.” What I did not realize, that I realize now, was that my mother was preparing me to be open and understanding of others differences, including my own.

Growing up, we moved around Miami a number of times. As my parents’ wealth and opportunities continued to grow, so did our living arrangements. There was a time when we moved from motel to motel depending on the season, rented a duplex, rented a house, and then finally bought a house. When we rented our house, the elementary school and first year of middle school were a struggle for me, especially in regards to my race and sexuality. These were my first experiences being around other Black youth. I recalled consistently being bullied for both my race and potential of being gay. I was the Black boy who acted White and gay. At this time, I did not understand what it meant to be gay. I did find support in middle school from the assistant principal and one of my teachers who always looked out for me. This was a time when I found it easier to disassociate my racial identity from the other kids picking on me for not being Black enough and chose to identify only as Cuban until I was almost 22 years old. While in middle school, my parents were worried about the high school I would attend, so they saved up as much as they could and bought their only house in a neighborhood with a better school system.

## **My Search for Identity Through Scouting**

My Boy Scouts of America (BSA) experience was one of the most influential and foundational experiences of my life. Since the first grade, I knew I wanted to join the program. As an only child, I was always looking for opportunities to connect with others. I recalled begging my parents to take me “Back to School Night,” a program for kids and parents to sign up for the scouting program and where I signed up to be a Tiger Cub. All we did was sign-up that night, but I never really joined. I remember being disappointed, but always claimed that I was a Tiger Cub. During this same time, my mother reconnected with a childhood friend. Her son and I were the same age and became good friends. This reconnection and new connection, along with my bad habits of skipping school and being easily influenced, prompted my parents to move and place me in a healthier environment.

I started the second half of third grade in a new area where everyone was involved in the scouting program. My parents signed me up again and I started in the Cub Scout program. My new friends and I were inseparable. All my friends at this time were White and came from mostly blue-collar lower socio-economic families. I remember that everyone’s parents worked hard and played hard. Everyone Wednesday afternoon was spent doing various Cub Scout activities, such as arts and crafts, swimming, bonding, and one of my favorite activities, turning woodblocks into race cars for the annual pinewood derby competition. We never talked about the social construct of race during these times, but, reflecting back, I knew my surroundings influenced how I perceived my own race, which I did not consider as Black.

When I became a Boy Scout in the fifth grade, things began to change. All of my friends continued in Boy Scouts except my best and closest friend at the time. We were at the age when we could go on camping trips without all of our parents. When I was 11, I went away to summer camp for a week. Summer camp was the first time I remember having my first boy-crush and afterwards I wanted to spend every summer at camp. When I came home the first summer, our house was packed up and ready for moving. My parents bought their first home and we were moving away from my friends and school. I remember not being excited about leaving everything behind. In reality, we only moved six miles down the road. My parents made this move to place me in a better school district.

After the move, I was mildly active in my Boy Scout troop. I went to most meetings and on every other camping trip. I spent my year looking forward to summer camp and, at 13, I was able to join the staff and become a Counselor in Training (CIT). I spent two summers as a CIT until I was able to be a full counselor at 15, when I spent my first full summer in central Florida. During my third summer on staff, I was inducted into a fraternal organization within the Boy Scouts called the Order of the Arrow (OA). I was still active in the troop, but the OA was where I found my home. All of my summer camp friends were involved in OA during the year. We had quarterly camping trips, once a month meetings, and state and national conferences. When Hurricane Andrew destroyed our home and Boy Scout troop in 1992, the OA was what kept me involved in scouting.

The OA had various levels of rank, which were similar to the traditional Boy Scout program. As I continued my involvement, I grew in rank and position. As I reflected on my time in the program, I now understood my own experience of



assimilation as I participated in racially disparaging jokes that aligned with some of my identities. There were two instances that particularly stood out for me. The first was when a few other members of color and me were standing in a circle calling each other the most racist names we could think of without any concern for who was around us because it was fun. At the time, it made me feel icky but still actively participated.

The second time was when I was the youth president for almost 1,000 members. There was a meeting at one of my advisor's homes to practice for a competition when he made fun of all the Black kids across the canal watching us rehearse for a dance competition. I remember struggling to think why he thought this was okay, but I also remembered what I had done before and asked myself if I gave permission for a White person to say that out loud. These were not lone instances but were two that have continued to stand out and inform who I am today.

I stayed in Miami and went to community college because of my love for the Boy Scouts OA program. I changed my career path from a band director to pre-dental so I could run for the youth president. In the OA, someone was not considered an adult until they turned 21. When I turned 21, I transferred to Florida State University (FSU). I continued to be involved at the state level, but when I was invited to join a national trail crew summer staff, I became involved on a national level. The OA took my love of working at summer camp to a whole new level. After seven summers of working in central Florida, I was offered a unique opportunity to work at a Boy Scout ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico, called Philmont. The camping, hiking, and trail building that Philmont offered was one of the most grueling and challenging experiences of my life.

After my first year of living away from home and a summer spent in reflection, I was finally able to label the feelings I had for other men as gay. In 1998, this was extremely difficult and challenging but did not deter my love for the scouting program. My entire year after this realization was spent with my scouting friends who also went to FSU or within my co-educational service fraternity, also based off of the scouting program. My scouting friends often went out to dinner, coffee, and the bars together. One of our group members was gay and out. I remembered the first time he asked us to go to a gay bar with him. I remembered apprehensively agreeing to go, because I knew I was gay, but I was not out. I remembered being nervous and excited about this adventure but still did not know how to react. Slowly throughout the year, we all came out to each other as gay; an act that created the first semblance of a *chosen* family. Finally, I could embrace who I was with a part of my identity that consumed my whole being at the time.

My work at Philmont for a nation-wide OA program set the tone for my future involvement in the organization. I was invited to join a similar type program in the boundary waters of Minnesota, Northern Tier High Adventure Bases, in the summer of 1999, which was my first summer working at camp where I was out to friends. I remembered feeling what a relief it was to *almost* be myself. I spent two more summers working in Minnesota as the director of the program. I focused so much energy into building the program that it impacted my academics significantly. The National Boy Scout Office flew me around the country for various meetings with constituents. I spent so much time focused on the development of this program I was all consumed by it. My position also opened another door for me--right into student affairs.

During my third summer in Minnesota, there was a staff member who asked me what I wanted to do in the future. We spent a lot of time discussing student affairs as an option. Although I had not finished my bachelor's degree, she connected me with the Dean of Students at a boarding high school in Michigan. Through that connection, I learned that they were in need of a residence hall floor counselor. As I completed the phone and on-campus interviews, I was offered a 10-month contract work at Interlochen Arts Academy.

In 2002, I went back to New Mexico to be on the front lines working with scouts again. At the time, I thought this was what I needed to refocus. After working at a Boy Scout base that was fairly progressive, I did not realize that Philmont was the complete opposite. I went from working at a base where I could be myself to working at a base where I had to hide who I was from others. I struggled emotionally. I spent more time reflecting on my life choices and the direction I wanted to head. Although this was a very difficult summer, one of the highlights was being honored as a National Distinguished Service Award recipient. I was 1 of 40 to be recognized out of an organization with 100,000 members. My parents rarely attended my extracurricular events unless I asked directly and this was one of those times. They drove to Indiana to watch me receive this award at a national conference in front of 7,000 people. This was such a special moment for me and I was happy that I could share it with them.

I spent one more summer working at a local summer camp in Gainesville, Florida, which encompassed much of my transition. I left Michigan in order to finish my bachelor's degree and moved back to Miami to live with family. I started a job working full-time for the Boy Scouts as a District Executive. I left the volunteer side of the

organization to become a *professional*. I quickly learned that this role was not for me and disenfranchised me from a program about which I deeply cared. This position was also the motivation I needed to complete my remaining three courses and raise my GPA in order to graduate.

The Boy Scout program has been one of the most influential programs that shaped me to becoming the human I am today. Being involved in the program opened doors that would have otherwise been shut. I was fortunate to find my gay identity among a group of friends who were open and accepting and was able to practice my *capacity* to lead volunteers and staff. Throughout my experiences, I began to understand a concept that has guided me today--that of servant-leadership. At the time, a concept that was entrenched into the BSA and OA programs that I later learned was based from Robert Greenleaf (1970). The program also stunted my racial identity development. I was not able to see or understand that during my time involved in the scouting program, but later, was something that became apparent during my journey in higher education and was something I clearly understand now.

### **My Exploration Throughout Higher Education**

Learning about myself in higher education was an unexpected journey. Working in a field that continued to challenge me was at the same time exhausting but rewarding. I have attended and worked at a variety of institutions that included the largest community college in the country, athletic-centered state institution, a small liberal arts college, a boarding high school, a teaching university, and the oldest public university in the country. Although the variety of schools was vastly different from each other,

discovering who I am was based on the relationships I established, the experiences I had, the spaces I was in, and the reflection that I participated in.

**College years at Miami Dade Community College.** After high school, I attended Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC). In fact, MDCC felt like high school part two. If I was not attending Boy Scout events, I was either working at McDonald's or at a dentist office. I found a group of friends who were taking the same science classes I was and we formed our own study group. Due to my involvements with scouts and work, it was hard to make any other connections besides my science friends. As a first-generation college student, I knew I wanted to go away to college and become a high school band director. When I had no other options but to attend MDCC due to cost and support, I chose not to follow the path I planned. I continued some of my high school activities such as jazz band, concert band, and even a member of the University of Miami Marching Band. I often met with my advisors there and they gave me the list of classes I would need to transfer to either the University of Florida (UF) or Florida State University (FSU). I knew I wanted to go far away. I visited friends who went to UF and, at the time, I knew that was the university I wanted to attend.

During my third year at MDCC, I started the application process. What I did not know at the time was that I would finish MDCC with 87 credits, but only 60 would transfer to my new institution. By this year, I dropped all campus involvement and focused on my position within the Order of the Arrow. I applied to UF and FSU on December 1, 1996. As a first-generation student, I did most of the process by myself. My parents were always my best cheerleaders but were not familiar with the college application process or how to apply to financial aid. On February 14, 1997, I received an

acceptance letter from FSU. I thought the only reason I applied to FSU was because of the institution's name recognition. At the time, I knew I wanted to go to UF. I remembered calling UF to find out the status of my application and feeling like a number. Every time I called FSU, I felt like a person. As a first-generation student, this solidified my choice. I paid my deposit and submitted my housing assignment for FSU. One particular evening, my dad sat down with me to help me choose my housing. As an only child, he knew I wanted a single room in a newer residence hall. Financial reality forced me in another direction. The reality was that a Stafford Loan of \$5,500 and a job was all I had to get me through the year financially. For those reasons, I picked an older residence hall with a community bathroom that was also the transfer student hall. I made my commitment to FSU on March 1st and my official acceptance letter for UF arrived in the mail more than two months later.

**College years at Florida State.** Moving across the state, attending orientation, and preparing for a new adventure in my life kept me from working at summer camp for the first time. I flew to Tallahassee for Transfer Student Orientation and immediately fell in love. I flew in a day early and a friend from the OA picked me up from the airport and took me to their summer camp to visit some other friends. North Florida scenery was different than the rest of the state and I remembered loving the difference. The next morning, I was dropped off on campus early and from the minute I stepped onto campus; I knew I made the right choice. The first two people I met at orientation were also from Miami. One of those people was a Colombian woman who has remained one of my best friends today. Most transfer students I met during orientation lived on campus. Once we all connected, a number of them who were assigned to the first-year towers switched their

housing assignments to the transfer residence hall, Cawthon Hall. I found comfort and excitement knowing I would not be alone living 502 miles away from home.

When it was time for move-in, my parents drove me to Tallahassee. We scouted out the campus the night before to ensure we knew where we were going the next morning. I was excited about this transition, while my parents were not. I was the second person to move into the residence hall. My mother unpacked and decorated my half of the room. As we said our goodbyes, my parents were in tears. I remembered forgetting something in the car and ran to the parking lot as quickly as possible to find them holding each other crying. As they drove off, I recalled a sense of excitement about my new journey and feared that I was doing this journey alone. I enthusiastically greeted every new resident on the floor, often before the resident assistant. I was nicknamed the social planner within a couple of hours. My first year on the floor, I asked people to call me Robert because there was another Bobby on the floor. Until this time, I used Bobby in all personal spaces and Robert in the academic or other formal settings. Due to my financial status, I was one of the few people on the floor who did not have a meal plan, so I always cooked when everyone went to the dining hall. What I believed helped me build community quickly was the community bathrooms in our hall. Everyone often kept their doors open and hung out in each other's rooms. When the first day of classes started, I was extremely excited.

My first semester of coursework consisted of Genetics, Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy, Spanish 3, and Organic Chemistry. I also was not sure what I wanted to do outside the classroom, hence, I ran and won the Hall Government President position. Hall Government consumed my time as a first-year at FSU. I was able to be a programmer for

activities in my building, attended state and regional conferences, and facilitated leadership workshops that I learned from Boy Scouts. Every week, I would visit the Director of Residence Life, whose office was in our building. I was looking for a connection and she became a role model and someone I aspired to be like. Like most people who have entered the field of student affairs, I learned about this realm as a potential career path from my residence hall director. I spent so much time with my co-curricular activities that I struggled academically. After my first semester, I was on academic probation. I did not realize when I transferred that I started with a 0.0 rather than my incoming grade point average of 3.2. Unlike my advisors at MDCC, when I met my permanent advisor at FSU I was steered in the right direction. I met constantly with him. Now that I work in the field, I know that I met with him more in order to establish a relationship with a staff member outside of my residential experience. At this time, I was still focused on a pre-dental track. When I reflected back on this time, I was a pre-dental major because that was what I knew from my job at a dentist office and I wanted to have a financially secure career.

Although I was actively involved in residence life, I wanted to explore other opportunities too. At this time, a number of my close friends pledged a co-educational service fraternity, Alpha Phi Omega (APO). Alpha Phi Omega was a service fraternity based on the principles of the Boy Scout program. As pledges, they were able to invite me to social events where I got to know many members of the organization. I had such a great experience as a guest, I decided to pledge the following semester. During this time of exploration, I also tried to get involved in organizations that centered on some of my identities. I attended a couple of Black Student Union (BSU), Hispanic Student Union



(HSU), and Cuban-American Student Association (CASA) meetings. I remembered always having a feeling of exclusion. I did not feel I was Black enough to be in BSU, Hispanic enough to be in HSU, or Cuban enough to be in CASA. My comfort with my identity as a Black man was lacking and my lack of Spanish speaking skills felt that I could not be a part of any of these groups. At the time, there were no biracial/multiracial student organizations. Mostly for these reasons, I knew that APO would be my new involvement home at FSU.

During my summer away after my first year at FSU, I was academically dismissed. I was able to apply for special reconsideration since I was a transfer student and was readmitted. At the same time, I changed my major from Biology to Environmental Studies. I still did not know what I wanted to do after graduation but, after spending my summer in New Mexico, I knew I cared about the environment. During this transition, I took a course called Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in the U.S. One of the course assignments was designed to explore a movie based on race, ethnicity, or nationality set in the United States. At this time, I was so disassociated from my racial and ethnic identities, I chose *Braveheart*. My professor attempted to dissuade me from that choice. My professor was not happy about my decision but indulged my choice. As I reflected on the conversation we had, I understood why she was challenging me to focus on a domestic concept film versus one based in Scottish history.

Living in Tallahassee was a challenge at times. I had no connections to my Cuban family, little connection to Black people, and my gay identity was just beginning to emerge. Among its members, APO was also known as *Gay-PO*. Alpha Phi Omega was the organization and environment that allowed me to explore my gay identity in the

comfort of an organization based on the values of scouting. I was also working two jobs in order to afford to stay in school. One job kept me connected to the residence halls as a night staff supervisor, while the other job allowed me to have flexible daytime hours. As a night staff supervisor, I sat at a desk in a residence hall or roamed campus depending on my assignment from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. During the day, I worked at the Center for Professional Development (CPD) working for non-credit programs. The connections I made through my involvement on campus, work, and local scouting friends began the process of Tallahassee feeling like home.

On February 1, 1999, I came out of the closet as a gay man to a friend. It was one of the hardest conversations I have ever had with someone. It was during a late-night work shift in the residence halls. A Graduate Residence Hall Director (RD) walked in on our conversation and wanted to know what we were talking about. Neither of us were willing to share with the RD what we were talking about and he left upset. At the time, I was not ready to share this secret with anyone else, but 2 weeks later shared with him what our conversation entailed. After I came out to the both of them, it became progressively easier for me to share with others. When I returned in the fall, I thought I was a confident gay man. I was the person whose friends came and talked to about them being curious, bisexual, and/or gay. I was the one who everyone went with to the gay bar. I also held everyone to a standard of alternating straight and gay bars. *Brothers* was Tallahassee's prominent gay bar and, as I was learning about my own identity, felt comfort in finding a place I could share with others in the gay community. During this time, *Queer as Folk* came to television. As a television show ahead of its time about a group of gay men and their everyday lives, Sunday evenings became a tradition of

watching this show and then going to the bar for 80s/Retro Night. My *Brothers* community became a group of friends who took care of each other from having designated drivers, various house parties, dinner parties, and lounging around nights. Although I had this feeling in comfort, I also felt like an outsider because of my race and size. I was always known as the big teddy bear friend on whom everyone could rely. I loved and loathed the role. Although I thought I was confident in who I was as a gay man, I had the same insecurities as everyone else.

Once I moved off campus, my time was spent filled with personal exploration and reflection. I was actively exploring what it meant to be a gay man, in addition to what it meant to better understand my racial and ethnic identity. The majority of the people I worked with on night staff were people of color and close members of APO, such as my big brother who was Cuban and my little brother who was Filipina. With some of these new connections, I attended BSU and HSU meetings again and also joined the Filipino Student Association so my little brother did not have to go alone. Through my time at FSU, I kept my status quo of being overly involved in co-curricular activities, under-involved in my curricular activities, and working 30-40 hours per week, while spending my summers away at camp. While I was away in Minnesota in 2001, a trifecta of circumstance was what placed me on the path I am on today. Once again, I was academically dismissed, did not have a plan for housing in the fall, and my daytime job was downsizing. Through a connection in scouting, I learned of a job opening at a boarding high school in Northern Michigan in residence life. I successfully attained the job and packed up my life in Florida for a new adventure.

## **My Path in Student Affairs**

**Living in northern Michigan.** My path in student affairs began with a non-traditional step at Interlochen Arts Academy (IAA), which sits 20 minutes outside of Traverse City, Michigan. As a boarding high school, IAA had approximately 400 residential students and 50 commuter students. The institution had three types of faculty (academic, artistic, and residential). Specifically, I was a floor counselor for junior, senior, and post-graduate (students who choose to stay one additional year after graduation) students. As a staff member, we were always required to be on-campus unless we were off-duty. In some instances, my role was very structured including room inspections every Thursday, enforcing opposite gender visitations, grounding students to their rooms, evening sign-ins, and alarming the building after hours so no student could sneak out. Overall, it felt like an extension of summer camp, but for an entire year.

During my first year, I was able to learn and put into practice so many initiatives that were grounded in my experience from scouting and at FSU. My work at IAA was challenging and rewarding. The students at IAA tried so hard to be standouts from each other that they were more similar than different. The number of students who identified within the LGBTQ community was inspiring. To work at an institution that actively supported a community of which I was a member was reaffirming. During my first year, I found a connection to supporting the women in my building, black students, and gay men and women. I was asked to join the Black History Month committee, which I declined. I still had feelings of resentment by what I considered non-acceptance into the Black community at FSU. I found myself striving to support the creation of community for students. Students often spent 12 hours practicing their arts and I believed they needed

downtime in order to relax. This was the year that I solidified my passion for wanting to work with youth in some capacity.

The challenge for me was the limited access to an adult community. My community at IAA was either 18 other residence hall counselors or high school students. Without a car to escape campus or others who shared days off, I struggled to find myself. Living in Michigan during the winter months had a significant impact on my emotional well-being. I quickly learned about seasonal affective disorder and had to make adjustments on how to cope. Living in northern Michigan in the winter was extremely difficult. I spent parts of my day in front of a sun lamp. When I was not working, I was preparing for a summer back at Philmont by spending an enormous amount of time practicing distance hiking. I loved the opportunity to escape and experience the nature that Michigan had to offer. I spent time hiking the sand dunes, learned how to ski, and learned how to walk on a frozen lake. Living in Michigan opened an opportunity for me to live away from home and experience student affairs. While working at IAA, I went to my first Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE), a housing recruitment conference. Over 250 college and universities were in attendance recruiting and I knew that this was the field I was meant to be in. My experience at IAA gave me the direction I needed to move back to Miami and finish my bachelor's degree.

**Living in the west suburbs of Chicago.** After working for the scouting program and finishing my last three courses to complete my degree, I moved north across the country to Naperville, Illinois, for a position at North Central College (NCC). I had the opportunity to work in residence life full-time with a bachelor's degree and apply for a master's program. I was a residence hall director for 150 men and 25 women first-year

students. North Central College offered a different experience than IAA. Since NCC was a Division III institution, most students who attended also participated in athletics. The majority of my residents were football, soccer, baseball, cross-country, and/or track athletes. My supervisor, a fellow Eagle Scout, guided me on the highly political nature of NCC. In my position at NCC, I attempted to bring my intentionality about building relationships that I learned at IAA into my role. I attempted to have one-on-one meetings with every resident. For my three years at NCC, I would consistently be able to accomplish this goal. Residents also knew that, if my apartment or office door was open, they were always welcome to come and hang out. During prime-time television, I would have approximately 10 students every night watch whatever new show was on in my apartment. I also built strong relationships with my colleagues and could easily escape with them into Chicago on the train. Living in proximity of a city expanded my social circle to have a healthy balance of work and personal life.

Within a month of working at NCC, I applied for admission to the Master of Leadership Development program. I recalled being excited, hopeful, and embarrassed all at the same time due to my undergraduate record. My colleague in admissions shared with me that this program would be an opportunity to prove myself academically which created a challenge that I worked extremely hard to meet and the majority of my coursework took place in the evenings. Since the institution was on quarters, six credits each term was considered full-time. The pace of the quarter-system was a significant change for me that took a year of adjustment. I often scheduled me on-call rotations during my class days. This way, I could attempt to have a flexible social schedule. My

daytime hours were spent in the office doing work and homework, my evening hours were spent in class, and my late-night hours were either on-duty or in the office working.

North Central College offered me an opportunity to develop and enhance my skills in advising student organizations. Although my residents were predominantly White, I spent a lot of time working with students of color and the LGBTQ students at the institution. During my first week on campus, I was asked by the President of the Hispanic Student Union called Raza Unida to be their advisor. She heard that I was half Cuban and wanted me to serve in that role. Our first event was to attend the U.S. Hispanic Leadership Institute in downtown Chicago. Growing up in Miami, my perspective was heavily influence by Caribbean Spanish culture and little Central and South American Spanish culture. There were approximately 5,000 people in attendance at this conference. During the opening plenary, the moderator began with a roll call by country. She named a few countries and when she got to Cuba, I stood up and cheered like others. In a room of 5,000 people, there were probably a hundred of us that shared this identity. After a few other countries were mentioned and cheered for, she named Mexico, at which point, the entire room stood up in applause and cheered. Growing up in Miami, I believed the majority of Hispanics living in the U.S. were Cuban and Puerto Rican. The conference and the subsequent conferences challenged me to explore a fuller understanding of what it meant to be Latino/a in the U.S. that was not centered only through a Cuban perspective.

One of the other new Residence Hall Directors who was Black advised the Black Student Association (BSA) along with the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at NCC. The students involved in his organization and my organization often operated as one. On

Friday nights, the BSA students would host spade night and watch Tyler Perry shows. The first few months, I rarely attended because I still did not feel comfortable around a culture into which I was born but that I did not understand in myself. As I continued to attend, the students realized my reluctance for attending and began to *school* me. I did not understand the allure of a Tyler Perry play or that the reason to play spades was not about the card game itself but more about the *smack* talk being spoken. A couple of the students took me to my first Black barbershop. I finally started to become comfortable with a half of my identity of which I had no concept. When my colleague left NCC, I was one of the few staff members of color at the university. I was also one of the only out LGBTQ staff members. There was a mandate that came from NCC administrators that said staff members could advise only one multicultural organization. A leader in our organization was anti-LGBTQ and hoped this could be a good opportunity to eliminate the GSA. At the same time, I was asked by the Student African-American Brotherhood (SAAB) to be an advisor for their organization. I asked for special permission to advise SAAB and GSA. I was granted the opportunity to advise SAAB but not the GSA. Since I was not allowed that opportunity, I sought out another colleague to serve as the advisor for GSA. I attended every GSA meeting to support as I could as a staff member. My last year at NCC, to the dismay of one administrator, the GSA held its first ever drag show on campus. The publicity surrounding the drag show was minimal, but I received feedback from the college president that he was happy to see our campus have an event that supported all students.

**Living in Colorado.** North Central College offered me an opportunity to explore my multiple identities, support students with shared and different ideas, and better



prepare me for a career in student affairs. Between completing a Master of Leadership Development, advising student organizations, and residence life experience, I began the search process for the next career opportunity. After six on-campus interviews and three offers, I chose to work at Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins, Colorado. I moved to Colorado in late June 2007 and spent over 7 years working in student leadership programming.

Colorado was the furthest I have ever lived away from my family for an extended period of time. My mother was concerned about me living in Fort Collins because of its proximity to Laramie, Wyoming. I remember her telling me that Matthew Sheppard, a young man murdered for being gay, lived in this southern Wyoming town. I thought Colorado would be a hard place to start over once again, but I immediately made a connection to the residence life staff. Additionally, my roommate from FSU moved to Denver and I was able to reconnect with him. He also introduced me to all of his friends who also identified as LGBTQ. One of the challenges of living in Fort Collins was the visible absence of people of color in comparison to other places I lived. Most of my community of color was people working at CSU. I appreciated being able to have a community but struggled because we talked about work too much.

I grew in my passion areas of identity development, equity, inclusion, and social justice during my time at CSU. My professional role, my colleagues, my involvement in a national student affairs association, and doctoral program all contributed to my development at this time. Conversations of identity development permeated most of my professional and personal lives. At CSU, I was able to explore my Cuban, Black, and biracial identities. As I learned more about various biracial identity development models, I

grew in my pride of being part of this group. I remember making sense of why I felt out of place in so many aspects of my life. Before this time, I was not sure how to articulate my feelings about being biracial. Until this time, I thought I could only be Cuban or Black. I reached my “a-ha moment” when I first read the Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People (Root, 1992). It was the first time I personally felt recognized for being me and to have the skills to articulate who I was at any time regardless of judgment by others.

In December 2008, a colleague and I traveled to Greeley, Colorado, and met with a faculty member of the Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership (HESAL) Program at the University of Northern Colorado (UNCo). The conversation was convincing enough for us, and another colleague, to sign-up for two courses in spring semester 2010. With all my previous education woes, I was extremely anxious about this next opportunity in my life. The conversations and coursework challenged me to reflect on my professional experience in a way I had not done before. I applied for admission in spring 2010 for entrance the following fall. During my program interview, I had the same anxiety I had prior to entering the master’s program at NCC. Although I was extremely nervous, the faculty put me at ease with their questions and the conversation that took place. This was an opportunity that I never thought I would be afforded in my lifetime. As a first-generation student, I never understood who got a doctorate or why someone would do such a thing. As a student in HESAL, my passion for higher education administration grew exponentially. Since my master’s degree was not in higher education or student affairs, HESAL gave me the skillset to understand my career choice and how

to integrate effectively what I learned in the classroom to work with students outside of the classroom.

Another area of professional growth during this time was my involvement in NASPA, the national organization for student affairs administrators in higher education. I found a home in the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Knowledge Community (GLBTKC), a group of student affairs practitioners who wanted to know more about a specialized area. Through the GLBTKC, I made connections with colleagues who shared the same identities and passions. The NASPA annual conference gave me opportunities to connect with other people of color who identified within the LGBTQ community. I also was able to engage in conversations centered on social justice and equity on a national level within higher education and student affairs that furthered my passions in this area. Through my involvement in NASPA, I was honored to be awarded the Outstanding Mid-Level Professional for the region in 2010 and nationally in 2011. Once again, I was humbled to be honored for participating in an organization that helped me grow as an individual.

Another pivotal identity development moment at CSU was the expansion of a more convoluted understanding of my sexual identity. In February 2011, I attended, for the third time, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Creating Change conference in Denver. When I attended the conference a decade earlier, I was not as savvy in understanding my own identities, social justice, or equity. My conference experience in 2011 was an eye-opening experience about how I could and should be a better agent of change. This conference also was the first time that I began to explore my identity as a queer man. Growing up in Florida, I was exposed to the word *queer* as a means of being

bullied versus someone's identity. At the conference, a queer person of color (QPOC) was often used to represent the LGBT community that also identified as a person of color. One evening, through a friend, I met a trans identified man who was in the midst of transitioning genders. Through our conversation, I learned that he had actually transitioned in most ways with one exception. I also found I was extremely attracted to him, emotionally and physically. These were new feelings for me. To be emotionally and physically attracted to someone who identified as a male, but was not born a male did not feel like gay was an appropriate identity. Reflecting on these feelings, this was the first time I owned queer as an identity.

**Living in North Carolina.** Living in Colorado gave me opportunity to explore my identity in a progressive environment, but my move to North Carolina had been quite contrary. In my brief time living in the southern region of the east coast, my experiences have been vastly different than anywhere else I have lived or worked. I moved to North Carolina to be closer to family and for an incredible opportunity for professional development. I also moved to North Carolina during a time where there has been a lot of racial turmoil in the country, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized gay marriage, and Donald Trump was the Republican President of the United States. At the university that employed me at this time, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we had statues across campus celebrating confederate soldiers, buildings named after leaders of the Ku Klux Klan, and state government managed by the Tea Party. Fortunately, in my position, I have had the opportunity to be included in campus conversations about supporting students of color. I have been able to work with staff members supporting LGTBQ initiatives on campus. I was learning what it meant to be a person of color in the

south. I was learning what it meant to be a gay and queer person in the south. I have grown comfortable with my own awareness of my identity and now I was challenged with understanding my identities in the context of a new environment.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Reflecting through my many life experiences, I could articulate that I was a queer person of color, who was biracial and gay, half Cuban and half Black, as well as a student affairs educator, higher education professional, social justice advocate, leader, learner, and sometimes an activist. The researcher positionality “represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet” (Bourke, 2014, p. 3). The reason this area of study was interesting and important for me was due to the fact that I was faced with many personal challenges growing up and navigating my own multiple identities. Due to these challenges, I immersed myself in activities and opportunities that I considered outside of my identities. My involvement in activities was an integral part of my growth as a campus leader. I eventually came to the realization that those activities allowed for opportunities of personal understanding of what it meant to be Cuban, then Black, then, gay, then biracial, then a queer person of color who was also biracial and gay.

My philosophy around my work in higher education and student affairs has been about equity and access for all students’ populations and individuals currently outside of the educational system. A richer understanding of what students experience during their undergraduate career could only help support future students, who in turn would impact society as a whole. As someone who has undergone his own individual journey during his undergraduate career, I was interested in hearing and understanding other biracial, multiracial LGBQ student experiences. If I was able to have a clearer understanding of

what and how LGBQ student leaders experienced their social identities beyond this research, but in my every day work, I could become a better advocate for us as a community. As a member of this community, I understood the challenges and successes that came with being a researcher throughout this experience. Because of my status as an insider within this community, I was able to relate to and understand the underlying experiences. I also understood as part of this community, shared assumptions of knowledge or experiences may filter any results in studies that I may conduct.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began by introducing with a brief glimpse of whom I was and why BMLGBQ student leadership experiences were important to me. Then I proceeded to discuss how expansive and understudied this topic really was. Next, I explored the impact of biracial and multiracial identity in the U.S., followed by a brief explanation of the LGBQ community in this country. Then I discussed how BMLGBQ students were seeking a sense of wholeness and the obstacles and hurdles students faced. Then I explored the need of physical and psychological spaces for BMLGBQ and other students on campus. I ended this part of the chapter explaining the need for educators understanding of intersectionality.

The purpose of this study was to make meaning of BMLGBQ student leaders experiences. There were two underlying research questions that evolved from this study:

- (a) How do BMLGBQ undergraduate student leaders make meaning of their experiences?
- (b) How do BMLGBQ students make sense of their multiple marginalized identities in the context of their leadership role? Educators have a responsibility to understand who their students were and how to best to support them. The significance of this inquiry was

to share the stories of five participants. I presented common terminology in an effort to offer a stronger foundation for the reader.

Finally, I presented the researcher story and researcher perspective. I shared that I was a queer person of color, who was biracial and gay, half Cuban and half Black. I shared that I was a student affairs educator, social justice advocate, a leader, and a learner. I also shared that I was an activist. As I shared my story, I shared how I made meaning of my experiences that have led me to where I am today and why I am completing this type of inquiry.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter is organized into themes of biracial and multiracial identity, LGBTQ identity, leadership identity, and intersectionality. The exploration of biracial and multiracial identity begins with a brief history of racial systemic oppression. The chapter expands with emerging biracial and multiracial identity development models and research. The exploration of LGBTQ identity follows a similar pattern by exploring a brief history of LGBTQ systemic oppression and expands with emerging LGBTQ identity development models and research. This chapter continues with offering various perspectives of leadership identity development and experiences. Finally, this chapter concludes with the exploration of intersections of multiple identities development and how college students navigate those intersections.

#### **Perspective of Racial Identity and Experiences**

##### **Brief History of Racial Systemic Oppression**

Frazier (2007) explained that race prejudices are a learned behavior. Philosophies and ideologies of race and ethnicity “developed as a consequence of the contacts of European peoples with the peoples of Africa, America, and Asia” (p. 23). Initially, religion defined the relationship between Europeans and non-Europeans (Frazier). At first, it was the role of Europeans to convert non-Europeans to Christianity.



Once non-Europeans became Christians, then it became about identifying the people as racially inferior (Frazier).

A myth that there were only three races that stemmed from Africa (known as the Negroid), Asia (known as the yellow) and Europe (known as the Aryan) was founded in Germany (Frazier, 2007). Elite societies formed based on the perpetration of this myth penned by Gobineau “propagated the doctrine of divinely ordained Germanic superiority” (Frazier, p. 24). Other famous artists that participated in this perpetration included individuals such as Wagner, Houston-Stewart Chamberlain, Rudyard Kipling, and Herbert Spencer. Spencer, an anthropologist, theorized that Europeans were at the top of the evolutionary scale with Asians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom (Frazier).

Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, the experience for biracial and multiracial people in the U.S. was a carryover of the hypodescent law, also known as the *one-drop rule* where an individual identified with their parental lineage of a lower social status (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). For instance, if a multiracial person had a grandparent who was Black, they would be considered Black. The Civil Rights Movement produced laws offering *equality* for all and “identity-focused interest groups” (Dhooper, 2004, p. 20). Although the Civil Rights Movement offered equality in laws, it did not produce equitable results for racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S.

Race has been understood to be a social construct, “the fact that is has been treated as a real, biologically based phenomenon throughout the history of the United States cannot be denied” (King, 2011, p. 440). For instance, in the U.S., there were four main areas that were by law, enacted as areas of segregation: residential, educational, recreational, and other public/private institutions. Although segregation by law is not in

existence today, it could still be seen in these same areas (Frazier, 2007). In addition, these areas have been similar to multiple systems of oppression that other marginalized identities rally to overcome.

There has been a continued underlying assumption that biracial and multiracial people are “confused, distraught, and unable to fit in anywhere in the American racial landscape” (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 131). Understanding biracial and multiracial identity has happened to be frontlines of up-and-coming research on racial identity development (Wijeyesinghe). It has still been considered in its infancy as there was a dearth of knowledge about multiracial identity and multiracial people (Wijeyesinghe).

### **Emerging Biracial/Multiracial Identity Development Models**

Research into breaking down prejudicial barriers has been around for decades. Allport (1954) postulated that the more contact there was between majority and minority identity groups, there would be a reduction in prejudicial thinking. Intergroup contact theory centered on the breakdown of social identity categories in order to reduce prejudicial behavior (Allport, 1954; Bergerson & Huftalin, 2011). Furthermore, there was a necessity that institutions reinforced and supported the contact among diverse groups of students (Allport, 1954; Bergerson & Huftalin, 2011). This happened during a time in the U.S. when institutions were mainly focused on racial segregation and identity politics. Matt Kelley, founder of the Mavin Foundation, believed that “multiracial individuals exist at a cultural crossroads and have an opportunity to help widen the definitions of what it means to be Asian-American, Latino-American, or African-American in a positive way” (Atkin, 2001, para. 36).

The first models of biracial identity development emerged around the early to mid-1990s. In fact,

Racial identity development among college students with parents from different heritage groups was largely unexplored until the 1990s, when two forces--one demographic, the other theoretical--converged to stimulate interest in understanding the experience and identities of biracial and multiracial youth (Renn, 2008, p. 13).

Major theorists on this topic included Poston (1990), Root (1992), Smith (1991), Jacobs (1992), LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton (1993), and Kerwin & Ponterotto (1995).

Although a number of models were developed within a 5-year period, the foundation of biracial identity development has largely been based on the research of Poston (1990) and Root (1992) discussed next.

**Poston's biracial identity development model.** Poston's (1990) research included concepts of living a healthy and positive life as part of a biracial identity development. Five distinct stages frame this model: personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration. In the first stage, children would hold their own identity and typically this identity was separate from the socially constructed categories in the U.S. Then, in the second stage, children would begin to select a group based on factors such as appearance or cultural knowledge. In some cases, an individual would choose a multicultural background if both parents' heritage and cultural groups were present equally, otherwise the dominant one may be chosen instead. The third area has been classified as the enmeshment or denial stage, when anger, shame, or self-hatred would begin to fester within an individual who could not overcome the guilt of not being able to identify with all aspects of their heritage. In order to move to the next stage, an individual must overcome these negative feelings. In

the appreciate stage, individuals would be open to learning and embracing all aspects of their heritage, although they may have a preference to which group they have a stronger affinity. In the last stage, integration, an “individual values all of her or his ethnic identities” (Renn, 2008, p. 14).

**Root’s biracial identity development model.** Root (1992) postulated four resolutions to biracial identity development. The first resolution was about the acceptance of the identity society assigned an individual. Typically, within a minority community, this acceptance of biracial identity was a simple acclimation based on the physical characteristics the individual looks most like. For example, an individual who was half-Black and half-White would be accepted into the Black community with an easier transition if physical characteristics matched that community. Secondly, identifications would begin to take place within both racial groups, dependent upon the support from both groups. In the third resolution, the individual would return to a primary racial categorization and begin to self-identify and may see one identity marginalized over another. In the last resolution, individuals would create their own racial category or group. Identification may take place with one group or another, but the fluidity of racial identity was up to the individual and they would typically identify with other biracial people, “regardless of specific heritage backgrounds” (Renn, 2008, p. 15).

**Renn’s ecology models of identity development in mixed-race college students.** Renn (2000) utilized both Poston’s (1990) and Root’s (1992) theories as a foundation to expand and include more students in higher education settings. Renn realized that theories did not flow as smoothly in practice as outlined in theory. Additionally, previous theories did not take into consideration the outside factors or

ecological factors that affect and influence students. These ecological factors could include institutional setting, family support, community setting, private space and/or personal space. Renn (2000) incorporated these ecological influences into biracial and multiracial identity development to identify five patterns. The first pattern was where the student would hold a monoracial identity. As in Root's (1990) third resolution, the individual would choose one of their heritage backgrounds with which to identify. Secondly, students would hold multiple monoracial identities, all of which were considered fluid as they shift according to the situation. Renn (2000) also indicated that personal and contextual factors, such as time and place, affect an individual's heritage groups they identify as. In the third pattern, students would hold a multiracial identity. For instance, students would elect "an identity that is neither one heritage nor another, but of a distinct 'multiracial' group on par with other racial categories: Roots fourth resolution (1990)" (Renn, 2008, pp. 16-17). In Renn's (2000) fourth pattern, students would self-select from the standardized socially constructed identities formed by U.S. government racial categories. This would allow biracial individuals to attempt to break free from the oppression placed upon them by a racial category from the dominant White majority. The fifth pattern would allow students to hold a situational identity. This self-labeling was vital for a student's self-identification. In essence, a fluidity of identity was created based on timing and context. Since students interacted with many different environments on campus, within the community, with family, or in their personal space, they could choose what elements of each of those environments were most salient to them to create their situational identity (Renn, 2008).

**Development of situational identity among biracial multiracial identity.** Renn (2000) conducted a study about understanding how college students changed and adjusted their identity based on their surroundings. There were 24 participants utilized in this study who attended 3 New England institutions. Each institution was a “private, residential, co-educational, undergraduate-focus campuses that attracted well-prepared students from an international applicant pool” (Renn, p. 403). The two major themes included space and peer culture. In this regard, space was defined by public spaces, student organizations, physical space, and private space individual to the participant. For peer culture, Renn discussed the concepts of group acceptance, membership, behavior, and discourse opportunities.

Among all three campuses, participants discussed the notions of finding comfortable spaces, both physically and psychologically. Physical spaces on campus included areas in which others shared the same interests, such as the “residence halls, student organizations, classrooms, and social events” (Renn, 2000, p. 405). Although public physical space with others was important for the participants, it was also equally important to have private physical space for individual reflection and to define what their own identity means to them. These private spaces allowed them to expose what their “peer culture, family background, and personally held notions of culture, race, and self” means to them (Renn, 2000, p. 405).

When interacting with other students of color on their respective campuses, the concept of public space changed for participants of this study. In some ways, the notion of public space was obvious and other times, quite subtle. According to the participants, these three notions were based on shared culture, phenotype, and the participation of

activities that represented the various cultured identities. Additionally, the lack of shared cultural knowledge kept some participants from joining in certain spaces. When participants attempted to find space that was occupied by a monoracial group of one of their multiple identities, they were sometimes met with concepts of “are you sure you belong here” or you do not “look X enough to belong” (Renn, 2000, p. 407). In most cases, students expressed that they felt it necessary to participate in activities that legitimized them to one group or another. The product of this study was the five patterns of situational identity among biracial and multiracial college students shared earlier.

### **Perspective of Sexual Identity and Experiences**

#### **Brief History of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Systemic Oppression**

Along with a continued racial divide, there is a global divide on the acceptance and rejection of *homosexuality* and the LGBQ community. In countries that have grown more secular in nature located in “North America, the European Union and much of Latin America” there has been much more acceptance of the LGBQ community (The Global Divide on Homosexuality, 2013, para. 2). This contrasted to those “in predominantly Muslim nations, in Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and in Russia” with a higher religious affiliation, which had a higher rate of rejection of the same community (The Global Divide on Homosexuality, para. 2).

Research has shown that people in the U.S. have slowly become more accepting of the LGBQ community, with an increase totaling 60.0% of the people, a growth of 11.0%, from 2007 to 2013 (The Global Divide on Homosexuality, 2013). A survey among LGBQ people in the U.S. revealed that society has now been more accepting of

them as individuals and a group, although 53.0% of them believed much discrimination still existed (A Survey of LGBT Americans, 2013). In this same survey, “Whites are more likely than non-Whites to say society is a lot more accepting of [LGBQ] adults now than it was a decade ago (58% vs. 42%) and, by a similar margin, more optimistic about future levels of acceptance” (A Survey of LGBT Americans, 2013, p. 8).

### **Emerging Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Identity Development Models**

Theories related to LGBQ identity development were first developed in the late 1970s (Stevens, 2004). Similar to biracial and multiracial identity development, the first theories were stage models in which understanding sexual identity advanced from an initial lack of awareness, through immersion, to identity integration (Cass, 1979, 1996; Fassinger, 1991; Troiden, 1988). As research of LGBQ identity formation grew, researchers recognized that stage models did not adequately encompass all LGBQ developmental processes. D’Augelli’s (1994) *life span* model of sexual identity development introduced the concept that identity formation occurs within context of cultural and life experiences.

**Cass sexual orientation identity formation model.** Cass (1979, 1996) developed a linear stage model of *homosexual* identity development and later revised the model as *sexual orientation*. Cass (1996) explored sexual orientation identity development from a constructionist psychology perspective asking questions focusing on the movement of an individual exploring sexual orientation from a third-person approach to a first-person perspective. Various levels of self-understanding served as indicators for each of the six stages in this model (Cass, 1996). Cass’s (1979, 1996) model was the foundation for



other models for LGBQ identity development and consisted of six stages: Stage 1- Identity Confusion, Stage 2-Identity Comparison, Stage 3-Identity Tolerance, Stage 4- Identity Acceptance, Stage 5-Identity Pride, and Stage 6-Identity Synthesis. They are discussed in more detail below.

**Identity confusion.** In this first stage, identity confusion, curiosity, and anxiety occurred when an individual began self-questioning (Cass, 1996). This stage was centered on a path of whether one found this identity desirable or undesirable (Cass, 1979, 1996). If one accepted the potential of being LGBQ, they would view themselves positively and work to ensure their environment was a positive one (Cass, 1996). If one rejected the potential of being LGBQ, they would explore one of two further paths. A person would either accept or not accept their understanding and meaning as correct (Cass, 1979, 1996). If they accepted the meaning, they would incorporate strategies that gave permission for further exploration of what they may be experiencing (Cass, 1996). If they did not accept the meaning, they would incorporate strategies to redefine their behavior or the action, “so that a stance of personal innocence can be adopted” (Cass, 1996, p. 236).

**Identity comparison.** In the second stage, identity comparison would allow for acceptance to begin occurring, while a person began to analyze what their role would be in society. This stage was filled with complex individual emotions. For instance, there was a loss of “plans and expectations linked with heterosexual sexual orientation--for example, having children--[and] may no longer apply” (Cass, 1996, p. 236). Based on an individual’s potential of identifying as LGBQ, either an individual would be inclined towards a positive or negative image of self (Cass, 1979, 1996). If a person was disposed

towards positive or negative self-image, then the path forward for an individual lied in perceived rewards and costs compared to their previously understood heterosexual identity (Cass, 1996).

**Identity tolerance.** In the third stage, identity tolerance would allow for individuals to begin seeking out other LGBQ person's. Individuals would become more focused on "social, sexual, and emotional needs that arise from seeing self as probably [LGBQ]" (Cass, 1996, p. 240). An individual in this stage could identify with the positive or negative aspects of identifying as LGBQ or may partly identify with being LGBQ (Cass). If positive, then this stage would allow for a connection with other group members, which would reduce the feelings of isolation, increase commitment to LGBQ self-image, and devalue heterosexuals (Cass). If negative, then this stage would devalue their LGBQ self-image, increase the value of heterosexuality, and avoid further contact with other LGBQ people (Cass). If partly, then the pathway was similar to both positive and negative aspects, except the focus would either be on a greater commitment to self-image or continued devaluing of self-image as a LGBQ person (Cass).

**Identity acceptance.** In the fourth stage, identity acceptance was when a person had a greater commitment to their LGBQ identity. A person may begin to have less contact with heterosexual friends and compartmentalize their life (Cass, 1996). This stage was also when a person had an inner-battle with understanding of self, while holding a minority identity and knowing that power lied in heterosexuality (Cass). During this stage, the growth and understand of self would allow for an acceptance that "gays are just as good as straights" (Cass, p. 245). This better self-understanding was the key indicator of a person shifting from tolerance towards acceptance (Cass).

**Identity pride.** The fifth stage, identity pride was when a person began to see more of the oppressive society they lived in and became more prideful in anything *gay* (Cass). During this stage, due to the feelings of being oppressed, there was also anger towards anything heterosexual (Cass). This anger materialized in a rejection of heterosexuals as an identity group and investment of time and energy to identify with the LGBQ community (Cass). If an individual was bombarded with negative feedback from this path, they would live in a “them versus us” mentality (Cass, p. 246). If an individual received positive feedback, then the divide of sexual orientation would not be maintained moving into the final stage (Cass).

**Identity synthesis.** The final stage, identity synthesis was when a person had found balance in their LGBQ identity. During this stage, an individual understood the divided world of positive and negative support from heterosexuals (Cass, 1996). The frustration that person dealt with was minimized with the elimination of negative people (Cass). Furthermore, as an individual increased interaction with others who were openly LGBQ, their understanding of self and increased a sense of belonging was boosted (Cass). The stage came to end when a person had reached a point of “wholeness” and “personhood” (Cass, p. 247).

### **Supporting Research of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Identity Development**

There was a core group of scholars (i.e., Abes, Beemyn, D’Augelli, Dilley, Evans, Renn, Talburt, Tierney) who completed research on the LGBQ and transgender community in higher education (Renn, 2010). In other instances, most research was the result of graduate student work (Renn, 2010). The limited research on LGBQ college

students focused on demonstrating that these students were normal and “deserve the same chance to succeed” (Renn, 2010, p. 134). Most research on LGBQ students focused on campus climate (Renn, 2010). In particular, most research centered on perceptions of and about LGBQ people (Renn, 2010). Additional research in this area also centered on policies and programs aimed at improving the experiences of the LGBQ community on campus (Renn, 2010). Although there was not a gap in literature for LGBQ White students, there was a clear scarcity in scholarship of LGBQ students of color (Renn, 2010). Current research often has relied on “convenience samples, limited data, and unsophisticated data analysis and/or interpretation” (Renn, 2010, p. 137).

**Cass’ lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identity formation study.** Cass (1984) conducted a study to support her initial linear stage model developed 5 years earlier. This study included 178 participants completing an instrument that measured what stage of LGBQ identity development they were in. Once the stage was identified, they were asked to complete an in-depth questionnaire specific to the current stage of LGBQ identity development. Twelve of the participants were excluded from the results because they identified with two stages concurrently. This study showed little distinction between Stages 1 and 2 and between Stages 5 and 6. Cass surmised that some of the results may have been skewed because of self-identified participant bias. Other assumptions made suggested the instrument may have been poorly developed for the early and later stages of sexual orientation identity development.

**Research supporting LGBQ identity development models.** Degges-White, Rice, and Myers’s (2000) study compared participants’ reflection of their own sexual identity development with Cass’s Theory of Sexual Identity Formation. A structured

interview process with 12 participants was developed based on Cass's model. Each question mirrored one of the six stages identified in Cass's model with the researchers hoping to understand if sexual identity formation truly mimicked Cass's model. Results identified minimum discrepancies, but overall presented evidence that the formation of sexual identity was a multi-stage process and that there was some validity to the linear stage model presented by Cass (Degges-White et al., 2000).

**Post-gay collective identity construction.** Ghaziani (2011) study focused on how a collective group of LGBTQ students formed a collective identity at Princeton. This study consisted of 15 participants, 18 interviews, and 100 archival documents. Over a 40-year history, the organization name that the LGBTQ students were a part of changed many times to meet the needs of the students. In fact, the organization had various breakout organizations to meet the needs of specific subsets of LGBTQ students. This study also revealed that the name used at the time was indicative of the majority population in attendance. For instance, when the organization was called Gay Alliance of Princeton (GAP), more men were involved resulting in a breakout organization called Women Orientation Women (WOW).

### **Perspective of Leadership Identity Development and Experiences**

The understanding of leadership theory has significantly evolved over the last century. In today's society, there has been a clear divide among what was considered *traditional* or *industrial* leadership and *alternative* or *post-industrial* leadership (Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2013). Additionally, leadership theories and identity have incorporated some of traditional and alternative concepts of leadership along with the incorporation of identity development. This shift in the understanding of leadership was

offering new ways that leadership education and practice impacted our campus communities (Eddy & VanDerlinden, 2006).

### **Evolving Definition of Leadership**

Over the centuries, leadership has been defined in so many ways that there has been no consensus on its definition (Northouse, 2013). This lack of consensus has also resulted in the development of many theories of how leadership is developed over time (Northouse, 2013). In the 20th century, themes for definitions of leadership have included domination, physical traits, personality traits, behavioral traits, positional, influence, initiating and maintaining groups, reciprocal, and transformational (Northouse, 2013). Later concepts of leadership focus shifted from leader-centric to follower-centric (Northouse, 2013). This shift in frameworks also centered on transformation and change (Northouse, 2013).

Although consensus has been lacking, current scholars and practitioners in higher education attributed three main components to leadership: process, influence, and common goals (Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2013). Leadership has been a process where those involved in leadership could not operate in siloes. The leader and the follower relationship would be mutually affected and impacted by each other (Northouse, 2013). Ultimately, the mutually beneficial relationship meant that not one person had to hold the title of leader, but followers were equally involved in a process that could equate them to leaders (Greenleaf, 1970; Northouse, 2013). Leadership has been influenced and “it is concerned with how the leader affects followers” (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). Leadership could not exist without influence (Northouse, 2013). Influence happened over groups and these “groups are the context in which leadership takes place” (Northouse,

2013, p. 5). Groups completed tasks that support a common purpose or goal. Leaders would lead followers by supporting, guiding, and motivating them towards common goal (Northouse, 2013). Leadership has all three of these components, isolated from each other and in conjunction (Northouse, 2013). A current working definition that has often been used in higher education and other spaces was “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2013, p. 5).

There were two types of leaders within a group or organization; assigned and emergent (Northouse, 2013). Assigned leadership roles were positional nature, often managers. When the three components of leadership were taken into consideration, assigned leadership positions did not necessarily equate to being a leader (Northouse, 2013). Emergent leadership occurred when some individual exhibited influence over a group (Northouse, 2013). The influence incorporated a process that then lead a group of individuals towards a common goal, equating leadership (Northouse, 2013). There was power within the context of leadership and was an important consideration as leaders emerge in an organization. There are two types of power that emerged within organizations; positional and personal. Positional power was based on hierarchal status within an organization. Positional power was a formalized structure in which an individual was given power based on their role (Northouse, 2013). Positional power included legitimately, reward, and coercive. Legitimacy and reward were often assigned types of power (French & Raven, 1959; Northouse, 2013). Coercive power was a leader’s ability and willingness to use power by force and manipulation (French & Raven, 1959; Northouse, 2013). Personal power was centered on a leader’s capacity to influence

followers (Northouse, 2013). Followers ascribed power to a leader based on appeal. If a leader could serve as a good and effective role model for followers, they were more likely to be given personal power that was closely linked to expertise and referent (Northouse, 2013). Expertise was based on the competence and knowledge (French & Raven, 1959; Northouse, 2013). Referent was based on charisma and likeability (French & Raven, 1959; Northouse, 2013). Finally, Northouse (2013) explained the difference between management and leadership as

The overriding function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations, whereas the primary function of leadership is to produce change and movement. Management is about seeking order and stability; leadership is about seeking adaptive and constructive change (pp. 12-13).

The differentiation of power and influence were critical to understanding the difference if an individual served as a manager of an organization or a leader within an organization.

### **Traditional and Industrial Models of Leadership**

Traditional and industrial models of leadership have included great man theory, trait process, skills approach, styles approach, situational leadership, contingency theory, path-goal theory, and leader-member exchange (Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2013). Although some theories were not widely accepted any longer, others were used in higher education to focus on the skill development of individual students (Komives et al., 2011). These theories were one-sided towards the leader and did not always include the follower as part of the process (Komives et al., 2011).

**Great man theory.** Earliest theories of leadership were based upon hereditary properties and dominance (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013). This theory began in folklore and was based on the “brothers of reigning kings who were ascribed to have



abilities of power and influence” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 57). In order to pass on hereditary properties, it was believed inter-family marriage of upper class was essential towards creating the high-class (Bass, 1981; Komives et al., 2013).

**Trait leadership.** Other theories evolved from the Great Man Theory that continued to observe the traits of men who were considered great leaders in society (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2013). Initially, leaders were believed to be born with traits that made them excellent and effective leaders (Northouse, 2013). Research over a century evolved to focus on actual traits of leaders. Theorist such as Stogdill (1948), Mann (1959), Stogdill (1974), Lord, DeVader and Alliger (1986), Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), and Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004) completed research over the last century and came to the conclusion that common major leadership traits central to their studies included intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Research conducted for trait leadership was not inclusive of minoritized communities (Komives et al., 2011).

**Behavioral leadership.** Behavioral leadership approaches were used to explain leadership when it could not be attributed to traits or characteristics (Komives et al., 2013). Management was also considered in this leadership approach (Komives et al., 2013). This approach focused on “leadership is not who a leader is, but what a leader does” (Komives et al., 2011, p. 39). A University of Michigan study on behavioral leadership identified three types of distinct behaviors of effectiveness: task-oriented behaviors, relationship-oriented behaviors, and participative leadership (Komives et al., 2013; Yukl, 1994). Criticism with this leadership style was that it did not take situation or context into consideration (Komives et al., 2013).

**Situational and contingency leadership.** Situational and contingency leadership theories connected behavior leadership theories with purpose and action (Komives et al., 2013). This approach highlighted that environment and context were critical in leadership (Komives et al., 2011). In practice, different situations required different styles of leadership (Komives et al., 2011). Situational and contingency leadership theories were centered on the leader's ability to quickly ascertain multiple dimensions that included level of support, level of directness, task orientation, and relationship orientation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Komives et al., 2011, Komives et al., 2013; Northouse, 2013).

**Influence leadership.** Influence leadership described leadership centered on charisma outside of a traditional leadership or managerial role (Komives et al., 2013; Weber, 1947). There were multiple models that defined charismatic leadership. House (1977) identified charismatic leaders based on behavior and what differentiated them from followers. Additionally, conditions such as times of crisis or challenging the status quo were instrumental on influential leadership (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1993; Komives et al. 2013).

### **Post-Industrial, Alternative, and Influential Models of Leadership**

Post-industrial, alternative, and influential models of leadership included the leadership challenge, relational leadership, servant leadership, social change model of leadership, and adaptive leadership (Eddy & VanDerlinden, 2006; Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2007). Alternative models of leadership were reimagining the leader-follower relationship. This reexamination was changing the understanding of old-school authoritative leadership styles towards relational style of leadership (Eddy & VanDerlinden, 2006). Current perceptions of leadership explained

that leadership was a process in which leaders and followers were members of one community. This was the predominate style of education and practice that was now occurring on college campuses (Eddy & VanDerlinden, 2006).

Alternative models of leadership enhanced the definition of traditional leadership to include a progression towards positive and sustainable social change. Alternative definitions “demand rethinking the traditional images and traditional relationships associated with leaders and followers” (Eddy & VanDerlinden, 2006, p. 6). These newer models of leadership shared the notion that “that all students who involve themselves in leadership education have the potential to increase their skills and knowledge” (Eich, 2008, p. 176).

**Reciprocal leadership.** In reciprocal leadership theories, leadership was meaningfully engaged between followers and leaders (Komives et al., 2013). Leaders could become followers in these models of leadership and followers could become leaders (Komives et al., 2013). Models that were often used in higher education that could be considered reciprocal in nature included Servant Leadership and Relational Leadership Models (Komives et al., 2011; Komives et al. 2013).

**Transformational leadership.** The goal of transformational leadership was that leaders and followers advanced each other to aspirational levels (Komives et al. 2013). Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as “a process where leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (p. 20). Characteristics that were mutually exchanged between leaders and followers were honesty, fairness, responsibility, due progress, and courage (Komives et al. 2013).

**Adaptive leadership.** Adaptive leadership was leaders and followers developing adaptive outcomes in an organization (Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, Marion, Seers, & Ortron, 2006). Adaptive leadership “calls upon participants at all levels of the organization to leverage their strengths and talents to effect change or address complex problems” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 75). This theory recognized tension and conflict as healthy problems that arose within organizations (Komives et al., 2013). In this model of leadership, participants who actively engaged in tension and conflict were able to navigate complex challenges facing organizations (Heifetz et al., 2009; Komives et al., 2013).

### **Leadership in Higher Education**

Contemporary development of leadership programs for college students has been in existence for a mere 50 years (Komives et al., 2011). Greenleaf (1970) published *The Servant as Leader* was a historic approach to leadership development. This was first in a series of papers that led to the development of Greenleaf (1977) *Servant Leadership*. *Servant Leadership*'s core tenants were the foundation of future leadership programs developed (Komives et al., 2011). In the mid-70s, national student affairs associations and a number of universities began efforts to better understand leadership in the context of college student development (Komives et al., 2011). Between 1972 and 1976, the University of Colorado and University of Maryland began the first known comprehensive leadership programs for students in the country (Komives et al., 2011). In 1978, the Inter-Associational Leadership Task Force was founded, comprising of organizations from two leading national student affairs associations (ACPA and NASPA), and the leading

national housing association (ACUHO-I; Komives et al., 2011). Finally, in 1979, the first leadership academic program was founded at the University of San Diego.

The understanding and development of leadership programs narrowly grew in the early 1980s. Roberts (1981) was the first book published, *Leadership Development in Higher Education*, focusing on leadership within student affairs profession. Heifetz, renowned author taught a course at Harvard University entitled *Leadership* (Komives et al., 2011). During the mid-80s, leadership conferences were hosted by the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, directed towards higher education (Komives et al., 2011). During this time, the first national survey to identify leadership programs on colleges and universities was distributed, garnering over 400 responses (Komives et al., 2011). Kouzes and Posner (1987) published the *Leadership Challenge*, the first book developed and used across the U.S. for accessible practices of leadership (Komives et al., 2011). The late 80s saw exponential growth in leadership publications that included *Development of a Modified Version of the Leadership Practices Inventory for Use with College Students* (Brodsky, 1988), *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989), and the first journal to launch *Leadership Quarterly* published by Elsevier in 1989. Also during that year, the first national meeting of leadership educators took place to develop and “clarify a leadership agenda for the 90’s” (Komives et al., 2011, pp. 22-23).

The 1990s exhibited a continued growth in leadership education across the U.S. In 1990, Susan Komives and Nance Lucas founded the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP) at the University of Maryland (Komives et al., 2011). National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs would serve as the leading hub for

institutions to join, exchange ideas and programs, and ultimately learn from each other for the two-decades (Komives et al., 2011). In 1992, Strengths Finder was developed focusing on positive psychology and leadership development (Clifton & Nelson, 1992). The next year, the *Journal of Leadership Studies* premiered. *Leadership*, by Northouse, was published in 1997, the same year that the first leadership institute for student organization leaders was hosted by NASPA. Tracy Tyree's dissertation resulted in the development of the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale that ultimately led to the Social Change Model of Leadership (Komives et al., 2011). During that same year, the first edition of Komives, Lucas, and McMahon's (1998) *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* was published.

The 2000s did not see a significant growth in leadership programming as the previous decade. *Leadership Reconsidered*, a publication that built upon the Social Change Model of Leadership, was published at the beginning of the decade. In 2005, the Leadership Identity Development model (LID) was published along with the release of the first Multi-Institutional Student of Leadership (MSL) by NCLP (Komives et al., 2011). The MSL was the first study of its kind that included 52 campuses and over 50,000 students participating (Komives et al., 2011). A number of texts were being reintroduced with their second editions, but a new leadership book that focused on leadership within African American, Native American, and Latino perspectives, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit* by Juana Bordas (2007), was published. By the late 2000s, the MSL became an annual study with over 100 campuses and 100,000 students participating (Komives et al., 2011).

### **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf's (1970) philosophy of servant leadership centered on "the servant-leader is servant first" (Greenleaf, 1991, p. 7). There were 10 components that formed this model: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Greenleaf, 1991). This model was based "on a process orientation, and values-based framing of positional leadership" (Komives et al., 2011, p. 43). This model was used in colleges and universities across the country, especially in faith-based institutions (Komives et al., 2011).

### **Leadership Challenge**

Developed by Kouzes and Posner (1987), this leadership model continued to be used at institutions of higher education across the country (Komives et al., 2011). The premise of this model was that leadership was accessible to all at any time and in any place (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The leadership challenge was developed after a thorough "analysis of thousands of personal-best leadership experiences" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 14). Then this model was further developed through case analyses and survey questionnaires (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Leaders engaged in *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* in order to get "extraordinary things done in organizations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 14). Those practices modeled the way, inspired a shared vision, challenged the process, enabled others to act, and encouraged the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Model the way.** Leaders must model and affirm high standards, understanding of self, and congruence of self with values. The two commitments that formed this practice

were clarifying values and setting the example (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader must find their voice and affirm shared values as a foundation to support other practices and commitments of the leadership challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader must know who they are and what they care about before they lead (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). To be effective, a leader must complete inner-work in order to share and affirm their values with those they work with in a group or organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader must “set the example by aligning actions with shared values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 26). Supporting this commitment often occurred by embodying shared values and teaching others to model values (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Inspire a shared vision.** The two commitments that formed this practice were envision the future and enlist others in a common vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Leaders who were strategic often spent more time reflecting on the future possibilities, rather than focused on the present tasks-at-hand (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). These same leaders found common purpose within an organization to move the collective forward. In order to enlist the help of others towards a common vision, leaders must sell the common vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This selling would take place by appealing to common ideals and ensuring the vision was attractive to the group (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Challenge the process.** The two commitments that formed this practice were search for opportunities and experiment and take risks (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). In order to effectively search for opportunities, leaders seized the initiative. This occurred when leaders guided others through “diversity, uncertainty, hardship, disruption, transformation, transition, recover, new beginnings, and other significant challenges” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 164). Leaders must also exercise oversight (Kouzes & Posner,



2007). Leaders must look for the hidden signs, anticipate change and innovation, and be ahead of the curve. Leaders must also develop this ability in those that they lead (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Additionally, leadership must “experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 26).

**Enable others to act.** The two commitments that formed this practice were foster collaboration and strengthen others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Leaders fostered collaboration by creating a climate of trust and facilitating relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader could not lead a group or organization without trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Relationships and a “sense of interdependence” would create a team that strived to be successful together (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader must “strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 26).

**Encourage the heart.** The two commitments that formed this practice were recognize contributions and celebrate the values and victories (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Leaders recognized contributions by always expecting the best and personalizing recognition (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). In team settings, expectations were a sign of trust and belief. Effective leaders had “high expectations of themselves and their constituents” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 282). High expectations in a high-functioning team were powerful motivators (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Personalizing recognition for success versus blanket recognition when expectations were critical and motivating towards a team’s success (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader must “celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 26).

## **Relational Leadership**

Leadership was relational and communal (Komives et al., 2013). The Relational Leadership Model viewed leadership as a “relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 95). The five key components that comprised this model were: purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process (Komives et al., 2013).

**Purposeful.** In this mode, purposeful “is having a commitment to a goal or activity” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 102). This commitment could be a goal or could be as expansive as a shared vision (Komives et al., 2013). Shared vision aligned with the Relational Leadership Model because it was formed by the contributions of others in the hopes of building a vision for the betterment of the organization (Komives et al., 2013).

**Inclusive.** In this model, inclusive meant, “understanding, valuing, and actively engaging diversity in views, approaches, styles, and aspects of individuality” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 108). This understanding explored both, the uniqueness of the individual and the group (Komives et al., 2013). Being inclusive in this model also meant exploring ways to incorporate all people (Komives et al., 2013).

**Empower.** The Relational Leadership Model aimed to empower self and environment (Komives et al., 2013). Self-empowerment occurred by educating, leading, structuring, providing, mentoring, and actualizing (Komives et al., 2013; Murrell, 1985;). Empowering groups, organizations, and the environment would develop the human spirit (Kiefer & Senge, 1984; Komives et al. 2013). Empowerment resulted in inclusivity (Komives et al., 2013).

**Ethical.** Core tenants of the Relational Leadership Model were ethical and moral leadership (Komives et al., 2013). Meaning, “leadership that is driven by values and standards and leadership that is good-moral-in nature” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 125). These standards were created by both, the leader and the members of the organization (Komives et al., 2013).

**Process.** Process was how a group functions, from planning to accomplishing goals. This component meant “that individuals interact with others and that leaders and other participants work together to accomplish change” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 133). Several necessary tenants to this component included collaboration, reflection, feedback, civil confrontation, community building, and meaning making (Komives et al., 2013).

### **Social Change Model of Leadership**

The Social Change Model (SCM) of Leadership came to fruition under the leadership of Alexander and Helen Astin (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996). This model was created specifically for college students who wanted to create social change (HERI, 1996; Komives, Wagner, & Associates, 2009). This model’s foundational elements were that leadership was socially responsible, collaborative, a process, inclusive and accessible, and values-based (Bonous-Hammarth, 2001; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2009). Additionally, involvement and service by students served as the prevailing means for understanding leadership (Bonous-Hammarth, 2001; HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2009). The Social Change Model contained three dimensions: the individual, group, and community/society (HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2009). Grouped within these dimensions were seven values that represented the interactions between individuals, groups, and communities (HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2009). The seven

values were: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship (HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2009).

The ultimate purpose of this model was to establish social change (HERI, 1996; Komives et al., 2009).

**Consciousness of self.** This value centered on self-awareness (Cilente, 2009).

This value “refers to people’s awareness of their own personality traits, values, and strengths, as well as their ability to be self-observers who are mindful of their actions, feelings, and beliefs” (Fincher, 2009, pp. 300-301). The greater the self-awareness, the more confident the leader became at identifying who they were as a leader versus allowing others to define them as a leader (Fincher, 2009; Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005).

**Congruence.** This value occurred when students acted consistently with their values (Cilente, 2009). As a student’s consciousness of self continues to grow, the “desire to act consistently with those values grows as well” (Shalka, 2009, p. 339). In the SCM, consciousness of self and congruence were interdependent upon each other (Shalka, 2009).

**Commitment.** This value was exhibited by a student’s demonstrated passion, investment of time, and involvement to a group and community (Cilente, 2009; HERI 1996). Commitment “implies intensity and duration. It requires a significant involvement and investment of one’s self in the activity and its intended consequences. It is the energy that drive the collective effort and brings it to fruition” (HERI, 1996, p. 40). This value could be developed over time (Kerkhoff & Ostick, 2009).

**Collaboration.** Within the *Group* dimension, collaboration was essential value of reaching common purpose (Cilente, 2009). Collaboration “underscores the importance of relationships, the need for shared responsibility, authority, and accountability, and the benefit of having multiple perspectives and talents in a group process” (England, 2009, p. 195). A core tenant of collaboration was human relationships and how people work together, value each other, and support each other as individuals, within the group, and in the community (HERI, 1996).

**Common purpose.** This value emerged when the group was participating in the development of a shared vision (Cilente, 2009). Common purpose “involves working with others in group settings” (Teh, 2009, p. 275). Common purpose would keep a group directed and focused (Teh, 2009).

**Controversy with civility.** This value was when students in a group meaningfully engaged through disagreement (HERI, 1996). When effectively used, this value engaged students in thoughtful conversations engaging in different perspectives in order to facilitate decision making (Cilente, 2009; HERI, 1996). This value enabled a group to avoid groupthink (Alvarez, 2009).

**Citizenship.** The purpose of the SCM was for individuals to see that they had a greater purpose beyond themselves (Cilente, 2009). Citizenship “centers on active community participation as a result of a sense of responsibility to the communities in which people live” (Bonnet, 2009, p. 150). Citizenship in SCM implies that a student was more than a member of a community, but they were actively engaged and serving the community (HERI, 1996). In order to impact social change, students must also be

engaged and aware of the greater issues that impact their community, group, and self (Cilente, 2009).

### **Salsa, Soul, and Spirit**

Majority of leadership models were grounded from dominant identity perspective. The experience for marginalized identity groups could be quite different. For instance, if a BMLGBQ individual was placed into a leadership position in organization whose majority membership did not match their own, they may feel that they were selected to fill a quota. This feeling could lead to the devaluing of own worth and self-efficacy; as well create a feeling of *token* stress (Knight, Hebl, Foster, & Mannix, 2003). Another example showed that participants in one study “viewed Black leaders and White subordinates more negatively than White leaders and Black subordinates” (Knight et al., 2003, p. 90).

Leadership theories and models predominantly used in higher education have not considered socially constructed identities as part of their process. Leadership in communities of color was different than those of majority identity culture (Bordas, 2007). Leadership in communities of color encourage,

Democratic values such as justice and promoting the common welfare, and its uses practical approaches that engage and empower people. This participatory form of leadership can replenish American democracy right at a time when involvement is faltering (Bordas, 2007, p. 5).

Bordas (2007) provided a leadership model that was “uniquely suited to our mosaic world because it incorporates the influences, practices, and values of a variety of cultures in a respectful and productive manner” (p. 9). *Salsa* (representative of Latino/a/x culture), *Soul* (representative of Black and African American culture), and *Spirit* (representative of Native American Culture) was an infusion of multiple cultures of color in the U.S. to

create this leadership model (Bordas). Bordas (2007) developed eight principles that inform this model of leadership:

- Principle 1, Sankofa; Learn from the Past
- Principle 2, I to We; From Individualism to Collective Identity
- Principle 3, Mi Casa Es Su Casa; A Spirit of Generosity
- Principle 4, A Leader Among Equals; Community Conferred Leadership
- Principle 5, Leaders as Guardians of Public Values; A Tradition of Activism
- Principle 6, Leaders as Community Stewards; Working for the Common Good
- Principle 7, All My Relatives; La Familia, the Village, the Tribe
- Principle 8, Gracias; Gratitude, Hope, and Forgiveness.

**Principle 1, Sankofa; learn from the past.** *Sankofa* meant “return, go back, seek, and retrieve” (Bordas, 2007, p. 18). In order to dismantle dominant identity theories of leadership, a leader must have an understanding of how those forms of leadership came to power in the first place (Bordas, 2007). This principle centered on learning from experience in order to avoid obstacles and drawbacks (Bordas, 2007).

**Principle 2, I to We; from individualism to collective identity.** Building equitable and just communities required a shift of thinking from the individual to collective community (Bordas, 2007). Leading in a collective community brought meaning to the community (Bordas, 2007). Developing a “*We* orientation, as found in communities of color, can be an antidote for healing much of the social malaise that unbridled individualism, overwork, and materialism have spawned” (Bordas, 2007, p. 41).

**Principle 3, Mi Casa Es Su Casa; a spirit of generosity.** When a collective community was established, then it formed the foundation of a caring and generous society (Bordas, 2007). “Generosity, mutuality, and helping one another” has held communities of color together during times of persecution, oppression, and subjugation (Bordas, 2007, p. 73). This principle within the collective community continuously reminded its members to aspire to put the community needs first and the community would thrive (Bordas, 2007).

**Principle 4, A Leader Among Equals; community conferred leadership.** This principle of leadership described a community in which leadership was established without hierarchy (Bordas, 2007). Leadership was rotated amongst the members of the collective community (Bordas, 2007). Community cohesion could be impacted by a leader who puts themselves before the collective (Bordas, 2007). In this principle, leadership was conferred by the group based on character, ability to serve something greater than themselves, serve as role model, and places the well-being of the group before themselves (Bordas, 2007).

**Principle 5, Leaders as Guardians of Public Values; a tradition of activism.** Leaders were innately in a position to lend voice to the voiceless (Bordas, 2007). Leaders must address issues for concerning the collective community that articulate public values “such as pluralism, justice, and equality” (Bordas, 2007, p. 19). Leaders were responsible for challenging the social structure of power (Bordas, 2007).

**Principle 6, Leaders as Community Stewards; working for the common good.** Leaders must serve as stewards to their community by nurturing and advancing the community (Bordas, 2007). Leaders must also cultivate the members of the community,



in turn increasing member's capacity to contribute to the greater good and lead (Bordas, 2007). The leadership that took place in "communities of color is inherently a public responsibility to bring people together to address and change the social and economic conditions that affect their lives" (Bordas, 2007, p. 100).

**Principle 7, All My Relatives; la familia, the village, the tribe.** This principle of leadership emphasized that the collective community should be treated as family, "regardless of position, social class, or ranking" (Bordas, 2007, p. 20). When leadership was considered a life-long commitment, leaders tended to treat members of their collective community as related, part of the family (Bordas, 2007). This commitment would put the needs of the community above the needs of the leader (Bordas, 2007).

**Principle 8, Gracias; gratitude, hope, and forgiveness.** This principle of leadership was centered on optimism for the future, learning from the past, forgiving others, and moving into action (Bordas, 2007). The ability "to forgive has allowed communities of color to heal the past and build new pathways of understanding" (Bordas, 2007, p. 142). This principle revolved on resolving the past, having gratitude for today, and being hopeful for the future in order to support and move the collective community forward (Bordas, 2007).

### **Leadership Identity Development Model**

Komives et al. (2005) developed a leadership identity model in order to gain a deeper understanding of leadership development among college students. This model served to fill a gap in the literature on leadership efficacy but did not address social identity models (Guthrie et al., 2013). This conceptual model emerged based on a grounded theory study of 13 students who identified with a multitude of diverse identities

who showed signs of relational leadership (Komives et al., 2005). This model accounted for categories of “developmental influences, developing self, group influences, students’ changing view of self with others, and students’ broadening view of leadership” (Komives et al., 2005, p. 593). The categories of development impacted every stage of the leadership identity development model (Komives et al., 2005).

**Developmental influences.** This study revealed that critical developmental influences that cultivate leadership identity included adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning (Komives et al., 2005). This framework governed the entire model. The developmental influences could impact each stage of the leadership identity development model in various ways. Authority figures, such as adults, were revealed to be the first to recognize leadership potential and serve as role models (Komives et al., 2005). Peers also served as a critical connector for meaningful involvement. Individuals engaged with peers to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, while “involvement experiences were the training ground where leadership identity evolved” (Komives et al., 2005, p. 598). Meaningful involvement was when participants were able to clarify their values, learn about self, and develop new skills (Komives et al., 2005). In team-based setting, they also learned how to do their best in concert with their team (Komives et al., 2005). Formal leadership trainings were often intertwined with reflective learning where participants learned to assess themselves, improve, and differentiate their experience (Komives et al., 2005).

**Developing self.** This study revealed that when a participant’s identity was first forming, they recalled it being very vague experience (Komives et al., 2005). Over time, participants were able to identify and label aspects of their own development (Komives et

al., 2005). Social identities were very impactful to the participant's perception of leadership identity. For instance, one participant felt pressure and motivation to present a positive Black male image while another participant considered being a male was a positive asset, but being gay could be a barrier to leadership (Komives et al., 2005). Common understandings from participants in this study were that social identity impacted the development of self. Specifically, race and gender were noted as impacting perceptions and expectations of who and why someone took on a leadership role (Komives et al., 2005). Building self-confidence was critical to developing self in this model. As confidence continued to grow, the participants took on more responsibility and risk with their roles as leaders (Komives et al., 2005). Once a student acknowledged they were a leader, they incorporated that into their identity as a person (Komives et al., 2005). Participants identified interpersonal relationships as a valuable tool in their self-development. They began their journey by working with people who were more like them and as their confidence and efficacy grew, they expanded their networks (Komives et al., 2005). For this reason, participants "developed an appreciation of diverse points of view and valued different perspectives" resulting in greater empathy towards other student communities (Komives et al., 2005, p. 601). Finally, as participants identified their motivation expanding based on time, experience, confidence, and skill level (Komives et al., 2005).

**Group influences.** This study revealed that the developing self could not happen without the impact of group influences (Komives et al., 2005). Initially, participants joined groups to create a sense of belonging (Komives et al., 2005). As participants grew in their understanding of self, they joined organizations that were more inline with their

values and convictions while narrowing down the number of groups in which they were involved (Komives et al., 2005). Initially, participants saw their groups as collections of people and, with more experience, evolved into an organization with a role and purpose (Komives et al., 2005).

**Changing view of self with others.** The study revealed that participants' view of their own self with others changed based on their interactions with group (Komives et al., 2005). Participants all began as dependent on the group for membership (Komives et al., 2005). As they developed self, they either continued as dependent to be in service of the group or independent to serve as a leader of the group (Komives et al., 2005).

**Broadening view of leadership.** Participants in this study started their journey not considering themselves to be a leader to ending that a leadership role could be from anywhere within a group (Komives et al., 2005). This evolution, in conjunction with developing influences, self, group influences, and changing view gave participants context on how they would make meaning of their broadening growth. This took the form that leadership was others and not them, then it became positional in nature, then non-positional in nature, to an understanding that leadership was a process (Guthrie et al., 2013; Komives et al., 2005).

**Leadership identity.** Similar to racial and sexual identity development, this study identified six stages central towards the development of student's leadership identity. The six stages were awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis (Komives et al., 2005). Each stage exhibited transition by "the interaction of developing self through group influences that

changed one's view of self with others and broadened the view of leadership in the context of the supports of the developmental influences" (Komives et al., 2005, p. 606).

***Awareness.*** In the first stage, recognition of leadership was presented as recognition that leaders existed. Participants in this study were aware that parents, family, and other authority figures served as leaders (Komives et al., 2005). Leadership was external to the individual and participants did not identify as a leader (Komives et al., 2005).

***Exploration and engagement.*** The second stage began preliminary involvement in groups and organizations (Komives et al., 2005). Participants identified this as a time of intentional involvement, taking responsibility, and experiencing a wide array of groups (Komives et al., 2005). During this stage, participants were engaged in such a large number of groups that they were often unfocused in interested in order to find a sense of belonging (Komives et al., 2005).

***Leader identified.*** The third stage began with an understanding that leadership was positional. Participants in this study perceived that leaders were leaders and followers were followers (Komives et al., 2005). This was the first stage where participants specifically chose to either be a member or a leader (Komives et al., 2005).

***Leader differentiated.*** In the fourth stage, participants began to differentiate leadership roles beyond positional in nature (Komives et al., 2005). In this stage, participants recognized that anyone involved in a group or organization could do leadership (Komives et al., 2005). During this stage, participants also recognized that leadership was a process (Komives et al., 2005).

**Generativity.** In the fifth stage, students took responsibility within their respective organizations. Participants were committed to the organizations larger purpose while clearly articulating their own values and passions (Komives et al., 2005). This stage was also when participants recognized they were now role models for the younger members of the group (Komives et al., 2005).

**Integration and synthesis.** In the sixth and final stage, participants chose to engage in leadership as a daily and continual learning process (Komives et al., 2005). Participants that reached this stage in the study were confident about their skills and abilities to communicate and work effectively with people different from themselves (Komives et al., 2005). Participants incorporated leadership as part of their identity (Komives et al., 2005).

### **Research Supporting Leadership Development**

Dugan and Komives (2007), Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership was a comprehensive multi-site study that collected data from 52 colleges and universities with 50,378 students as participants. This study was focused on the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale and Social Change Model (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Tyree, 1998). Key findings from this study indicated that collegiate experiences mattered (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Students in their senior year showed a significant growth in the *consciousness of self* during their time as an undergraduate. Participants in this study also experienced “meaningful positive change [that] occurred in terms of [their] *Leadership Efficacy*” (Dugan & Komives, 2007, p. 13). Data from this study also revealed that students’ pre-collegiate experiences mattered (Dugan & Komives, 2007). This study also highlighted that African American/Black students ranked highest in *consciousness of self*,

*congruence, commitment, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change* (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Additionally, this study indicated that students with marginalized identities, such as the LGBTQ, “first generation, African American, Native America, Latino, and multiracial students” are most open to change (Dugan & Komives, 2007, p. 14). Specifically, “students from these groups appeared to demonstrate greater aptitude and comfort with managing and navigating change” (Dugan & Komives, 2007, p. 14). This study also highlighted that mentoring and campus involvement had a significant impact on participants’ growth in leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Finally, this study also revealed that students “holding leadership positions in college organizations had a positive influence on all outcomes with the strongest effect size on *Common Purpose and Citizenship*” (Dugan & Komives, 2007, p. 16).

### **Perspectives on Intersectionality, Multiple Identities and Experiences**

The concept of intersectionality has not been new. For instance, in 1851, “Sojourner Truth, a freed black woman living in the United States observed that neither the racism, nor the sexism that she experienced could be neatly separated into distinct issues” (Van Der Meide, 2002, p. 7). Additionally, “feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color’ have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242).

Understanding the embodiment of the intersections of multiple identities has allowed individuals to understand the various oppressions and privileges they may have without creating a hierarchy for those same oppressions and privileges (Pulliam & Mott, 2010). Crenshaw (1994) “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity

when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 1788). Individuals must be recognized for their individual identities and their multiple identities too. If the LGBTQ community was lumped together as one group, then it would be easy to devalue the individual contribution of those four individually specific communities. Since biracial and multiracial individuals may also identify in multiple ways, ensuring space for self-identification would be imperative. If differences within groups were ignored, it would create and contribute “to the tension among groups” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). For this reason, “intersectionality is a way to challenge subjectification” (Diggins, 2011, p. 1). For instance,

Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experience of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited even on their own terms (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252).

This analysis demonstrated that intersectionality challenges the concept of a siloed identity experience as the only possible experience for an individual.

Researchers have struggled to articulate how identity and experiences have been shaped from the intersections of multiple marginalized identities (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010). In fact, much of the research surrounding the LGBTQ community has been based on the experiences of White individuals. Research on people of color often has been based on “samples that are predominantly heterosexual or of unknown sexual orientation, resulting in a paucity of scholarship about LGB people of color” (DeBlaere et al., 2010, p. 332).

Although research and literature has grown significantly since 2000, there must be further research and consideration of how we understand multiracial identity and its role with the intersection of other social identities (Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2012). There has



been minimal research on how students make meaning of their social constructed identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI) and Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) were two models that were highly referenced in higher education by student affairs researchers and practitioners, but more empirical studies could result in a developmental theory that examined the experiences of LGBTQ people of color (Abes et al., 2007; L. D. Patton, 2011).

### **Factor Model of Multiracial Identity**

Factor Model of Multiracial Identity was a philosophical shift back from stages to ecological factors in identity development models (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This model was based on individual choices rather than one's experience within systems of oppression or support (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Factor Model of Multiracial Identity showed that "moves to questions of how individuals understand and make meaning of these chosen identities in light of their experiences" (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 133). This model consisted of eight factors that guided and affected the choice of how multiracial people identify: racial ancestry, early experiences and socialization, cultural attachment, physical appearance, social and historical context, political awareness and orientation, other social identities, and spirituality (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Racial ancestry.** People who often identify as multiracial situate their identity based on their immediate and extended family (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This factor was less important if an individual did not identify as multiracial and chose their monoracial identity (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Racial ancestry was adaptable for individuals who identify

as monoracial allowing people to live without guilt or anxiety of having to choose (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Early experiences and socialization.** The early experience and socialization factor was very similar to identity stage models. Early experiences and socialization have been influenced by family, community, music, food, celebrations, and language (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This could be overt or subtle based on exposure and frequency (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). If an individual was comfortable with their multiracial identity at a young age, they often found support through family and friends as they continued to explore their culture. If an individual found comfort in their multiracial identity later in life, they may follow a path and explore their multiple identities at that time (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Cultural attachment.** An individual's choice of how they identify was impacted by "cultural traditions that encompass all of a person's racial background" (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 140). A choice may result in an individual not identifying as multiracial (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This factor was influenced and impacted by other factors in the FMMI (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Physical appearance.** Physical characteristics often dictated how an individual would make meaning of this factor. Depending on a person's outward appearance, such as skin color, may determine how a person sees self (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Individuals with features that exhibited monoracial may feel boxed into one identity (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Individuals who were more racially ambiguous may experience microaggressions and be asked phrases such as "What are you?" (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 140). In most

cases, this factor highlighted the assumption that most people who were multiracial look liked people of color.

**Social and historical context.** A person's racial identification was influenced by current and historical social and historical events (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Historically, the U.S. has maintained a model of the *one-drop rule* and it was not until the year 2000 that U.S. Census forms allowed individuals to check multiple boxes to indicate their race (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Although institutions of higher education have been starting to create and implement support structures for multiracial students, societal accommodations have been emerging (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Political awareness and orientation.** A person's choice to identify as multiracial was often linked to awareness and experiences in a larger social context (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). A person's self-identification "can take on meaning as a political act or statement" (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 142). In some instances, an individual identifying as multiracial was considered a political statement to live outside of the societal box (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Other social identities.** Social identities beyond race could often be a mitigating factor if an individual would identify as multiracial (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). For those with multiple marginalized identities, "racial identity may reflect an integration of racial and nonracial social identities" (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 142). In fact, some nonracial social identities may be more relevant and dominant for a person based on the similar factors of FMMI (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

**Spirituality.** In FMMI, spirituality was defined broadly as the "degree to which individuals believe in, seek meaning from, or are guided by a sense of spirit or higher

power” (Wijeyesinghe, 2001, p. 143). As important as family is as a support structure, spirituality also served a safe harbor for negative racial experiences (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Additionally, spirituality often transcended labels and differences based on labels (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

### **Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity**

An individual rarely experiences socially constructed identities as a single identity in a silo (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Instead, socially constructed identities often manifest simultaneously (Abes et al., 2007). This model “describes the dynamic construction of identity and the influence of changing contexts on the relative salience of multiple identity dimensions, such as race, sexual orientation, culture, and social class” (Abes et al., 2007, p. 3). Similar in some ways to FMMI, MMDI incorporated other dimensions of identity into the construction of the model. In an effort to expand upon the literature, Jones and McEwen (2000) surmised a model to have two components, the core and context. The research resulting in this model consisted of 10 undergraduate students of diverse backgrounds attending a large East Coast university (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Abes and Jones (2004) completed a study with three participants who were lesbian students resulting in the reconceptualized model. Abes et al. (2007) enhanced the model to include meaning-making and self-perceptions of others’ social identities.

**Core.** The core of this model represented an individual’s personal experience, characteristics, attributes, and personal identity (Abes et al., 2007). Participants often identified the core as their inner-self or inner-identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). For participants, their inner-self was more meaningful to themselves versus the perception of their outside identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000). In general, participants resisted

categorizing their inner-self because labels and categorizations lacked the complexity of their experiences (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

**Intersecting identity circles.** Similar to planets orbiting around a sun in a solar system, revolving around the core were intersecting identity circles that represent significant identity dimensions that include race, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation, ability, ethnicity, and culture (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Each of these social identities orbited the core and the rings of the orbit intersected one another (Jones & McEwen, 2000). At times, they were in close proximity to the core and other times further based on salient experiences of a particular identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). In particular, participants' identity dimensions were more or less salient based on the "contextual influences such as family background, sociocultural conditions, current life experiences, and career decisions and life planning" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410).

**Incorporation of meaning-making capacity in a reconceptualized model.**

Based on the Abes and Jones (2004) study, it was suggested that the capacity for meaning-making be incorporated into MMIDI based on "relationship between context and salience of identity dimensions" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 6). The reconceptualized model of MMIDI incorporated concepts of meaning-making, contextual influences, and identity perceptions (Abes et al., 2007). Participants in this study provided examples of three types of meaning-making processes that were formulaic, transitional, and foundational (Abes et al., 2007):

**Formulaic meaning-making filter.** Meaning-making under a formulaic lens was largely accepted as experienced (Abes et al., 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2009). In the formulaic filter, "contextual influences and perceptions of identity are closely connected"

(Abes et al., 2007, p. 7). Participants of this study saw each of the identities independent from each other when making decisions about self (Abes et al., 2007). In some instances, it was easier for participants to identify who they were not rather than who they were (Abes et al., 2007). In this filter, meaning-making by participants resulted in them identifying counter to stereotypes versus analyzing who they were as a person (Abes et al., 2007). Contextual influences, such as peers, family, and stereotypes, have little impact on a formulaic meaning-making filter (Abes et al., 2007).

**Transitional meaning-making filter.** Meaning-making under a transitional lens was largely an intermediary stage between formulaic and foundational (Abes et al., 2007). As participants in this study revealed a more complex understanding of their identities, they realized the limitations placed on their multiple identities by stereotypes and labels (Abes et al., 2007). Concurrently, participants found it reasonable to digress using stereotypes as way to outwardly identify or when they were experiencing self-doubt (Abes et al., 2007). Some contextual influences in this filter often were redefined and reinterpreted by participants, while other influences remained unchanged (Abes et al., 2007).

**Foundational meaning-making filter.** Participants meaning-making under a foundational lens was very in-depth and complex to their understanding of their multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007). Participants had a “greater ability to determine the relationship between context and perceptions of identity” (Abes et al., 2007, p. 11). Participants reinterpreted and ascribed their own meaning to contextual influences (Abes et al., 2007). Participants were able to understand how the intersections and relationships of their multiple identities interact and coexist (Abes et al., 2007).

## **Chapter Summary**

The experiences of BMLGBQ college students have been relatively unknown to educators. This chapter presented important literature in regards to having a core understanding of the identity development models and research of the experiences of biracial/multiracial and LGBTQ students and demonstrated the need for creating spaces on campus that support marginalized students psychologically and physically (Guthrie et al., 2013). As noted earlier, research has shown the impact of navigating multiple marginalized identities personal development, engagement, and well-being. These spaces offer intersections of socially constructed identities and offer opportunities for students to reflect and grow as a leader. This study explored how BMLGBQ student leaders made meaning of their experiences and offered stories to enhance understanding, support, and empower this unique community.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the research methodology for this study. The first section describes and explores the philosophy and paradigm used to guide this study, followed by a description of the methodology and methods. The third section will conclude with an understanding of research rigor in this critical cultural qualitative constructivist study.

This chapter is designed to address the two research questions that evolved in this study:

- Q1 How do BMLGBQ undergraduate student leaders make meaning of their experiences?
- Q2 How do BMLGBQ students make sense of their multiple marginalized identities in the context of their leadership role?

#### **Paradigm**

A paradigm is a researcher's worldview and how they make sense of it (Crotty, 1998). Paradigms are composed of "certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action" (Mertens, 2009, p. 7). Paradigms are defined by the nature of ethics, reality, and knowledge (Mertens, 2009). Additionally, the relationships of the researcher and participants informs the paradigm (Mertens, 2009).

Due to the difficulty of a single categorization of a paradigm, this study incorporated both, a constructivist paradigm and critical cultural paradigm throughout this research (Guido, Chávez, & Lincoln, 2010). By considering multiple paradigms as the foundation of this study, the reader gained a broad perspective for understanding and interpreting the findings (Guido et al., 2010). Understand the epistemology and ontology



of each paradigm connected to the inquiry was also outlined. Finally, research rigor was discussed and addressed in this inquiry.

### **Constructivist Paradigm**

In a constructivist paradigm, “knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and the researcher should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view who live it” (Mertens, 2009, p. 16). The constructivist paradigm holds that there is no one “Truth.” Meaning is constructed based on the collaborative interactions of the researcher and participants (Guido et al., 2010; Mertens, 2009). A constructivist paradigm develops shared meaning between researcher and participants (Guido et al., 2010). This means that “knowledge within this paradigm is emergent, contextual, personal, socially constructed, and interactive” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15). This social construction of knowledge occurs by the investigator and participants involved in the research process and the multiple lenses they bring to the process (Creswell, 2007; Guido et al., 2010). In this paradigm, the researcher is also the participant as is the participant the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher could never be separated from the research or participants (Guido et al., 2010).

In this emergent paradigm, research was a collaborative process. The researcher and participant were intertwined in a shared process that impacted each other (Mertens, 2009). The participant’s world and experiences were their own truth as was the researcher’s. There was no universal truth in a constructivist paradigm; rather multiple truths were real depending on the timing, environment, and circumstances (Guido et al., 2010). The emphasis of this paradigm was “that research is a product of the values of the researchers and cannot be independent of them” (Mertens, 2009, p. 16). Additionally,

since “reality is socially constructed” in this paradigm, the reality constructed may vary based on perceptions and timing within the process (Mertens, 2009, p. 18). A constructivist paradigm reality is not objective, but subjective and may have “multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (Mertens, 2009, p. 18). The social construction of reality takes multiple forms that are “intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding construction” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 110-11). The research goal in this investigation was to make meaning of this phenomenon in order to suggest valuable change in the way colleges and universities treat minoritized student leaders.

This constructivist study sought to understand how BMLGBQ college students made meaning of their leadership experiences while navigating their multiple marginalized social identities (Schwandt, 2007). Although linear stage models have been developed to articulate a multiracial student’s experiences (Cass, 1979; Komives et al., 2005; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2000; Root, 1992; Wijeyesinghe, 2001), these linear models have not necessarily fallen in line with a constructivist paradigm because this emergent design focused on the co-creation and co-authorship of the participant-researcher experience. The nature of this paradigm was transactional and subjectivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In addition, the ontological aspect of this paradigm stated that the participant and research would co-construct realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). A student’s experience with the intersections of multiple identities has been constantly evolving, devolving, circular, and non-linear in nature. In a constructivist paradigm, no one truth was shared, but multiple truths were created (Moss, 2004). In fact, a truth may be

revealed through this process at a certain instance and may change “under different circumstances at a different time” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15). As evidenced in my story in Chapter I, I understood this from both personal experiences and the research based on multiple models of identity development (Jones & McEwen, 2000). For these reasons, a multiple paradigm approach was appropriate for this study.

### **Critical Cultural Paradigm**

This study also incorporated a critical cultural paradigm. A critical paradigm is centered on the concept of having an “unapologetic stance on questioning everything” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 9), while the fundamental premise of a cultural paradigm “is that most of what we know is socially constructed” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 10). A critical cultural paradigm is a blended paradigm established to create transformational change in organizations and systemic practices that often oppress marginalized groups (Guido et al., 2010).

Consistent with critical cultural paradigm, the research gave power to the voice of students in this collaborative process. Institutions and organizations in the U.S. have been “fashioned around Euro-American culture and hierarchical structures” (Bordas, 2007, p. 203). Students with multiple marginalized, oppressed, and subordinated identities were often expected to fit into the collegiate norm of predominantly White, heterosexual, Christian campuses (Bordas, 2007). By exploring the campus leadership experiences of BMLGBQ college students, these students hopefully would feel empowered to make meaning of their experiences. Participants’ shared experiences assisted in forming recommendations for inclusive campus environments and enhanced research on the understanding the multiple intersections of identity for students in campus leadership

roles. This study went beyond research and “offer critique and suggestions for action” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 12). By using this critical cultural paradigm, BMLGBQ college students were empowered “to transcend the constraints placed on them by race” (Creswell, 2007, p. 27), either monoracial or multiple-racial, in addition to those placed on them by their sexual identity. This study could give BMLGBQ college student leaders voice where they typically had not had one. Student participants have had an opportunity to share stories from an individual perspective of interactions with peers, advisors, supervisors, and community members on the societal issues they likely faced every day (oppression, alienation, ostracization, hegemony, and domination; Creswell, 2007). Understanding the culture of BMLGBQ student leaders and building trust with them was vital to this investigation (Mertens, 2007).

Within a constructivist paradigm, multiple realities are constructed. The use of a critical cultural paradigm complements and enhances the constructivist paradigm by challenging existing power structures and promoting resistance to the construction of realities placed upon BMLGBQ college student leaders (Creswell, 2007). The use of a blended paradigm is symbolic of social justice and social action by serving as a “catalyst for dismantling oppression” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 11).

### **Methodology**

Methodology describes the process of inquiry and serves as the intermediary of the underlying philosophy guiding this study in addition to the procedures of collecting the data (Schwandt, 2007). The knowledge produced from blending paradigms (i.e., constructivist and critical cultural) has been derived from qualitative methods, which often included narratives, interpretations, and/or reconstructions (Crotty, 1998; Merriam,

2009). In this emergent design, the end result of the participant-researcher process should present “a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor construction” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). For this reason, I employed narrative inquiry as methodological approach in this study.

Narrative is synonymous with story (Riessman, 2008). Narratives also “do political work” (Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Personal narratives often highlight systems of privilege, power, and difference (Riessman, 2008). In a narrative methodology, social constructions are extracted and understood through interactions of the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of a narrative approach was congruent with the constructivist and critical cultural paradigms because participants and researchers served both roles throughout this process. Within this methodological approach, “scholars often invite research participants to be active in the inquiry by offering suggestions for study design” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 16). Due to the coming together of multiple realities, the initial interview questions were open ended and addressed themes pertinent to the inquiry in the first interview. The understanding created by the participant-researcher experience assisted in establishing additional questions knowing that this process would “evolve and change as the study progresses” (Mertens, 2009, p. 20). In a narrative approach, this process created an active space of inquiry that constantly changes the perceptions of the stories co-created by participants and researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry offers unique opportunities to analyze “the way large institutions dehumanize, anesthetize, and alienate people” who are part of the system (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 47). Narrative inquiry aims to create meaning of life

events that are rich in depth and meaning by revealing truths based on first-hand experiences of participants (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). Informed by constructivist ideals, a narrative approach "allows us to view an individual's [racial] minority identity development as fluid and dynamic" (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999, p. 18). Participants' narratives were developed "as a result of a co-constructive process" with the researcher (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999).

In order to capture the full range of reality of each participant, multiple naturalistic methods for data collection were included in this study, which, in this investigation were multiple in-depth interviews (Guido et al., 2010; Mertens, 2009). One of the primary methods of collecting data in qualitative research has been through in-depth interviews (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). In line with this paradigm, in-depth interviews have often been described as a conversation (Legard et al., 2003). Under this blended paradigm, knowledge has been created and negotiated during in-depth interviews as the interviewer traveled along the journey with the interviewee (Kvale, 1996; Legard et al., 2003).

In-depth interviews give participants and researchers the opportunity to focus on a specific topic while interpreting how that topic was experienced throughout their lives (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This method would be important to understand as participants reflect on whom they were as leaders and the influence they had working with and leading others. This approach would focus on the "*hows* and *whats* of storytelling but base inquiry on intensive interviews about specific aspects of people's lives" (Chase, 2005, p. 659). The strength of using this approach would create a process that was fluid and evolving in nature as the study progressed (Mertens, 2009).

There are four key features of in-depth interviews. First, in-depth interviews create structure along with flexibility (Legard et al., 2003). Second, another key feature is that in-depth interviews are “interactive in nature” (Legard et al., 2003, p. 141). Although interview questions are created, the flexibility of engaging in conversation allows the participant and researcher to guide the conversation to what is most comfortable for the interviewee (Legard et al., 2003). The use of follow-up and probing questions in order to dig deeper are the third key feature (Legard et al., 2003). Finally, “new knowledge or thoughts are likely, at some stage to be created” (Legard et al., 2003, p.142). When researchers and participants probe, and dig deeper, they may uncover knowledge or thoughts that have never been explored prior to that moment.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants selected for this study attended a southern region university on the east coast. The institution, given the pseudonym Hurston University, was a highly selective, predominantly White institution, situated in a small college town with approximately 25,000 students. Initially, I identified two gatekeepers in the southeastern part of the country who served as staff members at their university in LGBTQ student services offices. I was purposeful in the sampling strategy by employing criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007; M. Q. Patton, 2002). By using criterion sampling, I predetermined characteristics, or in this case, socially constructed identities for this research (Creswell, 2007; M. Q. Patton, 2002). Participants had to be college students who racially identified as biracial and/or multiracial and also identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer. Participants also had to self-identify as an on-campus leader either through a curricular, co-curricular, or an employment setting. They also had to identify as

an undergraduate student not enrolled in their first year of college in order to ensure that they would have some leadership and involvement experiences they could reflect upon. There was no exclusion by gender, so participants could have identified with any gender (male, female, and/or transgender). There was no other criterion of exclusion for this research.

With such specific criteria, the gatekeepers had trouble identifying participants for this study because students were either not public about their sexual identity and concerned about anonymity or identified as monoracial and LGBTQ. After conversations with the gatekeepers, I made flyers for them to distribute to students who they thought may be interested and asked that they shared the flyers with other staff members at their institutions. Through this process, four interested individuals contacted me through email to participate in this study. The participants who contacted me via email were excited about this study. Additionally, two other interested individuals contacted me through telephone to have a better understanding of the study. At the time, one of the major concerns for the participants was about anonymity. Ultimately, all six participants were eager to participate and met the criteria. I sent the participants an electronic copy of the informed consent (see Appendix A), which included a detailed explanation of the study along with a copy of the first-round interview questions. The study concluded with five participants. One participant, who was eager to participate, had to cancel our first interview. After the cancellation, the participant received a unique opportunity to study abroad. I continued to seek additional participants but, due to the confined location of the study and limited population, I was unsuccessful.



All participants were over the age of 18 and signed a consent form that explained the benefits and potential risks of participating in the research. In this process, I had an “ethical duty to protect the privacy and dignity of those whose lives [I] study to contribute to knowledge” (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). For this reason, I asked participants to select a pseudonym in order to offer as much confidentiality and anonymity as humanly possible (Josselson, 2007). Table 1 provides a brief glimpse of the BMLGBQ student leaders who participated in this study.

### **Data Collection**

As the researcher, I served as a facilitator and a participant for the collection of stories in a narrative methodological approach (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Participants must be included in the research process from start to finish in order to ensure that their story was heard (Mertens, 2009). Data were collected in two semi-structured intensive interviews. Since, structured interviewing pre-established all questions for a “limited set of response categories” and unstructured interviews established a greater range of questions to gain depth, I incorporated a blend of both interviewing models (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 363). The interviews were semi-structured and in a comfortable setting for a conversation that led to more questions and space for knowledge to manifest (Merriam, 2009). The interviews commenced after receiving approval from Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B).

Table 1

*Participant Demographics and Leadership Involvement*

Participant/Category	Alyx	Andrew	Anthony	Nouri	Ororo
Racial Identity	Half Singaporean Chinese and Half Romanian	Half Black and Half Native American	Half Mexican and Half Black	Half Black and Half White	Half Black and Half White
Sexual Identity	Queer	Gay	Bisexual	Bisexual	Lesbian and Queer
Year (at time of study)	Sophomore	Junior	Junior	Senior	Senior
Leadership Involvement	Officer in LGBTQ Student Organization, Political Campaign, & On-Campus Employment	Executive Board of Multiple Identity-Based Organizations & On-Campus Employment	Latin and Black Identity-Based Organizations and Executive Board of Campus Progressive Organization	Multiple On-Campus Jobs, Resident Assistant, Latina Based Sorority, and Student Director of campus safety program	Gap Year Abroad, Internationally and local community Service-focused
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Other		Depression			Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

## **Interviews**

The initial interview took place in a setting of each participant's choosing and had a flexible length of time allowing for the development of the participant-researcher relationship. The interview setting was critical because I wanted the participant to feel most at ease. Since some participants were not public about their sexual identity, I also wanted to ensure anonymity on their behalf. In those instances, participants asked for suggestions on where to conduct the interview. In one instance, a participant asked to meet further away from the campus to ensure no one would over hear our conversation. Ultimately, this process allowed for emergent themes to arise for the alteration of questions for the second interview. The interview questions explored the journey of each participant through their individual identity path and how those identities intersected in their leadership role. In addition, the questions explored how the participants' identities played out in their leadership efficacy and capacity to lead.

During the first interview, I began our conversation by thanking each participant for their time, reviewing the purpose of the study, and received informed consent (see Appendix A). After receiving consent, I ensured that participants were comfortable and began the interview with the first question (Tell me about yourself). The remainder of the interview was guided by questions (see Appendix C) that asked participants to share stories about how they came to understand their various identities. Initial interviews with participants ranged from 33-minutes to 4 hours. The initial interviews occurred prior to the U.S. national election, which elicited great conversations about the state of our country.

The second interview also had a flexible length of time and had occurred onsite at a location of the participants' choosing. Expanding on the first interview, the second interview asked more in-depth questions (see Appendix C) to garner how the BMLGBQ college student made meaning of their leadership experiences. The questions evolved from the stories participants told in the first interview. Some of these interviews took place prior to the U.S. national election, which participants were more hopeful about the current climate. The interviews that took place after the election had a different tenor. The election had a toll on a couple of the participants. I let the participants choose if they wanted to proceed with the interview or reschedule it for another time and just talk. Ultimately, participants chose to do the interview.

Through the conversation that occurred during both interviews, I had anticipated that stories and memories would emerge that would be mutually beneficial for the participant and the researcher. Listening to participants' stories and sharing my own story made for a rich fruitful connection. As someone who was also BMLGBQ, it was clear that we had shared experiences and other experiences that were not alike. The interview process was a wonderful experience that I believed both participants and I enjoyed.

### **Data Analysis**

In a qualitative study, data analysis is an ongoing and continuous process throughout the research (Mertens, 2009). In order to have a better understanding and address political structures and privilege, researcher and participants work side-by-side in this process in order to make social change (Mertens, 2007). Since each co-constructed story was unique, each researcher and participant interview was "analyzed as separate voices to reveal diversity of perspective" from other participants in this study (Mertens,

2009, p. 427). Social action stories served as a tool to change the status quo by presenting “critical stories about power issues that have the potential of evoking consciousness” (Moss, 2004, p. 364). The overall approach to analyzing the data for this study was thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis allowed and focused its primary attention on what was said by each participant (Riessman, 2008). The use of thematic analysis identified from the spoken narratives what was similar and what was different among the experiences of participants (Cain, 1991; Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis has five guiding principles. First, thematic analysis strives to present and “keep the story intact for interpretive purposes, although determining boundaries of stories can be difficult and highly interpretative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). Second, analysis by themes prioritizes the sequence of events of a story in order to share a more accurate participant perspective for others for interpretation (Riessman, 2008). A third analysis is presenting themes in line with the time and place of the story versus “generic explanations” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). Finally, the use of thematic analysis was to “generate inductively a set of stable concepts that” (Riessman, 2008, p. 74) are transferable across cases. Thematic analysis was well-suited for this study because it could “be applied to stories that develop in interview conversations” (Riessman, 2008, p. 54).

After each interview, I spent time reflecting on the questions that I asked and how I asked them. More importantly, I listened to what and how participants shared their life experiences with me. Throughout the interview, I attempted to dig deeper to ensure that I had substantive and an abundant amount of information to review for a full analysis. Initially, I listened to the interviews to gain a deeper insight into our conversation. After

transcribing three interviews, I hired an online service to review the recordings and transcribe them. While the service was completing the transcription, I continued to listen to the interviews without having the text in front of me. When I received the transcripts back, I sent the documents to the participants for their review. I asked participants to review the transcripts and share with me any insights they had, any restatements or changes they would like to make, or omit anything that they did not want shared in any capacity. Participants indicated their appreciation for this opportunity and only one participant wanted to clarify a statement they had made during our second interview. This participant clarified their statement during our second interview. I reviewed the transcripts of the first interview in detail and make notes for any preliminary themes (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, I made notes and highlighted passages I perceived to be an important element of the participants' life experiences prior to solidifying questions for second interview. I repeated the same techniques of reviewing the transcripts of the second interview.

Once the interviews were completed, I listened to the interviews once again. I took notes for potential themes I did not pick up during the previous process. I also used newly printed transcripts to highlight new passages I did not previously grasp. Even with all the measures I put in place, I realized that some participants were extremely verbose in their story sharing while other participants were quite frank. Even after I incorporated additional questions to dig deeper, some interviews did not give the level of the depth I was hoping to receive. Although some interviews were shorter than others, the value of the stories shared was still meaningful and added to the richness of the inquiry.

## **Research Rigor**

Research rigor is the tenet for which goodness and quality of inquiry are established and measured (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Based on the relationship between researcher and participant, constructivist theorists “developed a framework for ethical practice of qualitative research” that values transparency and reciprocity (Mertens, 2009, p. 18). Guidelines for researchers in this blended paradigm include: respect for people, face-to-face meetings, listening, sharing, generosity, cautiousness and sensitivity, and avoidance of elitism (Mertens, 2009). The two types of rigor in qualitative research are trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

### **Trustworthiness Criteria**

Trustworthiness is qualitative criteria for rigor used within this study, in addition to serving as a catalyst for action (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The criteria for trustworthiness included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure *credibility*, I performed member checks throughout all aspects of this study. Member checks are considered to be the most critical practice for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through member checking, I incorporated participants’ continuous feedback and updating of the transcripts and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Rigor explains that, when there was a lack of stakeholder and participant input into the research, the results are often skewed towards individuals in power, intentional or not (Mertens, 2007). After my first review of all transcripts, I developed initial themes and shared this information electronically with the participants for their feedback. After participants had time to review the initial findings, I offered opportunities to connect in-person, over-the-phone, or by other means of

choosing to discuss and update findings or at the beginning of the subsequent interview. Sharing after the initial interview gave participants the opportunity to ensure that their voice was accurately reflected. The back-and-forth dialogue and review gave the participants and researcher space to ensure that truest narrative was presented (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999).

The criterion for *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) referred to a study's demonstrated "use of thick, rich descriptions" of data (Evans & Broido, 1999, p. 661). I described the experiences in great depth and detail so a reader and other researchers could come to their own conclusions. I also used direct quotes from the participants in the findings section to allow readers to come to their own conclusions. Also, the use of thick-and-rich descriptions in addition to direct quotes, allowed other researchers to decide how this data was similar or dissimilar to their goals. *Dependability* was demonstrated by means of collecting multiple forms of data through two in-depth interviews and member checks. *Confirmability* was demonstrated by having a transparent and organized process of communication and data collection that maintained confidentiality for the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although these four criteria of trustworthiness were in place, it continues to be up to the reader to create their own truth from the information presented (Riessman, 2008).

### **Authenticity Criteria**

Authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) addressed "ethical and ideological issues that arise in naturalistic research, particularly research associated with issues of social justice" (Evans & Broido, 1999, p. 661). The criterion for authenticity includes ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, tactical



authenticity, and fairness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Presenting a full picture of a participants' experience rather than omitting a critical piece of their voice would exhibit *fairness* (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, fairness was achieved by the mutual sharing of stories, perspectives, and experiences. Stories that I shared of myself created a mutual dialogue that entailed a significant sum of vulnerability. I engaged participants in meaningful conversations around themes presented and asked for their review to ensure their stories were being presented in a balanced and fair way. I strove to treat participants with fairness (Evans & Broido, 1999). I presented all views, findings, and stories to participants in order for participants to be involved with the co-creation of this research from start-to-finish. The findings shared publicly were co-authored stories of participants and researcher.

*Ontological authenticity* refers to the sharing of knowledge that better informs participants by expanding their knowledge beyond themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, I shared transcripts of our conversations, engaged participants in their stories, and shared findings to engage participants in ways to help them better know themselves and the researcher's shared stories. *Educative authenticity* refers to how participants gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the stories of others in the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Participants were unaware of who participated in this study. Participants received a final copy of the completed study in order to understand and read the stories of other participants and their leadership experience at the University.

*Catalytic authenticity* refers to identification of problems and results in action to address the problem (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Schwandt, 2007). As participants shared their stories, I continued to dig deeper to have a better understanding of what informed

their beliefs. As participants continued to dig deeper, they were attempting to figure out the “why” of the problem. From our conversations and the findings, there should be a clear story that discusses the problem and offers ideas on how to address the problem.

*Tactical authenticity* refers to the “extent to which participants in the [study] are empowered to act” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 15). The underlying belief was that a researcher could not “be separated from or objective about those” being studied (Guido et al., 2010, p. 16). I empowered participants and myself to understand themselves better and to make changes they wanted to see as marginalized student leaders. In line with this paradigm and approach, “the act of narrating a significant life event itself facilitates positive change” (Chase, 2005, p. 667). Because of the stories shared, I have continued to find tools and resources for participants who want to make positive social change on their campus (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the use of constructivist and critical cultural paradigm. The constructivist paradigm views reality as subjective with multiple “truths,” when blended with a critical cultural paradigm gives power to the voice of student participants (Guido et al., 2010). The use of blended paradigms for this inquiry encouraged participants’ involvement in the co-construction and development of this study, in addition to being part of the change this study research could create. Following this, I described the use of narrative approach as the methodology for this research. Specifically, through in-depth interviews, I co-created a thick and rich story to give voice for the participants and researcher (Evans & Broido, 1999). Additionally, I described the participants, setting, and methods for this research. It was critical to have participants

who identified as non-first year BMLGBQ student leaders on a college campus. These students provided context to their experiences that allowed, both researcher and participant, to further explore how they experienced leadership at an institution of higher education. The participants were able to select the setting in which they felt the most comfortable for their interviews. Finally, this chapter concluded with an understanding of how trustworthiness and authenticity was developed to ensure research rigor.

Trustworthiness criterion included four areas (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Authenticity criterion included five areas (ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, tactical authenticity, and fairness; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This rigor was captured by two criteria of constructivist critical cultural inquiry.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**FINDINGS: PARTICIPANT PROFILES,  
THEMES AND PATTERNS**

In this chapter, I share the stories of five BMLGBQ student leaders who vary in age, university status, and experiences at one institution of higher education in the southeastern part of the U.S. The students also varied in their comfort level of engaged conversation and ability to reflect upon their life experiences and identities. Some students had a clear understanding of who they were racially and not in their sexuality. Some students had a clear understanding of their sexual identity but not their racial identity. Others had a clear understanding of the intersections of their identity. Hearing and sharing the experiences of these student participants was truly a gift.

Every student had different levels of their understanding of leadership. For younger, less experienced students, leadership was purely positional. For other students, leadership was centered on positive change. Some students shared stories demonstrating their engagement as leaders but did not directly attribute their activities to their capacity to lead.

The vignettes and stories shared occurred through two interviews with each participant that formed Chapters IV, V, and Epilogue. Some participants spent time reflecting and preparing for interviews that sometimes lasted over 4 hours. Other participants just did not have the same level of experience to share, but their stories were just as rich. Before the vignettes, the institutional setting was shared. The institutional

setting provided a basic understanding of the institution that all five participants attend. Then, the following vignettes explored the familial backgrounds, identities, educational journey, and provided glimpses into the future influence students wanted to have on their communities.

### **Institutional Setting**

The institution for this study was Hurston University, HurstonU, named after Zora Neal Hurston. Hurston, born in 1891, a daughter of two former slaves and graduated from Columbia University with a Ph.D. in Anthropology. Hurston studied and collected folklore of the south, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Originally from the southeastern United States, Hurston traveled in this area, illegally serving as an instructor in the segregated south.

Hurston University was a predominantly White institution, located in the heart of the southeastern United States. Situated in a small college town, it had a strong and rich history of academics and athletics. HurstonU was a top-tier research institution with approximately 25,000 students. Ranked as a highly-competitive institution, HurstonU received 30,000 admissions applications a year and accepted only 5,000. HurstonU ensured that students in financial need were able to attend without additional burdens placed on them.

HurstonU was the epitome of curricular and co-curricular rigor. Students had the mentality of *work hard, play hard*. Libraries at HurstonU were always in use, 24-hours a day. The institution had over 1,000 student organizations with unique missions and purposes. Students were expected to graduate in 4 years. Any additional time needed required students to drop all secondary majors and minors. Students were also expected

to have at least one internship during their time at HurstonU. Students loved HurstonU! When they were not in the classroom, they were leading an organization, volunteering in the community, starting a business, or cheering for one of the Division 1 athletic teams.

## **Alyx**

### **Background and Identity**

Alyx spent the majority of her life living in the southeastern part of the United States. She relocated once with her family to the state where she currently attended college. When her family relocated, she was raised on the outskirts of a small town where she was the youngest of her siblings with two older sisters. Alyx was a 19-year-old woman who identified as half Singaporean Chinese and half Romanian. Alyx also identified as queer. As she shared her introduction during our interview, she said, “those are always the big facts about myself.”

One of the challenges for Alyx when she relocated was the transition from a populated area to a sparsely populated area. Alyx spent most of her life in a town that had less than 10,000 people. She shared that the town she grew up in had little to no diversity. Alyx shared that she “was very much one of those mixed children who sort of did the swing from one identity to the other depending on the group” she’s in. Alyx was also raised in the Romanian Orthodox Church. When Alyx was involved in the church, she spent all her time around other Romanians. Outside of church, she had another core group of friends who were Asian. Alyx would recall the times she hung out with a specific group as “moment.” During high school, her journey to identifying as queer was a much slower process. She discussed her inability to see herself:

I was always aware of my racial identity, but I was much slower on the intake when it came to figuring out I was queer. When I was in high school, I hung out with this group of kids that [were] 95% queer, but I still very much was convinced I was just an ally. I didn't really think about it. Not quite in denial, but not really up front about it...I was aware I like girls, but it didn't occur to me that that meant something because I definitely liked men, so obviously, I'm straight.

Depending on the audience, Alyx used "bi" interchangeably. She said, "I tend to use 'bi' in a situation where I think people are less aware of other identities as sort of, like my easy pass on just saying a sexual identity without people being like 'what is that?' and I guess I also like the ambiguity."

### **Educational Journey**

Alyx had a plethora of options to explore for her college. She ultimately chose to go to a university within 2 hours of home. She affectionately called the high-research, extremely selective public institution her "back-up." Ultimately, affordability was a deciding factor for Alyx. For Alyx, the perfect college was the one where she could make the experience she felt she needed at the time.

Alyx was a double major in the social sciences. During the summer, in between her first and second years of college, she studied abroad in China. She was involved in a wide-array of activities on campus that included holding down two positions of employment, active in a left-leaning political student organization during the presidential elections, multiple biracial/multiracial identity-based student organization, and one LGBTQ student organization. Alyx also had many experiences in the classroom where she felt she was "the only minority in the room."

Alyx strived to find the balance of her involvement in co-curricular activities. She shared about her worry of being boxed into one category of her identity. At the same time, she did not want to be the person people said, "Oh, of course you're angry . . .

you're the angry queer kid." This was a feeling that emerged after her involvement in a political organization where someone shared, "You're irrationally passionate about this" topic.

### **Impact and Influence**

Ultimately, Alyx wanted to have a positive impact on those that she led. While involved, she strived to be a role model in a setting that had limited role models with shared identities. Alyx wanted to "become the kind of person you needed when you were younger." Although, she expressed doubt on the wisdom she could offer, she felt "people would benefit from knowing that someone else lived through this too."

## **Andrew**

### **Background and Identity**

Andrew, a self-proclaimed "mama's boy," was from a rural town in the southeastern part of the United States. Andrew was a 20-year-old man who identified as half Black and half Native American. Andrew also identified as gay but not "out as the next person." Andrew and his biological sister were adopted by two White older parents. Being "adopted into a White home" in a rural town in the southeastern United States has had a profound impact on Andrew's experiences. Before Andrew left for college, he shared,

I began to talk to my parents about my adoption just because it had been such a taboo topic. We never spoke about it. In my home, we don't speak about a lot of things, like political views just aren't talked about because there's clearly a cultural divide that they feel like I might not really see why they feel a certain way politically or they won't see why I feel that way.

Andrew felt that there was a constant cultural divide in his household and the community in which he was raised. For that reason, Andrew's journey had been his own. For



instance, he has centered himself in the Christian faith. Although his parents “never pushed religion” on him or his sister, he shared that he did “practice Christianity, but that’s because that’s something I developed.”

During our time together, it was clear that Andrew valued his privacy. The conversation in which we engaged was an extremely personal one for him. Andrew was “raised up in a home where we didn’t talk about a lot of things, I don’t always feel like I have to talk about it or like it’s everyone’s business.” On multiple accounts, he alluded to the fact that what he was sharing was extremely personal but felt comfortable engaging in the conversation. For instance, Andrew shared that his sexuality was a barrier for him with his parents:

They never created that safe space and because they never said that something else was okay. Even conversations now are just still very heteronormative. . . . There’s always been a divide. I know that my parents love me and I love them too, but there’s just a difference between loving someone and knowing them.

### **Educational Journey**

When exploring higher education options, Andrew weighed three important factors when making his decision (academics, atmosphere, and athletics.). He had a short list of institutions he was interested in attending and, when he went on the campus tour at his current institution, he fell in love. During his tour, he learned about the institutions “commitment to the students,” especially the extremely supportive financial commitments. At the time, his family was concerned about affordability and this was a relief for them. Another factor weighing on his decision was that his tour guide was a Black student at a predominantly White institution. Andrew shared that, “I could kind of see myself there and this is her experience, then hopefully mine will be the same or similar to” it.

Andrew was a double major in the social sciences and took student involvement to extraordinary levels. He was on the executive board of multiple identity-based organizations, member of multiple sub-organizations within student government, participated in a summer gateway program for marginalized identities, and maintained 2-3 jobs at any given time. Andrew spent a summer in a large-metropolitan area for an internship, his first time living in a major city, where he went on a date with another man. He reminisced about the difference between going on a date in the city and the affirmation of that experience versus going on a date near his campus. This experience opened the door for Andrew to explore other academic opportunities allowing him to explore other metropolitan cities for extended periods of time.

Andrew has been an advocate for mental health awareness on campus and in the community. As someone who lived with depression, Andrew had sought out on-campus counselors for support and was open about it. He participated in a video on a major cable network that discussed mental health on college campuses and the need for others to seek out support. Mental health was an important aspect of Andrew's identity that intersected all aspects of his other identities which helped craft his story.

### **Impact and Influence**

Andrew reflected on his need to help the communities he was a part of while looking at it from an outsider's perspective. He discussed the importance of challenging his peers' misconceptions of identities in a meaningful way that challenged what they had always known as status quo. He shared by challenging them, it would "allow them to develop their own sense of truth and that be influenced by their own thoughts and their own beliefs and their experiences." Andrew continued further by sharing that, "being a

student leader and being an advocate has just given me much more of a sense of boldness” to engage in dismantling systems from the inside to create a better future for marginalized and oppressed people.

## **Anthony**

### **Background and Identity**

Anthony was born and raised in a small town in the mountains of Appalachia. Anthony was raised by his mother and older sister and had 12 brothers and sisters. He was the youngest of four on his mother’s side of the family and the second oldest of 10 on his father’s side of his family. Anthony was a 22-year-old man who identified as half Mexican and half Black. As Anthony shared his stories, it was revealed that Anthony identified as someone who was mixed heritage but also identified as a Black man or a Latin man depending on context. Anthony’s journey to understanding his sexual identity was not as well defined. Anthony initially wanted to participate in this study on the condition of anonymity because he was still discovering who he was in regards to his sexual identity. When Anthony discussed his sexuality, he said, “I won’t even say I’m 100% comfortable in my own sexuality on a heterosexual level, a bisexual level, whatever you want to call it. For me, labels, I don’t really like labels to be honest.” If Anthony had to label his identity, he would have identified on the spectrum closer towards bisexual.

Anthony was raised with the Mexican half of his family. Anthony considered himself to be extremely cultured with his Mexican heritage. He was baptized and confirmed in a Spanish church, participated in six Quinceaneras, fluent in Spanish, and traveled often to Mexico to visit family. Anthony volunteered at the “Club,” the local

YMCA, since he was 11 and has put in over 1,500 hours of service to that organization. In fact, Anthony shared that his best friends were either Mexican or Black. Although Anthony had a strong connection to his Mexican heritage growing up, he lacked a connection to understanding his “Blackness.” Anthony shared that he had grown in his ability to reflect and understand who he was racially since high school, but his sexual identity had complicated his ability to label something that was “constantly growing, revolving, and changing” based on new experiences, knowledge, and interactions.

On his journey, Anthony found solace in his faith. He did not grow up with a father in his life. After having an extremely challenging year in college, Anthony decided to explore a connection he felt he was missing. As he and his mom were heading out-of-town one weekend to celebrate his 20th birthday, Anthony told his mother that he thought it was time to meet his father. Anthony met his father when he turned 20, although his father lived a life filled with guns, drugs, and violence. When he met his father, he learned that his father turned his life around and said, “God really had intentionality when I met him because I’m fortunate enough to know that he left that other life alone and he’s walking in a different faith base as well.” His father invited him to attend church the next day and, during the service, Anthony had a life-changing experience. As Anthony was sharing this story, it was clear he was emotionally impacted by this experience and said,

Literally, after the spiritual connection happened, my spirituality was just growing exponentially. To this day now, I try to wake up every day and read my Bible. I try to read sermons. I meditate. Looking back from a year ago to where I am now and to where I know I’ll be.

Although Anthony did not like to use labels for himself, he realized the power they had over him by either boxing him in or creating new opportunities.

## **Educational Journey**

Anthony's first year at HurstonU was an extremely challenging one. Anthony came from a hometown where he was "super social and plugged in everywhere" to realizing he was now a "minnow in the ocean." Anthony also struggled during his transition to HurstonU, not only with his racial and ethnic identities, but also with his sexual identity. Anthony included himself in this description but said that students came to HurstonU as "headstrong" people thinking they can do it by themselves. Anthony shared that he thought the "big thing that I was missing when I came to [HurstonU] was that strong foundation with my family." He went home the summer after his first year and emotionally broke down with his mother about his experience. Anthony sat in a car outside of his sister's house "bawling, crying, telling my mom everything that I was... my feelings, how I was feeling, where I was academically, how everything was just a mess." Anthony took the Fall semester off his second-year of college. During that time, he was considering transferring to another institution closer to home. After visiting another institution, Anthony realized he had two options, either assume heavy debt with student loans or continue to go to an institution cost-free. He chose to return to HurstonU after a semester off. When he returned to HurstonU, he found a collective group of advisors who shared his identities with whom he was able to process his experiences, which was a "breath of fresh air" for him.

Anthony was a double major in a foreign language and social sciences. After Anthony's first year, he got extremely involved on campus. He joined a number organizations focused on either Latin or Black students, in addition to joining the executive boards of some of those organizations. He held a leadership position in the

university's main social justice organization and joined a number of mentoring groups, both as a mentee and mentor. Anthony spent the summer between his second and third year of college participating in an internship in a major metropolitan city. During his time away, he had an opportunity to connect with alumni of the university who shared identities, politicians, university board of trustee members, and himself. Anthony said it was an opportunity to see people that looked like him do great things and have a larger impact on the greater community.

As a first-generation student, Anthony said he “felt that pressure [of] carrying my family on my shoulders at such a great university.” He felt that he had much to prove and could go it alone. As he reflected on his experiences thus far, he shared “little did I realize I didn't have this without them.” He found balance between keeping his family involved in his educational experiences and finding a collective on campus to keep him centered and moving forward. He would sum up his experience thus far as “it's not about how hard you fought, but when you bounce back”

### **Impact and Influence**

When Anthony began his journey at HurstonU, he struggled until he found the resources necessary to success. Anthony shared, “it's been a tremendous journey and what I can use now to pay it forward to other individuals.” In his leadership roles, Anthony made it a point to share with younger students the importance of building relationships. He wanted students to know that they were not alone in their journey and all they needed to do was look around to recognize the valuable resources around them. He told me that he was constantly “having conversations with people, I'm naming off the learning center, the writing center, dropping names, shoot an email with eight different

things, drop my name, tell them who [staff members] are, and just ask for help.” Anthony understood by sharing this sentiment that younger students would reach out when they wanted to and it was all about timing for each individual. Anthony shared that he hated the word networking because it sounded and felt “nasty” and would rather spend his timing “creating connections and relationships.”

## **Nouri**

### **Background and Identity**

Nouri was born and raised in the southeastern part of the U.S. She grew up in a lower-socio-economic area of a major city with approximately 1,000,000 people in the same state where she currently attended college. Nouri was raised in a single-parent household with one younger sister who attended another state institution. Nouri’s father was not actively involved in her life growing up. Nouri recently connected with her father and told him, “I don’t know you as a person . . . I feel like I want to get to know you, because getting to know you is getting to know part of myself.” Nouri shared that, if she had to label herself, it would be the following: “Black and White, then I would say being a woman, being a feminist, being bisexual, being an older sister, coming from a low-income background, being a [HurstonsU] student.” Nouri also shared that, being an extrovert was an important aspect to her identity, while she was ethnically ambiguous. That physical ambiguity has had a profound impact on her life.

Nouri has always known who she was racially. When Nouri was younger, she had a conversation with her little sister explaining what it meant to be Black and White. At the time, her sister was convinced she was only brown, because of the color of her skin. She did not understand the concept of being both, Black and White. Nouri’s story to her

sister was, “You know how you see animals in nature, like zebras, and pandas, and that kind of thing? We’re like them. We’re Black and White.” That story had such a lasting impact on both of them that they got matching tattoos of pandas. Although Nouri was not close to her father, she was close to that side of her family. Her two White cousins on her mother’s side and two Black cousins on her father’s side of the family went to the same schools growing up together. As Nouri reflected, she shared that her family was not siloed based on identities, but they intersected in other spaces. She referred to this as the unification of her identity. She was not just Black and White, but she was biracial. She shared that she also continued to struggle with her identity as well. Nouri did not feel she could claim her Black identity until she came to HurstonU.

Nouri explored her sexuality with other girls at an early age. She shared that in seventh grade, a number of her classmates had gotten pregnant. At the same time, Nouri “grew up in a very religious community.” She said that her family was friends with gay people growing up and her mother told Nouri “that they were going to hell.” The summer after eighth grade was Nouri’s first same-gender intimate encounter. During this encounter, Nouri’s mother walked in and was clearly mortified. Later that same summer was a time of exploration for Nouri. She shared that she was fairly “fast” that summer exploring her bisexuality with both men and women. Her mother was an active member of a church until Nouri was 14 years old and was not “ok” with this behavior. At one point, her mother asked, “So you’re a dyke now?” Nouri responded with “Oh my God, I’m your daughter, why would you talk to me like that?” Nouri said she “basically calmed down” so she could rebuild her relationship with her mother. When Nouri was in high school, she joined the Gay Straight Alliance. At the time, she “met a lot more people



who had different sexual identities, and I felt like I could be . . . I felt safe in it.” It was during this time that she “casually” came out to a small group of friends. In order not to strain familial relationships, she did not share this with anyone in her family except her sister.

### **Educational Journey**

Nouri was raised by a family who loved the athletics of HurstonU. Nouri always knew of the institution but considered it out-of-reach when she was applying to colleges and universities. She explored institutions all over the southeastern part of the United States. Ultimately, she expected to go to the local college with the rest of the “townies.” Nouri applied to HurstonU because her grandmother did not give her an option. At the time, she was not expecting to get into the University. Although she was excited about her acceptance, her family’s socio-economic status was a weighing factor. She applied to other institutions, both in-state and out-of-state. Financial aid was a deciding factor for her. Nouri received a full financial need scholarship to attend HurstonU. Nouri said,

I decided to come to [HurstonU], because of the financial aid package, and the fact that no one else was willing to give me any money. Which is kind of crazy to say, because it’s definitely shaped who I am today, and the fact that I only came here because they gave me money.

Nouri has enjoyed her time at HurstonU. She was a senior double major in the social sciences. Additionally, one of her majors had an additional emphasis on gender studies and a minor. As a first-generation student, she found that involvement on campus was critical to her success. Nouri had to carry multiple on-campus jobs during her time at HurstonU. She served as a resident assistant for a couple of years, student director of a campus safety program, and worked in other student services offices. Additionally, she was involved in a Latina multicultural sorority. Her involvement in this organization gave

her a unique perspective into the lives of women who did not share her identity. Nouri was also involved in an organization that was focused on biracial, multiracial, mixed-race identity students. Nouri did attempt to get involved in the University's version of a Gay Straight Alliance but struggled to find a connection. Instead, she stayed involved in her LGBTQ organizations back in her hometown.

Nouri spent a summer in a central African nation completing an internship at the University. Nouri shared that this experience was integral to her growth as a student and person at HurstonU for various reasons. She had a wonderful experience learning how to support local communities build grassroots economic experiences, which was in line with her academic pursuits. This was also the first time she could recollect experiencing both micro-aggressions and racism towards her Black identity from other members of the present cohort. These experiences were foundational to her continued work at HurstonU to engage in meaningful ways with the community to effect change.

### **Impact and Influence**

Nouri shared that her life journey had given her the vision on how she wanted to impact her communities. Nouri indicated she,

Wants to work with women, especially pregnant women and women who come from marginalized backgrounds. Listen to their stories and connect them with other women who share aspects of their stories or allow them to share their stories with other people, because I just feel like there's a lot of power in hearing that someone else went through something that you went through.

On top of everything Nouri was involved in, she managed to make time for volunteering at a center that served as a transitional living facility for women and children temporarily displaced. That displacement could have occurred because the women were looking for new jobs, financial circumstances at home were dire, or the family was escaping another

form of “structural violence or domestic violence.” Nouri volunteered working with younger children supporting them to emotionally express what was happening in their lives. Nouri believed that her work would have a profound impact on the lives she touches.

## **Orooro**

### **Background and Identity**

Orooro was born on a military base in the western United States. She grew up in a town outside of a major city with approximately 1,000,000 in the southeastern part of the country. Orooro characterized her town as “one of those places that is entirely too large and diverse to be as backwards as it is.” She was an only-child who was raised by her father. Orooro was 22-year-old woman who identified as half Black and half White. Orooro identified as a lesbian. Other identities important to who Orooro was her love for Black coffee and her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Both of Orooro’s parents were in the military. Her mother, who was Black, was in the Navy and not involved with her life after Orooro turned 3. Her father, who was White, was a Marine, who raised her. Orooro would describe her father as “one of the most weirdly woke White people you’ll ever meet,” meaning he understood social justice more than he should considering his background. Her father’s side of the family was from the Midwest. Orooro shared a story about her grandmother not meeting another Black person until she was 19 years old. She continued that her grandmother basically believed that “Black people had tails, Jews had horns, and that Mexicans were all here to steal our jobs.” Then she laughed and said that all of cousins were either Black, Jewish, or Mexican.

Since Ororo was raised by her father, she had always known of her racial difference. There was one time that other students in her first-grade class convinced her she was adopted. When she asked her father why he never told her, he said, “I definitely helped make you, calm down!” She said her father was extremely blunt and direct growing up. He wanted to make sure she was in touch with the Black part of her identity so he kept books in the house which were “pro-Black propaganda.” In order to better understand her mixed race identity, Ororo explained that she used to disassociate herself from the negative stereotypes other people placed upon Black people. Ororo said it was a time when she would tell herself, “I’m Black, but it’s just the color of my skin. I don’t have that culture. I ‘m not hood. I’m not ghetto.” When Ororo arrived in high school, that was when she would say, “I really got woke.”

During high school, she realized that she “internalized a lot of really negative, toxic things. I needed to sit back and rehash this . . .” She recalled a conversation with her father when he asked, “I gave you all of this literature when you were a kid, how are you just coming to this conclusion?” From there on, Ororo shared that she understood she “was very much [paused] Black, but I’m mixed.” In fact, she started emphasizing that she was Black as part of her identity because she did not feel she looked stereotypically Black. This was important for her to share with others because it set a tone in conversation. Although Ororo identified as half Black, in conversations with her father’s side of the family, they continuously reminded her that she was also half White. In one definitive conversation she had with them, she said, “I have never been White. That is the one thing I will not ever be. That is how the definition of it works in this country, is I can’t.” She shared with them that her experience was always going to be different

because she did not physically presence as a White person. Ororo has never felt that she fit into one culture. She proclaimed:

I feel like I did that weird nerdy middle school thing, but I've always been very internationally focused. I think once I realized I didn't really have a solid *culture* to fit into or I wasn't part of anything, I was like 'Screw it. I'm gonna learn everything about everywhere else. I'm gonna find somewhere that likes me.'

At the age of 12, Ororo realized she had her first crush on a girl. For years, Ororo would attribute her crushes on girls as a "hormonal thing." For this reason, she "procrastinated on [her] sexuality" until she was at a boarding high school. During her senior year of high school, she shared she went through a phase where she was in multiple relationships with men and did not understand why she was not entirely enjoying her experiences. One night, she went to a gay club with a number of her friends and had a same-gender intimate encounter in the club. The encounter for her was everything she was lacking in her experiences with men and sat the stage for her "a-ha" moment. After her high school graduation, Ororo went abroad for a year and was in her first relationship with another woman "in a country where being gay is illegal." Ororo shared, "I feel like I had a lot of internalized homophobia that took me years to sit down and unpack."

### **Educational Journey**

Before Ororo came to HurstonU, she was at a boarding high school for 4 years. Although she lived close to home, she lived on campus in the residence hall. Since she had an experience that was already similar to what she would experience in college, she took a gap year and traveled abroad through a HurstonU program. She spent 8 months in a western African country volunteering on behalf of the University. When Ororo came to HurstonU, she had taken advance placement tests for a number of subjects for which she

had not taken courses during high school. She was able to pass those tests and receive college credit even before she arrived at the University.

Orooro was a double major in a foreign language and social sciences. Her emphasis focused on Western Europe. Orooro also spent a semester studying abroad in Western Europe. Ultimately, Orooro's shared that she would "sell out" and become a lawyer in order to pay the bills and then move onto "something more meaningful." Orooro was so busy with her academics she did not get as involved on campus. Orooro spent a significant portion of her involvement on campus completing research within her field of study and included an internship at the United Nations in New York. She had multiple jobs during her time at HurstonU. Orooro discussed the fact there was a queer people of color group on campus, but she had not gotten involved because it was a small group where everyone knew each other. Ultimately, Orooro's involvement on campus was mostly through volunteer and service experiences.

### **Impact and Influence**

Orooro has dreamed of working at the United Nations. Her many experiences abroad gave her a lens in which to better engage in the global community. During Orooro's gap year at the University, she spent time working for a non-profit which focused on redeveloping forests. The goal of the non-profit was to empower families by providing food, education, and income. Orooro believed that she was always meant to be the vice president of a student organization or any other organization she was in. She believed she never had to be the one in charge, but the one behind the scenes doing the work. From her own explanation of what leadership meant to her, it became clear that Orooro was a servant leader (Greenleaf, 1970). Ultimately, Orooro had an uncanny ability to dissect

everything she was involved in and explore how to make it better. Once she had an understanding of how something worked, she implemented positive change. She shared she wanted to continue this as she moved forward with her life. Ororo had a unique understanding of looking at the world with lens centered on intersectionality. She also made sure she shared her perspective of that worldview with others. She hoped to continue to enlighten others on how to problem solve through intersectionality to get to the root of problems.

### **Findings: Themes and Patterns**

The purpose of this constructivist study was to understand the campus experiences of biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer (BMLGBQ) college student leaders. This chapter is designed to address the two research questions that evolved in this study:

- Q1 How do BMLGBQ undergraduate student leaders make meaning of their experiences?
- Q2 How do BMLGBQ students make sense of their multiple marginalized identities in the context of their leadership role?

All student leader participants have undergone a journey to understand their identity. In some ways, participants have experienced their multiple identities in silos and, in other ways, it was more complex and multifaceted. This chapter explores four themes and patterns identified in the data in response to the research questions. The first theme explored how participants made meaning of their racial identity based on experiences. The second theme explored how participants made meaning of the sexual identity based on experiences. The third theme explored how participants made meaning of their

leadership identity based on experiences. The fourth theme explored how participants made meaning of the intersections of their racial, sexual, and leadership identities.

### **Biracial and Multiracial Experiences of Student Leaders**

Each participant's journey towards understanding their racial identity as a student leader on campus was unique and powerful. Participants experienced and navigated their racial identities in silos and at intersections. Themes and patterns emerged as participants discussed their experiences as multiracial individuals on a journey that included finding a sense of belonging, monoracial experiences, multiracial experiences, and exclusion based on racial identity.

#### **Sense of Belonging**

Coming to HurstonU, participants sought to find a community on campus. Each of the participants had many experiences in common and just as many dissimilar. Ororo, a half-Black half-White lesbian woman, shared that the state and the institution were a strange conundrum for BMLGBQ people. For instance, she said that the state, "may have the highest Klan membership in the south, but we also have the highest concentration of people with Ph.D.'s in the world." Attending an institution like HurstonU was a "no-brainer" for Ororo. She understood her identities and what she was looking for at HurstonU because of her previous experiences at a boarding high school. For Ororo, it was clear that there were not many people who looked like her. Ororo shared, "I feel like there aren't that many visible people that are brown and queer" at HurstonU. Ororo added that she felt that White people on campus befriended other students with marginalized identities in order to show how accepting they were as people. She joked that she made a "minority bingo [card] for White people, so [they] can collect [their] friends."



Finding space for Anthony, a half-Black half-Mexican bisexual man, in the beginning was extremely challenging. Anthony shared,

I came to HurstonU. I didn't realize how alone I felt. Didn't necessarily find that friendship group that everyone else was finding. Didn't have any clubs or organizations. I was just yet concreted in. It was just difficult. Had a couple support systems here and there, maybe reach out here on campus, some older students, but for the most part it was just a solo ride that first semester and first year.

When Anthony was adjusting to his time at HurstonU, he saw himself visually represented at the University. He expanded that “HurstonU was an environment that had such a diverse group of Black bodies here, as there are White and Latin bodies.” All of the participants discussed that their respective racial communities often functioned in silos. Exploring that further, Anthony struggled and elaborated:

My interactions with the Black community vice versa [with] the Latin community here, [and] with the White community. I mean, there was such, I guess, for me was divided. I still think there are at times. Navigating that sphere was just like I knew I wanted to come in here and keep my Latin connection, because it took me so far. That's something I wanted, so I joined a couple Latin organizations.

In order for Anthony to begin to find space at HurstonU, he had to let his guard down. He intentionally sought out people who shared the same culture with him, although student organizations operated in silos. Anthony believed that, “When you let certain people that you have that connection with, their culture or whatever, it allows them to let their wall down a little bit.” Anthony also strived to not be boxed in by silos. Anthony shared that he, “even some [spoke] Spanish with the Black community. My best friends on this campus are Black. It's a small group. I call it my collective.”

Andrew, a biracial Black and Native American gay man, could picture himself at HurstonU from the time he toured campus. Andrew offered:

My tour guide was Black, and that was something different. They're at a predominately White institution and I did not feel I would be represented as a person of color on those campuses. For me to come to predominantly White institutions and to be toured by a Black person, I was like, "Oh my gosh." I could kind of see myself there and if this is her experience then hopefully mine will be the same or similar.

Leaving home and coming to HurstonU was an easy decision for Andrew. Thankful for his parents, Andrew struggled as a transracial adoptee. He was seeking community at HurstonU because it was not something he could get at home. Speaking about his Native American and Black identities, Andrew shared that his parents “just couldn’t relate. They didn’t know what to do with that.” He continued,

Once I came to college it was just a lot of cultural exploration, sexual exploration, just a lot that I feel like I had to do on my own. It's like I joined [Black student organization] (BSO). I joined [Native American student organization] (NASO) and just began to see what it meant for me to be Black.

Andrew submersed himself into his involvements on campus. He became actively involved in BSO and NASO in order “do a lot of self-reflection, self-exploration to get to know who [he] was and who [he] was in the larger picture of society and then how [this] would translate into [his] career path.” As Andrew reflected, he shared a specific insight that lead to him finding space in BSO and NASO. Andrew did not consider himself half Native American and half Black. Andrew considered himself Native American and Black. Andrew recalled that he “had to explain to the executive board is just because I'm half Native doesn't mean I'm half Native. Just because that's my racial makeup doesn't mean that I only possess half of the culture. No, I'm fully [Native American] culture and fully Black.”

Nouri, a half-Black half-White bisexual woman, found her community in spaces that did not align with her identity. Nouri observed that the campus was extremely

divided based on the community's social identities. Nouri did not want to give her campus a bad reputation when she reluctantly described:

I don't want to say this because I think that things are changing, but coming here from my first year our campus is very much like segregated. It's very much, you have your Black people over here. You have your White people over here. You have Hispanics over here. You have Asian people over here. You may have some cross mingling. You have like, "We're tolerant of each other to an extent," and then even the fact that you have your queer White people, your queer Black people, your queer Hispanic, it's all so separated, and I think that was the biggest issue.

On the other hand, Alyx, a half Singaporean Chinese and half Romanian queer woman, often felt she could participate in some of those spaces but often felt out-of-place. Alyx shared,

I went to a few Asian student associations meeting or one for the Chinese Student Association and I felt kind of, I don't want to say uncomfortable but it was a little like, I recognized it was a little different and I recognized that a lot of the people in those groups would stare at me and be like why is this White kid here which is never a comfortable feeling.

Alyx did join a student organization that was created for students who were mixed Asian heritage. She positively glowed about the attempt that the organization founder was attempting to do with its creation but was not sure how far the organization would go because of the limited number of people. Alyx saw the "potential for it" and at minimum thought it would be "this wonderful experience of just knowing that these people exist."

Although Alyx struggled to find space in the racial identity based organizations, she found community and belonging in other ways. For instance, Alyx declared:

I know a lot of the friendships I've made in college are very much these moments when you're talking to someone and you mention this factor like, "I'm mixed race" and they'll say, oh same but it starts this whole discussion that tends to go deeper than a lot introductory conversations go just because you have that in common. It allows you to form some relationships that way.

When coming to HurstonU, it was clear that the participants all sought various ways to understand their own sense of belonging and find space. All participants had similar experiences of trying to navigate their multiple racial identities and finding a community to affirm their identities. For participants who grew up in a home with a parent who shared their identity, such as Ororo, Anthony, Nouri, and Alyx, it was easier to exhibit confidence in identifying areas to get involved. Due to Andrew's upbringing and a transracial adoptee status, Andrew was not only wanting to be involved on campus but looked for meaning in who he was as a person considering his identities.

### **Functioning in Monoracial Spaces**

As BMLGBQ students, some participants' journey was focused on the silos of their identities. Because of the nature of HurstonU, some participants found this easier than others. For instance, when Anthony discussed his identity, he often referred to himself as a Black man or Latino. Although, Anthony recognized his multiple identities, it was rare for him to label his identities as biracial, multiracial, or mixed-heritage. Since Anthony was raised by his mother's Mexican side of the family, it was important for him to know the other parts of his identity. Anthony said, "I wanted to know what Blackness is. I wanted to know where I fit [in as] a Black man. Started to make friends here and there, or associates, whatever I guess they were at the time" when he came to HurstonU. It was clear that Anthony spent time reflecting on his experience because he continued by sharing:

I realize I really wanted to engage with the Black community. Being a Black man, I was like these aren't questions I necessarily probably could have verbalized back then, but now it's just like what is Blackness? What is my Blackness? How do I fit into this?

Anthony found space within the Black community on campus, but was missing the Latin community in which he was raised. He chose to participate in both communities concurrently which was mostly isolated from each other. Anthony continued by sharing:

I dove back into the Latin community here. Met some amazing individuals, both male and female. It was just amazing. It was so organic, natural. I didn't have to put on a front. I could be who I was, to where I have to be this Mexican, knowledgeable individual at times. I might have said, "Yeah, I was baptized/confirmed."

Although Anthony also found space with the Latin community, he struggled with the weight of labels. He understood that he was Black and Latin. He understood that he visually presented as a man-of-color and could "pass" in either community. Anthony also offered:

When I wake up, I know I'm a Black man, and I know how society might see that, and see myself. That's not the only way I think. It's weird. I'm not saying I'm color blind or anything along those lines, because I do recognize the value of seeing who I am. In a setting like HurstonU, in a setting of my hometown, in the setting of this larger institution we call United States of America, but I see myself as [Anthony].

Ororo on the other hand struggled to get involved in the Black community at HurstonU. Ororo engaged in conversations around intersectionality with other students who did not grasp concepts of intersectionality or multiple identities. Ororo shared that her "issues with a lot of Black groups is you'll roll up and they are all Hotep twitter." At this point in the interview, I asked Ororo if she could provide context for the meaning of Hotep. She explained, "Hoteps are basically those janky Black dudes that you see on Twitter who are like, 'Yes, queen, my Nubian queen,' and they all wear like ankhs and they are really fake woke, until you actually talk to them." Ororo concluded her thoughts with, "You can get on Hotep culture and Black communities all day. I feel like a lot of them are so focused on one issue that they forget that people have intersecting identities."

Ororo thought that this facet of the Black community was not something she had seen when visiting other campuses, volunteering, or at her internships. Since she was confident with the intersections of multiple marginalized and privileged identities, she did not find the space she was seeking with this portion of the Black community at HurstonU.

Additionally, this was something where Andrew also struggled. As Andrew was finding space with his racial identities, he described himself as one who was not into the protest and activist scene, which was prevalent at HurstonU. Andrew commented:

Oftentimes I feel like if I'm not at the protests, I'm not supporting my Black people; I'm not loving my Blackness. You hear White people talking about it and panning like, did you hear about the rally or something like that. Because I am in White spaces such as [Honor System] and [ Campus Tour Guide] that just are not for Black people, so you hear them talking about things like that. It's like you often want to step up and say, no, here's why they're doing that, but then it's like I wasn't doing it. It's like I feel like why I wasn't doing it, that more so keeps me quiet.

Since Andrew was not active in the activism scene, he felt that he sometimes did not have a voice in or behalf of the Black community.

### **Code Switching**

Anthony and Alyx discussed various ways that they code switched between identities in order to fit in. In regards to code switching with his racial identities, Anthony added:

I have to act a certain way to maneuver that dynamic. I have to act a certain way to maneuver that dynamic, and I have to act a certain way to maneuver the Black dynamic. It's just like why do I have to put on this mask just to kind of like deal with this specific audience of population?

Although Anthony wore different “masks” with different groups he interacted with, he did not find this comfortable. Anthony later stated that, “if I have to put on a face, or a mask to fit into a certain population or a group, it's just not my time necessarily to sit

within that group, with those group of people.” As we discussed this further, he recognized he did code switch but did not like it. For Anthony, this was counter to who he was and his “authentic self.” For Alyx, she was more entertained by the idea of code switching. Alyx explained, “the fact that you’re playing the game of who you want to be in certain situations.”

### **Functioning as Biracial/Multiracial Student and in Spaces**

As BMLGBQ students, three of the participants had very salient experiences around the biracial and multiracial identity. Alyx believed that she had always been comfortable with her mixed race. Alyx declared:

I think I was very much one of those mixed children who sort of did the swing from one identity to the other depending on what group I'm in. Which was something I never quite noticed about myself until fairly recently. I think that's what I started coming into the idea of being mixed race as an identity of its own.

Although this sentiment was Alyx reflecting on her youth, she did not realize that she did this until she got involved on campus. Ororo had always had an understanding of what it meant to be biracial. During the interview, Ororo reflected amusingly about a conversation she had with her father about how she would be perceived:

My dad very bluntly and accurately put it, he goes, "To White people," he goes, "You are acceptably Black." He's like, "You are Black enough that we can feel interesting standing next to you," but he was like, "You are not Black enough that you freak us out." That's the way I usually see it.

Ororo plainly revealed that she did not visually present as half Black. On campus, people have told her she looked mixed but were not sure what “box” to check for her. Ororo quipped, “People are either shocked when I'm talking about Black rights and I'm like, ‘Oh, fun facts. I'm Black,’ because I don't look stereotypically how you expect Black people to look, oh gosh, she's a little paler.” When she sought Black and Brown spaces,

she often had to “find an in” to discover “where all the Brown people are.” Due to her complexion, she joked that, “I’m not the White ally. I’m the awkwardly slightly paler ally.” Ororo’s foundation of understanding her intersectionality is centered on her understanding of being multiracial. She exclaimed, “I feel like that’s one fun thing about being mixed, is that my entire life has been at an intersection, and so I feel like I’ve gotten really good at knowing, almost instinctively, what links together.”

When I asked Nouri how she came to understand her biracial multiracial identity, she responded by sharing:

Honestly, that’s been something I’ve been grappling with is accepting, not accepting, but understanding what that means for myself versus what that means when people see me. I think those are two very different things and something that I’m still trying to rationalize is, I feel like there’s a lot of pressure for me to define who I am racially, depending on the situation that I’m in. I feel like no one really asked me who I was ethnically until I came to [HurstonU]. People just assumed.

Nouri continued, “I think I can’t separate my Blackness from my Whiteness and vice-versa because I have a White mother that is the love and the affection that I got, but then most of my identity, I think is structured around my experience as being a Black woman.” Similar to Andrew, Nouri did not necessarily identify with being multiracial or mixed heritage because she saw herself living with multiple identities, similar to Andrew.

Nouri explained:

I kind of have a thing with the idea identifying as multiracial . . . I didn’t define myself [as multiracial] because I view, not that I have like a mixed identity, [but] the fact that I have two identities, and they are interconnected and cannot necessarily be separated.

At the same time, Nouri recognized that she could not separate her “brownness” from her “White.” She lamented “that doesn’t make me lesser Black than I am White.” As



we were discussing this further, it was clear that Nouri was also reflecting and ideating.

Nouri offered:

The one part that gets me from saying that I'm just Black is the fact that I feel like I'm invalidating the connection that I have to my mother's side of my family, by saying that I'm just Black. Then also, I feel like the experiences that I have are more aligned with the Black community. I feel so torn. I also have to acknowledge my privilege in being fair skinned, because I am mixed because yes, I do face some discrimination because people assume that I'm Black, but then also, I'm fair skinned, so I pass as Latina. Which is not saying that people who are Latina get away from discrimination, but it's just different.

Nouri has struggled to find her place in “Black [HurstonU] versus regular [HurstonU].”

Due to her mother’s White background, she constantly asked herself if she had “the authority to claim certain experiences because my mom is White?” She struggled with understanding how she could use her voice in the context of her own identities and continued by explaining, “I felt like just because my mom is White that [that] invalidated my experiences that aligned with some experiences that a lot of people have in the Black community.” Nouri said, “there's certain pride in being able to say that I come from my Black background. Then I felt like I'm lying.” When engaging in conversations around discrimination and privilege, Nouri struggled to find a balancing act amongst her identities. Nouri clarified:

It's not until talking about our discrimination, talking about oppression, to where I start to feel slightly uncomfortable because I'm like, yes I can relate to what you're saying, but also I do have this privilege, and recognizing my privilege and what do I do with that, type thing.

Nouri also considered herself to be visually ambiguous. People’s understanding of her identity confounded other students due to her involvements on campus. Nouri explained:

When people try to figure out who I am ethnically, one because I'm in a Latina based sorority, they just assume I'm Latina, and it's really funny because will look at me and they'll be like, "Oh, I thought you were Latina, then I saw your hair, so I knew you were mixed with Black."

Nouri's ambiguous nature was also what gave her the strength to choose how she wanted to identify. She performed a spoken word poem during a pageant about "being ambiguous." Nouri proclaimed, "It was the fact that you don't need to know what I am, don't try to categorize me, and that kind of thing." Although Nouri seemed steadfast in her understanding of her multiple identities, she still questioned herself.

### **Isolation and Exclusion**

Participants shared stories of how they experienced isolation, exclusion, and/or discrimination based on their racial identities. In most instances, participants shared stories of exclusion and isolation taking place in both curricular and co-curricular settings. Anthony experienced an extreme case of isolation during his first year at HurstonU. He described the pressure he felt from society as a Black man who should be strong and able to do things for himself. Anthony confessed:

I guess, being candid. They don't see White people talking here and there, being in communities, using their networks, utilizing this and that. I don't know if it's just the way we were raised, or like socialized. Sometimes being a Black man can make it seem like you have to do all by yourself, for yourself, with nobody. That's not the way it should be. That becomes cemented on your heart. When you get older, like that's what you carry forward with you.

Eventually, this feeling was what lead Anthony to take time off from the institution and find a new path for himself.

Andrew had a significant experience when he was excluded from an organization that ultimately devastated him and put him on a path to define his future for himself.

Andrew detailed a story about wanting to join a Black Greek letter organization:

I wanted to join a fraternity my freshman year, and I researched a fraternity and realized that its mission and its principles were in alignment with my identities and who I am as a person. Things such as love for all, [academics], and service. Those are things that have been instilled into me from my family and just things that I discovered that over time I was passionate about.

Although this organization was also Black-affiliated, the fraternity had a reputation of having a significant portion of its members known for being gay. At the time, they were attempting to change their reputation because they saw this as a bad thing in the Black community on campus. Andrew continued:

The organization ended up not taking me which was confusing because I certainly exceeded the requirements to be a part of it and obviously, I wanted to do it for the right reasons. With the organization being such a [secretive] organization they aren't really allowed to disclose why they didn't accept you. It took a big hit to my confidence and which I have never been a very confident, like conceded, person or anything like that, but I have always tried to believe in myself... I've also never had brothers. Moving forward if the principals such as brotherhood, scholarship, service...if someone is telling me that I am not good enough to oppose those principles. Then what am I doing in my life that is showing them that I'm not in alignment with that mission?

Ultimately, Andrew sought out campus counseling because of this experience. He realized he needed to “talk things through because it really really hurt.” Ultimately, this experience was what propelled Andrew to be a prominent campus leader. Andrew persisted, “I took it also as motivation to be a voice in the Black community.”

Nouri described her first experience with racism occurred when she came to the University. It influenced how she would continue to interact with people throughout her time at HurstonU. Nouri informed, “this is what my racial identity means in interacting with other people and how people perceive me.” Nouri has constantly dealt with microaggressions throughout her time at HurstonU. She shared one of her first memories of experiencing microaggressions was while studying abroad in Africa. Nouri was engaged in another conversation with a White woman from HurstonU. At the time, Nouri

complained about the humidity and the impact it was having on her hair. The other student said, "Oh yeah, it's because your hair's so nappy, right?" Nouri recalled, "I looked at her and I was like. . . . It was the first time that I really looked at her and I felt so. . . . She didn't realize that what she said was problematic and it was because . . . I didn't say anything, I didn't, I just let it go." Beyond that experience, Nouri exclaimed:

Other than that situation, it's never been blatant. It's always microaggressions and the fact that people, for example, in my RA trainings, like I said, I always ask a lot of questions. I'm always very curious. I'm always very open minded. Whenever I notice, during RA staff meetings, that the people of color wanted to keep asking a lot of questions, it was like, "Oh my gosh, they're being a nuisance. You all just need to calm down," but the other White staff members wanted to ask a lot of questions and kind of be excited it's like, "Oh it's fine, we're all being excited and happy."

While Nouri's experience of exclusion and isolation occurred through a study abroad experience, Alyx described a specific experience while exploring involvement in an Asian student organization:

I felt very uncomfortable as a "halfie" who looks less Asian than some others, I guess, because that always plays a lot into it. I just remember very much receiving these looks that were very much like, "Are you just that random White kid who likes Asian stuff?" I remember feeling so uncomfortable that I just sort of stopped attending, because this wasn't what I wanted it to be for me.

The participants also had experiences that took place in the curricular sphere of their lives. Nouri called the "microaggressions" as constant in the classroom example. In discussing a time she felt excluded, Nouri remembered:

It's just little things, like professors not calling on you when you raise your hand, but they'll call on a White student. It's also multifaceted because they'll call on a White male, a White female, before they call on a Black male or a Black female, or other racial identities.

Nouri was not alone in her experiences within the classroom. Andrew had similar experiences in the classroom. He outlined when he referred to his majors and minors,

I intersected what I was learning in the classroom, merged my race into that. I was wondering why in my [Political Science] classes I would never hear of Black politics, why would I never hear of Black people in business. Why was that only in certain fields like sociology and things like that?

This feeling of isolation was what gave Andrew the drive for the work that he wanted to do in the with his career. Andrew wants to have assurance that other individuals, students and people did not feel excluded from opportunities. Alyx also referred to her experience with her chosen major:

There are always a lot of class discussion on things touching on identity. There are always these moments where you recognize like, 'I am a minority in this room.' I just came from my [Political Science] recitation, which is U.S. politics, and it's a class of 15 people, and there are 2 people of color, including me. There are very much these moments where I hear a discussion and I'm thinking in a completely different way, and I know it's because I'm one of the few not White people in this classroom. I think moments like that really drive home this like, "Oh God, I'm thinking very differently from everyone else."

Alyx discussing this feeling of being an outsider in the classroom was all too familiar with the other participants.

### **Sexual Identity Experiences of Student Leaders**

Each participant's journey towards understanding their sexual identity at HurstonU was a unique experience. It was clear through the interviews and conversations with the students that their path to understanding their sexual identity was met with a combination of challenges and ease. The themes and patterns emerged as participants discussed their experiences as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people. They expressed that it was a journey that included understanding of sexual identity during college, sense of belonging, relationships, and experiences of isolation and exclusion.

## Sexual Identity During College

Coming to HurstonU, participants had unique experiences coming to understand their sexual identity better. Ororo came to better understand how she identified during her gap year abroad working in a country in Africa. Now that Ororo understood her sexual identity better, she expanded:

It feels like I've now sat down and signed a contract with "The Gay," and we are now on this road. You're going to have to accept the fact that it's gonna be difficult wherever you live. You're gonna have to worry about coming out to people. You might have to lose friends. What is your grandma gonna think? I feel like I just pushed it to the back of my mind. Then you look back, though.

Ororo has always had an open relationship with her father. One of things she reflected upon on her journey was to understanding her identity. She wished someone would have given her a heads up about the path ahead. She joked:

It's like understanding gay in hindsight where you look back and you're like, "Oh, yeah. Probably should have been. . . . Somebody should have clued me in." My dad did. He looked at me and he was like, "I think you're gay." I was like, "Dad! I am a straight! What are you talking about?" My dad was like, "Yeah, about as straight as your hair."

When I asked Anthony how he came to understand his sexual identity, he exclaimed, "that was a toughie." Anthony always knew he had an attraction to all people, but he did not know what it meant. During the summer before he met his father was when he "actually had an interaction with another man." After that encounter, Anthony was able to put into words what he was feeling his whole life about his attraction to men as well as women. When Anthony met his father for the first time, it was a spiritual experience for him and he spent the whole year learning more about himself. Anthony reflected, "being a man of faith, I try to practice celibacy." That being said, Anthony was also exploring his new-found understanding of his sexual identity:

I won't even say I'm 100% comfortable in my own sexuality on a heterosexual level, a bisexual level, whatever you want to call it. For me labels, I don't really like labels to be honest, either. Because I go back to the I am [Anthony]. There's so much more beyond people besides their sexuality.

As Anthony was reflecting on his year, he discussed his summer internship where he haphazardly said, “Actually there was an interaction with another man this summer, too.” After sharing this incident, he could not stop laughing about forgetting it. Anthony told his family that he was interested in both men and women and “knew they’d be okay with it.” As Anthony continued to understand his sexual identity, he did not want it to consume his experience at HurstonU. Anthony emphatically proclaimed:

I came back this fall. I'm academically straight, emotionally straight, mentally straight. I got my faith, all these things. I got my support group. There was this . . . Literally, within the first three weeks, there was that question of what do I want, what do I want, don't want? This year like maturing as a man and individual. One of those steps is like what you like and dislike on an intimate level, a sexual level, and a relationship level. Those questions were literally, as I mentioned, they were attached to me. It was such a burden. I want to make sure I'm utilizing, maximizing, my time here at HurstonU. I was down. It was just something I was constantly thinking of being a man who has feelings, like strong feelings, hormones, whatever it be, testosterone, everything. All of the above. It is overwhelming at times. It's biological, too. It's not something I can necessarily push in the back of my head.

Anthony understood that he was still discovering what his sexual identity meant to him, which was why it was important for him to participate in this study.

Andrew came to HurstonU with the idea that he would use his time at the university to explore who he was and determine his career path. As Andrew was describing his sexual identity, he often conflated traditional gender expression of masculine and feminine mannerisms with sexual orientation: “I've never felt like masculinity defined my sexuality or being like feminine or whatever.”

Andrew said, “I came in with the idea that I would explore and if at the end of the day I decided like okay guys aren't what I want, I honestly believe that I would still be the same Andrew that I am right now.” This was important for Andrew to explore while at HurstonU because he could not explore this aspect of his identity at home. Andrew added:

The reason that sexuality, for me, is such a barrier with my parents is because they never created that safe space and because they never said that something else was okay. Even conversations now are just still very heteronormative. It's like my sister knows because, once again, I can relate to my sister.

Although Andrew discussed thinking his parents may have known about him identifying as a gay man, he was not sure. He shared that his parents poked fun sometimes by joking “about coming out” through social media outlets, such as Snapchat. Andrew has a real fear of the impact and outcome that would occur for him coming out as gay. For that reason, he said he was extremely “methodical and deliberate” in his decisions about his life. In this instance, Andrew explained why he was not ready to come out to his parents:

I want to make sure that if I come to them with this that, I'm going to be ready, just ready to put it on the table and ready to accept the consequences. Whatever may ensue, I want to make sure that I'm okay, that I'm established enough to walk away from that conversation knowing that whatever happens I'll be okay. I'm not at that place yet financially, clearly. I haven't even had a boyfriend, so it's not like that type of stuff is really pressing me right now. I know that I'm gay because I know that I am attracted to males.

As Andrew was externally processing his thoughts, he struggled with the concept of “coming out.” Here was an example: “The whole process of coming out is just something that really irks me because straight people don't have to do it, so I'm like, why do I? Then again, I see why it's necessary to [do so].” As Andrew discussed more about his parents, his concern centered on how he would approach them and at what stage he would be in



his life. His fear was that his parents would equate being gay with being loose. Andrew said:

Right now a relationship is not really something that I am looking for. I don't see it as being something that I'm looking for in the near future, so I would also want to hope that I am established with a young man when I come to them too so that they wouldn't just be like, "Oh, you're gay and you're out here hooking up with guys." Then that's something completely different than I'm gay and I'm seeing someone. We've been committed for such and such amount of time. This is what's going down. I just want to make sure that I'm okay walking away from that situation. My sister has always been very supportive, but I think when the time is right, when I've thought it through, when I have reached a place or I've established enough to be okay with it, it'll happen.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Orooro sought out both communities of color and non-hetero communities. Orooro saw that those communities rarely mixed. In fact, she exclaimed, "I feel like all the race organizations on campus are really straight." When she attended the LGBTQ Student Organization Alliance (LGBTQSO) meeting, she felt strange. Orooro stopped attending the meetings because there were too many straight/heterosexual people attending. Orooro understood the "need for straight allies, but why are 75% of the people at the [LGBTQSO] meeting not queer, that [seemed] very odd." She felt that there were minimal opportunities for queer people of color (QPOC) to connect on campus:

There's really not spaces. I think there's a [Queer People of Color] group on campus, but it's like six people. There's actually a bunch of people in it, but it's like they have all known each other since freshman year, and so it's like you can't really just roll up and be like, "Hello, I am also brown and gay."

Since Orooro was not able to find a community in which she felt comfortable on campus, she started exploring the local community. We discussed local bars that catered to the queer community and which bars had the best drag shows. It was clear she found a community within the greater community off-campus:

Gay bars are always predominantly White. You may get a Hispanic kid or two if you're lucky. I feel like you go to Black events and they're still so much of the 'Well, we need to worry about other issues plaguing the community and you guys are making things unnecessary.' It's like, how I navigate it. If I find another Brown person, I get really excited. I'm like, 'And you're queer. Thank you. Thank you,' because it's like I'm not really navigating so much I am wandering around with a Google Maps that's not syncing correctly.

Along with Ororo passing physically as racially ambiguous, she attributed part of the difficulty to finding a lesbian and queer community at HurstonU was because she could pass as straight. Sometimes she felt invisible because students did not see her as queer and other times she felt invisible because she could hide her identity when she was not feeling safe. Ororo said, "I also feel at a lot of queer events, I don't look gay." Ororo continued, "I literally wore a shirt once that said, 'Keep calm and kiss girls,' and the most lesbian looking girl I've ever seen came up to me and was like, 'Thank you for being an ally.'" Ororo expanded her thoughts to the greater queer community and compared the "What are you?" question that she received from in-group and out-group. She understood and appreciated when in-group, queer people of color, sought clarification of her identities. When out-group, White and straight people, asked her, she often got irritated. Ororo elaborated:

[QPOC] will be like, "What do you actually identify as sexually, because I've seen you at every single queer event, but you also look really straight, and I'm kind of confused as to why you're here." It's like, ah, I'm gay, but I understand. Whereas straight people are like, "What are you?" It's like, I'm not some fun show.

At the same time, Ororo recognized what she would identify as a privilege to her identity for the ability to pass as heterosexual:

That's also where I feel like, oh, there's a lot of invisibility but also a lot of privilege that comes with the fact that if someone were to come and find everyone that looked gay, I'm not gonna be found.

Where Ororo seemed to have found her strongest community was the in curricular aspect of her time on campus. It was clear during the interview that Ororo was extremely intelligent and passionate about her future. She made clear that what she did in all of her classes was “gay it up.” While in class, another student engaged Ororo in a conversation about why she always presented on a *gay* topic. She exclaimed:

I got asked, actually, I can think about this in my Portuguese class, some guy came up to me, because every single language class I've been in, you always have to do a presentation on something from a country that speaks that language. So, I've literally done gay rights in every single one, it's just like a theme, I'm like, “I'm going to gay up your education, right now.” I literally had someone come up and ask me, “Why'd you pick gay rights?” I'm like, “Because I'm a gay.” They're like, “Oh.”

Anthony was not public about his sexual identity to many people on campus and his participation in this study was conditionally based on anonymity. Anthony really wanted to share his story, but it was important to him to come out when he was ready. When Anthony first started to explore his sexual identity, he reached out to a mentor on campus. Anthony confessed, “I actually reached [out to] my mentor, and fortunately they were able to connect me to a couple of individuals who thought similar to me, or maybe they offered a different perspective.” The individuals Anthony reached out to were all alumni of the institution who were Black gay, or queer, men. Some of those individuals identified as out and others were still on the down-low (i.e., not out) with their sexual identity. Anthony spent the first 3 weeks after his first encounter with a man speaking with those alumni to understand their experiences. It was important for him to hear the perspectives of so many different men, including those identifying as heterosexual because he wanted to be as informed as possible to understand what he was experiencing. Anthony reflected: “I just listened [to] what they had to say.”

Anthony acknowledged that was harder for him to find a community with his sexual identity on campus, partly because he did not like to use labels and partly because he was discovering who he was. Anthony claimed a baseball analogy that he used to connect with people who he perceived as non-heterosexual and was a person of color:

I don't tell people who I am, what I identify. I actually tell people, the people who I know, I say I play baseball. There's softball and baseball. We have our code names for that. That's the way I go about it. That's how I tell people, too. When I trust them enough, I say well, I play baseball. Well, I play softball.

Andrew struggled to find community on campus in regards to his sexual identity, “I've just always been a very private person with my business.” Since Andrew was raised in a home where personal conversations did not occur, this experience carried with him to HurstonU. Andrew once had a conversation with a good friend of his on campus who was also gay. At the time, Andrew had not shared with his friend that he was gay, but his friend saw him on an electronic media gay app. Andrew’s friend asked him, “I saw you on a gay app. Why didn't you tell me?” Andrew explained that he was “put back” by someone asking him something so private and said “Okay, I'm on a gay app, but that's my business.”

Andrew’s privacy kept him less public about his sexual identity. Partly because he was methodical in his thoughts and planning and in other ways, he did not feel like HurstonU was the right community for him to embrace his sexuality:

I guess I'm not necessarily as out as maybe the next person is just because I'm like, there's some things that I don't really particularly like on this community, like specifically the [city] gay community that make me okay with . . . that make me okay with just coming out with it because they're just messy as it frequently can be.

When Andrew completed a summer internship in a major metropolitan city, he realized how good he could feel somewhere else. When reflecting on this time, he got a big smile

on his face and said, “Man oh man oh man oh man oh man oh man.” Andrew went on his first date with a man when was completing his internship. He recalled thinking, “It was just like the way that even the people at the restaurant treated us, I know that it wouldn't have been that way if I had grabbed lunch with him here.” For Andrew, living in the south offered more barriers to exploring his sexual identity in a meaningful way than if he were in the Midwest. Andrew believed that it was harder to find a community because sexual identity in general, “specifically in the south,” had a bigger stigma that people placed on it.

Nouri had a strong support network at home but struggled to find one at HurstonU. She too was not as out as others in this study and had only been in relationships with men. She did try to go to LGBTQSO meetings but was not sure how to tell people how she identified since she was in a relationship with a man at the time. She also shared, “It wasn't something I told a lot of people, it's not something I feel like I needed to tell people.” She struggled with how to engage in conversations with people around her sexual identity. Nouri said, “I didn't know how to find that here without going up to random people and being like, ‘Hey, I'm bi, where can I go to hang out?’” Another outlying factor for Nouri was that she “felt like [she] needed to have certain experiences at HURU to feel validated in [her] sexuality.” Overall, she claimed that “people don't assume that I am bi because they haven't seen me date a woman.”

### **Relationships**

The want for relationships varied among participants based on how “out” they were at the time. For instance, Ororo began her first relationship with a woman while participating in her gap year abroad experience in an African country where being gay

was against the law. Jokingly, she shared that she always sought the most obstacles when making a decision. She also entered into this relationship before she came to the realization that she was gay. Ororo's first relationship was with a mixed German and French-Canadian declaring:

[I] had a weird relationship with her, but all the while I was like, "I'm not gay." Finally, one day I just woke up and I called my dad, wished him a happy birthday, and was like, "Also, I'm gay." He was like, "Okay, do you still have malaria though?" I was like, oh, it's not the end of the world if I'm gay. It's like, again, for someone who was as much of an ally as I was, I feel like I had a lot of internalized homophobia that took me years to sit down and unpack. Then I had to come out to my girlfriend. My girlfriend was like, "No duh." Like, "Ooh, surprise."

On the other hand, Anthony was not sure if he wanted to engage in a relationship.

He compared his wants to sometimes being hormonal and other times being emotional.

Sometimes I question myself. Is this feeling sexuality more like a hormonal thing, because I'm physically attracted to both. Obviously. Sometimes I feel myself wanting to be in a relationship with a woman, but maybe not a man. But I know it's just like if someone exhibits qualities and appearance, or like is able to engage in a conversation no matter who they are, then we can make something happen.

Anthony was basically non-committal until he was forced to commit. It was clear that he saw his time at HurstonU truly as a time to explore who he was and what he wanted:

It's just now, for me, it's, I think, the big emphasis, and my point in life right now, is engaging with that, and actually like doing it. Physically having those interactions and engaging, and to see as you grow and mature like going on dates. People go on dates to find out what they like and dislike. That's the stage I'm at in my life. Whether it be dating, whether it be interactions, whether it be like sexual encounters. I'm at that stage of seeing like this is what I like, this is what I don't like. This is what I want, this is what I don't want. Is this a hormonal thing, is this the testosterone thing, or is this like a committed, emotional relationship attachment?

Nouri explored entering into a relationship with a woman once. She had a crush on someone and was extremely interested in dating her. Unfortunately, Nouri was not successful entering into that relationship because of how she identified. Nouri elaborated,

We tried to talk and she told me she didn't want to be with me because she thought, she said, that you can't. . . . She kind of invalidated being bi. She was like, "You have to be either gay or straight. I don't date women unless they are lesbians." I was like, "Oh, well. Okay."

After that, Nouri only dated men. When she was dating one guy, she shared with him that she was bisexual. She said it was not something he could handle and ended their relationship. After that experience, she made clear before dating anyone that she was bisexual. Nouri explained, "This is who I am. . . . I want to be upfront with it." Since the one guy that had a problem with it, she continued "I need to let every guy that tries to talk to me, I need to let them know." Overall, Nouri shared that she was also a very private person. She attempted not to mix business with her personal life. At one point, she was participating in a Safe Zone training and her supervisor was there. Although it was a Safe Zone training, she had not disclosed her identity to her supervisor for various reasons. One reason was because she had a strong non-intimate relationship with one of her co-workers. She was fearful that her supervisor would now assume their relationship was more than "buddy buddy." Ultimately, she participated in the training without revealing her sexual identity for that reason. Nouri "still [hasn't] technically dated any women."

### **Isolation and Exclusion**

Being a resident of the south, Andrew had always felt isolated because of his identities. Andrew said, "I feel like just being here it's like there certainly is a stigma." Andrew detailed an interesting perspective of what he saw as an unofficial hierarchy in the gay community at HurstonU. The hierarchy was based on self-identified terminology and traditional gender expressions. Andrew explained,

It's like when someone comes out, like someone who identifies as a guy comes out as gay, that's viewed differently than when someone who identifies as a guy

comes out as queer, comes out as pansexual. There's a hierarchy to how gay you can be or how feminine you can act.

Andrew saw this to be the case more in the south and on-campus than when he interned in the Midwest. Andrew struggled with the presume vanity that came with being a gay man. He did not want to seem shallow and vain and struggled when his “girlfriends” solicited advice from him on who was cute and who was not. Andrew said he appreciated that they were trying to include him in a conversation, but it made him feel awkward. Andrew proclaimed readily: “It kind of assumes like I'm going to have an opinion on this guy's attraction and that attraction and that because I'm gay, I obviously have an opinion on all guys. That's just not really my case. It's not how I rock the boat.” For Andrew, personality mattered but he did not know how to engage in that conversation with his friends. Andrew said, “I really take into account a person's character before I say I am attracted to them.”

Nouri had multiple jobs on campus. One of her jobs was working with Greek-Lettered Organization Office (GLOO) and said, “I don't think I would ever disclose [my sexual identity]”. Nouri often felt excluded from conversations around her sexual identity when she was in a relationship with a man. Students on campus automatically assumed she was straight and placed those assumptions on her in conversations:

I remember was when I was with a group of friends, and I want to say it was all women, and we were talking about partners, people we were interested in, and cute stuff that they were doing. That time, I was interested in a woman, and I felt like I couldn't share my story of my love interest, because everyone they were talking about were all in hetero relationships. So I think I hinted at the person I was interested in, but I didn't use any gender specific language. I felt like I didn't have a space to do it.



## **Leadership Experiences**

These BMLGBQ students have had varied experiences centered on leadership. Some participants were able to articulate why they could easily identify why they became leaders or what drove them to do the work they were doing without calling it leadership, while other participants were not as reflective on their experiences. The themes and patterns emerged as participants discussed particular leadership experiences, meaning of leadership, finding space as leaders, specific characteristics of effective leaders, and challenges these courageous leaders face.

### **Meaning of Leadership**

Coming to HurstonU, some participants had a basic understanding of leadership while others grew through their experience at the University. For Ororo, leadership meant something bigger than herself. Ororo said, “I feel like leadership, it's not necessarily just being a head of a club or being something. It's are you doing something impactful and, I would say, something that is making something better?” Ororo was an academically focused student and related her leadership mostly to her field-of-study and future endeavors. She continued by saying that the impact did not have to make the world better but “doing something in your field while authentically being who you are.” Although Ororo did not attribute her service to making the world a better place, her numerous volunteer efforts did so. As Ororo described why she did what she did, she said, “I feel like the stuff I do that, if put down on my resume as a leadership position, has always been I volunteered with this, I helped with this, I put in a lot of effort for this.” Ororo was never one to be in the limelight but more behind the scenes. Often, she “didn't come up with the idea, but I have definitely helped shape it and move it in directions, and so I feel

like that's what it is, authentically being who you are while simultaneously doing something that makes things better.”

Since Anthony had a terrible transition to HurstonU, he focused on being a resource for other students at the institution. Anthony saw the positive from how he struggled and remarked, “I think another beautiful thing is with that pain that I have now, I try to pay it forward with other individuals, with younger individuals. Particular population is young men who look like myself or women.” Anthony wanted to be a tool for other students and continued, “I present myself as that resource, that support system, that person just to be there if they need somebody there. Then if they want, of course, they'll reach out for it.” Anthony attended student organization meetings to offer himself as someone other students could come to for support. When Anthony first started at HurstonU, he did not know people were there to support him when he struggled. He exclaimed, “When they want to reach out, I'll be there. It's all a thing of timing. Like I said, there's value and history in the past, but it's not how I base my actions.” Anthony did not want students to feel like they were boxed into their identities or their past:

I see the potential in people that they sometimes can't see in themselves. I just want them to know, if you want it, you can have it. If you want to do it, you can do it. I think that's a big thing that we often forget to see because we're bound by this institution maybe, or bound by it being a liberal campus. We're bound by because we're Black, or we're bound because we're bisexual. We're bound because we're male, because we're female. That's not the case.

When I asked Anthony to elaborate a little bit more about his feelings about this, he continued:

Being able to tell other people who might sit in the same boat as you, is such a breath of fresh air. Such a breath of fresh air. It's just because now you're talking about it. When you can talk about something, you're able to process it, you're able to reminisce on it, you're able to reflect on it, engage with it.

Ultimately, Anthony did not want a student to experience the same pitfalls he experienced and wanted to help them “grow” and succeed at the institutions.

Similar to Anthony, Andrew wanted to be a resource and support mechanism for students at HurstonU. Andrew wanted to be a leader who helped students determine their own path. It was important for Andrew to connect with other students who shared his identities and also hailed from rural communities. Andrew believed:

Coming from these communities and coming from these backgrounds and what has been drilled into their heads and [talked] to them as truth. And then, them being allowed to develop their own sense of truth and that be influenced by their own thoughts and their own beliefs and their experiences.

Andrew shared that his leadership style was different from other Black students on campus. He discussed the rich tradition of activism on HurstonU’s campus and delved into why he did not participate in the way that people thought he should:

It's like I think in our generation there's a big stigma that's like if you are out on the forefront protesting, if you aren't at the die-in, if you aren't at the rallies through campus, then you aren't doing anything. People also have to realize we might be liberal, we might be progressive, we might be activists in our own ways and in our own rights, and I just don't think that's as validated. For me, I'm just not the type of person who's going to be at the rally. I'm not going to be yelling through campus. That's not my lane to walk in because my thought process is if you're out here doing this and you have a 2.1 GPA, not saying that you do, but you're still not getting anywhere. My thing is more so taking an institutional, which then again, the institution still isn't set to work for us, but it's like if I can prove myself in the classroom, if I can prove myself through my involvement, through my leadership positions, then I feel like that's my method of activism. If I can empower others to reach their full potential even in a system that doesn't work for them, that is my method of activism. I don't think that's as glorified as the people who are at the rallies, at the protests, sitting in the pit, laying in the union. It's like that's important too, but all forms of activism when done right are valid and they matter.

As Andrew shared his view of activism and his role in it, he ended with, “I'm okay with the work that I do because I know that if someone else is made better because of it, that means more to me.” Ultimately, Andrew’s role as a leader on campus had also helped

him understand what he wanted to do in the future. Speaking about the impact of his leadership experiences, Andrew described that they, “led me to formulate my interest in going into equal opportunity in the workplace” in order to ensure accessibility and advancement of positions for minoritized people.

When Nouri reflected on her perspectives of leadership, she shared, “Leadership, to me, is being willing to hear people's stories, and to take from those stories everyone's strong points, and then come together and use those to work towards a common goal or to help each other strive for success.” Similar to other participants, Alyx used her past to inform her present. When asked how she modeled her leadership style, she shared her philosophy:

I'm not always glad to say I've struggled to life but I, I'm not ashamed of the things I think have grown in me personally because of it and I would want to keep that with me as much as possible in a leadership position. I hope I would never forget what it's like to have these moments of uncertainty or have to work for something. You grow up to become the kind of person you needed when you were younger. Which I liked a lot and I like the idea of. You know. Be able to help people in the way you needed help, when you were younger and when you were struggling with things like [racial] identity or sexuality.

Alyx saw her role as an integral part of the university community. She shared that she believed that, “You have a chance to really create your own legacy at HurstonU.”

### **Finding Space and Community**

As participants sought to find space and community on campus, they explored various paths of involvement and taking on roles as campus leaders. Ororo found space in the university's international student center and shared an example of when someone came up to her and said, “Oh, I know that you speak French, we need your help.” That skillset opened a door for Ororo to volunteer with Syrian refugee relocation and support as a translator. Other times, she volunteered with the LGBTQSO on campus. Ororo said

that one of the key aspects of her getting involved was that she was a visible member of the campus community:

I feel like that's something that you get included because of the fact that you're visible, but if you're someone who has a talent but you're not super, super gung-ho or you don't have a sign on your forehead, then I don't feel like people will just come up to you and be like, these are these opportunities.

On the other hand, Anthony got involved with leadership on campus by applying for executive board positions with one of the largest student organizations on campus and other smaller organizations. He became the head of a major committee with one of the largest student organizations on campus focusing on progressive causes. Andrew found his leadership niche in many areas on campus. He focused on creating space on campus, similar to what he experienced when finding a home at HurstonU. Andrew's work with admissions and in other student organizations casted him as a role model for many. He wanted to make sure he shared his story, like others shared with him, "I've also had the opportunity to featured on different websites, different videos that [were] produced by admissions, and different pamphlets. I always get to share my story." In addition, Andrew focused on making some of the organizations of which he was a part more inclusive.

Andrew helped some of these organizations create surveys because he,

Wanted to make sure that we were getting the truth [seeing beyond] gender diversity, and academic diversity. Looking at race and ethnicity and what demographics really comprised our [organization] and seeing where we are, where we want to be in three years or something and then looking at how we can get there.

Finding space and community for Nouri took on a different lens. Nouri was involved in a leadership position within a Latina-based Greek organization and drove conversations around diversity and acceptance in her sorority. For Nouri, it was important to ensure that women in her sorority engaged in conversations beyond the Latina binary. For instance,

Nouri shared, “We take the idea of diversity, it's more than just diversity in racial diversity, but diversity of thought and sexuality.” Nouri recognized that she needed to do more work in this area and so she found a community in activities on campus that focused on social justice and leadership development. When elaborating further about those experiences, Nouri declared:

So I think it's opened doors for me to be able to learn more from other people, to see where other people are coming from, and then also express myself, and not necessarily speak on parts of my identity, or parts of my experience, communities I should say, but my personal feelings.

Nouri found a community because she chose to engage in various communities in leadership roles. She led the late-night safety program for the institution, worked for residence life, worked in other offices, and was a member of many organizations. When speaking about how she made meaning of her leadership roles and interacting in spaces with other leaders on campus, she affirmed:

It allows me to speak with people who are student leader in other positions and be like, ‘This is where you're coming from. This is how I'm feeling it. How I'm internalizing what you're saying, but I want us to at least have a, even if we're not agreeing it at least opens the doors for communication.’ I think that's the best way, and then also being a student leader has allowed me to learn the strength that I have in myself, and understand how much I can handle, and really making me rethink things that I thought I was sure of.

When Alyx reflected on how she found a community within her leadership role, she said that her being a leader in a student organization made it “easier to navigate [her] way into that helping be a leader in terms of [her] sexual identity.”

### **Leadership Skills and Characteristics**

Certain skills and characteristics were highlighted as important or gained by participants from their roles as leaders at the institution. For instance, Ororo chose to be a

behind the scenes leader. Ororo said it was important to support and push ideas forward of the collective community:

I'm not really a person who likes being the person who founded a club. Vice presidency is what I like to describe myself [as], as a general rule. I like to actually do stuff, but I don't want to be the one who had to make the club or be the face of it.

When I asked about what she gained from her role as a leader on campus, she said, "I think it's basically made me less afraid."

Anthony shared multiple characteristics that he believed were important to being a leader. First, Anthony thought that the ability to build authentic relationships was a critical skill. It was clear in Anthony's actions with others that he valued relationships. Anthony said, "When I'm in those leadership or influential roles, I really just try to figure people out." He was referring to his ability to make connections with people and declared:

When I mentioned being empathetic with other people, since I could say my middle name was Intersectional. I come across someone, and I could come across probably one of the richest, white males on this campus and I would find something that we could relate about. When I find, and act like things were normal. I have something we can relate about. When I find a black person, we have something to relate about. When I find a Muslim person, we have something to relate about.

Anthony said he had an ability to "flow in and out of whatever group, any conversation, interaction, dialogue, with anybody, anytime, anyplace, and anywhere." He was a self-proclaimed learner. In order to be a more effective leader, Anthony "actively listens" and "asks questions" in his interactions with others. Anthony said, "It's not always about where I can be met, but where I can also meet them." Anthony served as a resource to many as a role model and leader in many organizations:

That's why when I'm having conversations with people, I'm naming off the learning center, the writing center. I'm dropping names, I'll shoot an email with like eight different things. I'll drop my name, tell them who you are, and just ask for help.

Ultimately, Anthony said the most important characteristic for him as a leader was to “have fun, do what you got to do!”

Andrew said that the characteristics that best represented him as a leader was “Advocate,” which played out in different facets for him. Sometimes it was about being in the trenches with his team, continuously growing, and always working. Andrew confessed,

I think that being a leader means that you, number one, know the people that you're advocating for, that you are able to get in the trenches with them and do work but also that you're able to make the decisions on behalf of them. That all comes from knowing them, knowing how their identities play into the work that you're doing. Leadership for me is not always being in the glamour position but more so knowing when it's time for you to take a step into the trenches, knowing when it's time for you to get things done.

Andrew also understood where he struggled as a leader and would like to grow:

I think that I personally struggle with leadership [as] delegation, just because I feel like I think I can do everything on my own. It's just not okay. I believe my way for things is always the best way, which is, I feel, human nature really. Also, leadership is a continuous state of growing of your people and every declaration that you make but also of yourself.

Andrew comprehended the importance of self-awareness. He understood that the more he was aware of who he was as an individual, the better a resource he could be for his peers.

Andrew claimed, “I feel like just being a leader once again goes back to knowing who you are, what you wanted from certain situations, and doing that reflection for yourself before you can improve another person.” Andrew also realized concepts such as challenge and support are useful skills for leaders:



Certainly, being self-aware and knowing that we are product of our environment most of the time and not everyone is as in tune or like as a accepting of who they are as maybe I am in some spaces. Then trying to meet people where they are, so that's certainly like a social advantage that being a leader has helped me with is meeting people where they are and not trying to get them to where I am. And I think on a professional scale it's certainly led me into like different type of work that I want to do.

Andrew's role as a leader was to open doors for students with similar backgrounds as his own. Referencing a program in which Andrew served as a mentor, he reflected about the participants:

Most of them come from the same background that I do and are balancing getting involved, just that adjustment to [HurstU] and maybe even their sexuality or other things they have that are going on back at home. It's knowing that each person might be different but our backgrounds serve as a commonality and that I can tell them what worked for me.

Ultimately, being a leader on campus has given Andrew "much more of a sense of boldness."

Nouri believed that traits critical to being an effective leader included listening, social justice, being a voice for the voiceless, and making change. Nouri proclaimed, "I'm very big into listening to people's idea." It was important for Nouri to "hear somebody who's not speaking up, asking them to let me know their ideas, and how they feel like we can all solve something or work towards something together." Nouri believed that her role as a leader was to "have a space to speak up for [her] identities." For one of the programs for which she was the director, she used her voice to call to question the lack of hiring people of color. At the time, she did not believe it was intentional, but she wanted to train her team on how to be more inclusive in their hiring practices.

Being a leader on campus made Nouri continue to question her motives. Nouri often considered how and why she was serving her peers.

Being a student leader is making me think about what I can't handle, can handle, and with that really deciding who I am. I think honestly it was me getting in these positions especially being [in residence life] made me think about what can I do for [students]. What do I have to offer? I was like, before I think about what I have to offer, I need to think about who am I? Who am I presenting myself because how can I ask someone to be comfortable in this space, and think about how their identities, and their outlook on other people's identities until I first know at my own identities. So through that, and having these programs where we talk about the things that matter to us. I was like, 'Okay, well what matters to me? Who am I? What is my stance on things?' I think that definitely made me evaluate, and question some things that I came in thinking.

Similar to Anthony, Alyx believed that empathy and listening were important qualities of a leader. Alyx believed that a leader must have "an ability to work well with others."

When reflecting on her own characteristics, Alyx said, "I don't know if I have you know exactly a lot of wisdom to offer but, I think, I think if nothing else people, benefit from knowing that someone else lived through this too."

### **Challenges of Leadership**

Ororo's form of leadership centered on academia and activism. One of her biggest challenges was whether or not she did enough:

You need to be some sort of special snowflake, you need to be involved in something. Otherwise, it's like, 'Oh, you don't do anything, you just go do your homework and you go back', I feel like it's almost the opposite. I almost wonder if it's like, did I not do enough? Why didn't I run for student body president? Why didn't I take over the world? I feel like here it's such a big deal that you do something grand, that like that's more important than, honestly, almost anything else. It's like, oh, you conquered the bio lab, and cloned a kitten.

Ororo was a disrupter of the status quo on campus: "I feel like being 'in leadership positions', in very straight white spaces, has made me more, I guess, obnoxious in the best way possible about it." That disruption flowed into other spaces as well. Ororo and I spent an additional 90 minutes discussing politics and the future of our nation. During that conversation, she stated emphatically:

A revolution is not revolutionary at the expense of any group. Then it's not revolutionary. We've been doing that. That's not new. It's kind of like when people were like, "Donald Trump is, like, oh my God, making racism popular." None of his positions are new. This isn't new. This is old as fuck.

At the time, Ororo was focused on the challenges of living in the south, being a leader on a campus with a strong, unwavering pride of southern heritage, and the fact that most spaces on campus were White and straight. Although she was a disruptor of these spaces, she also found them in abundance throughout campus and off-campus too.

Anthony felt that one of the biggest challenges to leadership was inclusivity.

Anthony recognized his own faults in trying to be inclusive and believed if it was hard for him, it had to be hard for so many others that did not practice this skill daily. Anthony proclaimed, "It's just not going to happen for everybody." Even though Anthony struggled on this path, he shared, "I always try to make a group feel inclusive."

Another challenge Anthony discussed was centered on power and influence. He recognized that power often corrupted good intentions. Anthony explained the complexity, "being a leader, it can be really hard to do that because you're the one who's supposed to move the group forward and you're supposed to lead." He expanded on his belief with, "on this campus, from student organizations, from an institutional level, people have that influence and power. Sometimes, they use it for their own personal gain, or maybe it hinders people more than it helps people." Anthony believed that this corruption of power could be grand or it could be minimal. In conjunction with his path to being inclusive, Anthony recognized when he was in a position of power, he most constantly strived to be inclusive. Cautiously, Anthony declared, "I think with that having that influence with that power, you have to be very careful about how you go about it. Because a slight slip up of the tongue from a 'Hey guys' to a 'Hey y'all,' or something

along those lines, can change someone's perspective like that.” He knew that his work “might not happen overnight.” Anthony finished his thought with “but the time in which it takes to get there, there's so much to learn, so much to cultivate. By the time you get there, it's just like well, dang, I don't care about this, but I know about all of this now. It's all onto the next thing.”

Andrew’s declarations of the challenges of leadership were different than other campus leaders. In some ways, Andrew was still discovering who he was as a person and in other ways he struggled with the opportunities afforded to him as a leader. When he reflected on his experience with the Black Greek Letter organization, he took it personally. Andrew shared, “I had to grow from that situation, become a better person for myself before I could then start helping other people on how they could deal with some of the same issues I had dealt with.” Andrew’s approach to protests was different than his peers and that was a challenge for him personally. He wished activism was consistent and on campus his peers strove for systemic change versus one-time demonstrations. Andrew shared his frustration with student’s inconsistent acts of change pushers:

It's like I think about the whole protest and sit in. It's like those things are not consistent. They happen around big events, and then they die off. It's about how popular are they at that moment; do we feel like we want to continue it even when it's not being talked about publicly.

Andrew was challenged by the opportunities he was afforded at the expense of others. He was able to attend events, such as President Obama’s speech nearby during the fall Presidential Campaign and sat on the stage behind the President. Andrew recognized what a great opportunity and honor it was for him to participate in this historic event but also worried about who did not get to participate. Andrew said,

Yeah, but at the expense of others not being included that there's still being that whole like you're a student leader, so we're going glamorize you, type-of-thing, and that's just something I've never been a fan of. I said like, "Oh this is a really cool opportunity."

Andrew believed the opportunities provided him had gave him a keen sense of what was right and what was wrong in the classroom. He struggled to engage in meaningful conversations with faculty when he could see that they were perpetuating systems of marginalization and oppression in the classroom. Similar to experiences Andrew faced with his family, he juggled his need for privacy and addressing inclusion based on his identities. Although he struggled with how to address issues in the classroom, he said it gave him the fortitude to make change outside of the classroom and plan for the future. Andrew reflected, "I feel like this certainly made me much inquisitive and really want to use my education and my degree to help others and dismantle a lot of these stigmas or just systems that make it difficult for people to accept who they are."

The largest challenge Alyx faced was time management. Her curricular and co-curricular pursuits kept her busy. She said, the "problem with being a leader is that it's very consuming, so it's hard to be involved in multiple things." One of the organizations she was involved in "runs [her] life," so how did she "get involved in these other organizations that would also appeal to [her]."

### **Understanding of Intersectional Experiences**

Participants' understanding of how their identities intersected varied based upon their journey. Some participants were able to make meaning of their whole-self, while other participants compartmentalized how their identities intersected. More themes and patterns emerged as participants discussed their particular leadership experiences that

took place in respective silos of race and sexual identities, race and leadership identities, sexual and leadership identities, and all identities.

### **Intersectionality of Racial and Sexual Identities**

Orooro struggled to find community accepting of her racial and sexual identities at HurstonU. She was not able to find the “ideal” community in regards to BMLGBQ student leader identity. Orooro did not feel that, “those things are really integrated” at HurstonU. One reason was that she was true to herself. Visibility of identities was important for Orooro who proclaimed:

I feel like when I first started getting involved on campus, it's like, I can't just sit around and talk about how important it is that people are visible, if I'm not visible. It made me more like I've stopped caring, I don't care. Congrats, if you hate me because I'm half Black and gay, then that's not my problem.

Orooro sought out a university QPOC group and said it was hard to locate: “I had found the QPOC group, and that's like a hidden thing where they have potlucks periodically.” She said the group never registered with the university and was a secret group. As she reflected on her experience with the group, she shared the irony:

You can't form like a QPOC group that doesn't register and then be like, why is no one joining? Because of the fact that, nobody could find you, but also, why are we not being out? Wasn't the whole point that there was actually a place where we could roll around and be like, "Yo, I'm Black and I'm queer," visible.

Orooro reiterated during her interview that everything at HurstonU occurred in silos. She felt that unless she, or other people, were in identity-based organizations or involved in an on-campus identity based cultural office, personal identity and “all the fun stuff that you talk about when you’re talking about intersectional identity” never happened. Orooro highlighted during the interview that being Brown and queer in the south added an interesting dynamic to determining who was out while in the university community.

Orooro said that so many QPOC were on the “down low that you’re not gonna figure it out until they have enough money to deal with the fallout from their parents.” Although her father was direct and open about discussing her identities, Orooro framed her dilemma, “a lot of my QPOC friends are from very, very traditional families who are like, this would not fly in any circumstance whatsoever.” She was comfortable with her identities as a Black and lesbian person but struggled to find space on campus within campus student organizations. She frankly declared, “I am unapologetically loud about how Black and gay [I am], because you got to know, because you can't look at me and automatically go, ‘That there is a Black person,’ and can't automatically look at me and go, ‘There's a lesbian.’”

Andrew related his racial and sexual identity to a hierarchy that played out in both communities for him. Andrew frustrated proclaimed, “I think it is very important also for us to understand as a man of color that is gay that there is still like a European standard of beauty.” When he reflected on this, he continued discussing that there was a universal disdain for Black people and Blackness. He ended his thoughts with “well, just melanin really.” As Andrew continued to reflect on this train of thought, he discussed the intersections of access to resources that he had seen White LGBTQ-identified people had in comparison to QPOC. He said that this was “normalized in our communities and accepted.” He believed access to resources limited his ability to access resources on campus, especially when it came to identifying staff members who share his identities.

Nouri also struggled to find community on campus within her own identity based communities. Feeling like an outsider everywhere, she proclaimed: “I wasn't Black enough for the Black community, I wasn't gay enough for the gay community, so I feel

like I was always in this weird limbo space, to where I wasn't enough in both areas.”

Nouri often felt that she was perceived more as an “ally rather than an active member of the community, in both.” She also struggled to find her space during times of activism, due to the murders of people like Sandra Bland. Nouri shared:

Even when they had the movement of #sayhername, focusing on Black, trans women, that kind of thing, or just Black queer women, that kind of thing, it was really hard to be myself as a part of that community because I felt like it wasn't inclusive to bisexual, biracial women and that kind of thing. I kind of stayed back and supported from the outside, even though I feel like I should be able to be within it, I feel like that is my community, I do have a lot of those shared experiences, but as being someone who's not actively in a non-hetero relationship . . . I don't know. I felt like I needed to validate myself in order to be a part of that community or to be able to be a part of functions going on in those communities.

### **Intersectionality of Racial and Leadership Identities**

Although most of Ororo’s leadership experiences took place in the curricular parts of the institution, she was truly passionate about having a positive impact in her communities. Activism was a big part of her leadership at HurstonU. Most of the activism activities that took place at HurstonU were along the Black/White binary. Although people of color and marginalized people participated in the varied activist activities on campus, it was still focused on anti-Black movements. Ororo understood that she visually presented as fair-skinned and straight and focused on “checking [her] privilege” when participating in activism on-campus. Ororo said, “I remember that I don't necessarily need to be a face.” Ororo and I easily discussed politics, race, and service during her interviews. One conversation went as follows:



Bobby: The UN yesterday just endorsed the Black Lives Matter movement.

Ororo: Yeah, the UN literally has been saying. . . . They've condemned us for years on racial discrimination. They're like, "Oh, there's no such thing as races." I'm like, when Europe tells you you're racist, it's time to stop. Sorry.

Bobby: The rest of the world sees it. It's time to look at our own. . . . We gotta look in the mirror, but we choose not to right now.

Ororo: It's funny too. You say "we" and it's like, no, it's literally just White people. Let's be real. It's not us. We're here forever being like, "Duh."

Bobby: That's true.

As Ororo pointed out the difference between my sentiment, “We gotta look in the mirror” and her calling White people out, I realized that we saw social justice from a different lens. I believed part of that was because of my role as an educator and part of that was because of her strong sense of activism.

As Anthony reflected on his racial and leadership identities, he often centered himself on the pain of his first year to propel him forward as a resource to others later. Anthony took his role as a leader on campus seriously. He approached every situation as a means of paying it forward to the men and women he worked with, especially those that were people of color. On the other hand, Andrew approached the intersection of his leadership identities as two-wholes in one person. When thinking about this, Andrew exclaimed, “It's not like the creator said, I'll give him this 50% of the culture and not the other.” For Andrew, it forced him “to be a part of the change” from all parts of his racial identities. As a campus leader, he knew that other people were struggling in similar ways and it was important for him to reach out. Andrew worked to ensure that there would be “those affinity groups [that] are just really for dialogue and conversation, getting that safe space, and that very necessary time together.”

### **Intersectionality of Sexual and Leadership Identities**

Participants were not nearly as reflective with the intersections purely based on their sexual and leadership identities. Nouri incorporated sexual and leadership identities into her work as the director of a campus program and within her sorority:

I know at my sorority, definitely speaking up. Whenever we're having events I'm like, 'Okay, well can we make sure that we're inclusive in the idea of it not being just targeted to hetero-relationships? Can we talk about this in terms of non-hetero relationships and then also people who may not be cis-gendered, and that kind of thing?'

Nouri said these spaces had given her an opportunity to speak up for people who shared her identity and those of other marginalized groups. After trying many other organizations, Alyx was the only participant who found her campus home to be within the campus LBGTQSO. Alyx said that it was "a place for all queer students." She also discussed the challenges as a student leader in that organization and ensuring the group actively engaged in the entire queer community versus hovering around the gay and lesbian binary. The question she often asked members of the organization was, "What does it mean to be something outside of [gay/lesbian] umbrella?" One poignant experience on which Alyx reflected was how people perceived her when she became involved in other organizations. Alyx noticed that she got type casted as the LBGTQSO person. People would assume and say things to her like, "Oh, of course you're the angry, you're the angry queer kid." She continued with "They just associate you with this and very much kind of discount you because there's like, 'Oh, you're irrationally passionate about this.'" One challenge that Alyx faced was time management. She exclaimed, "I also think the other problem with being a leader is that it's very consuming, so it's hard to

be involved in multiple things. It's like SAGA runs my life, so how do I get involved in these other organizations that would also appeal to me.”

### **Intersectionality of Racial, Sexual, and Leadership Identities**

Personally, Ororo tended to operate within the intersections of her own identity although that was contrary to the campus environment. She verbalized her skepticism, “I don’t feel like anything on this campus is truly intersectional . . . I don't really think there are intersectional spaces on this campus.” When I asked her why she believes we operate silos, she responded:

Because it's easier. It's easy to say that, "We need to work on race issue, and then we're going to do all the stuff later", or, "We need to work on women's rights", it's like, Black Hoteps, white feminism, etc. . . . When people want to work on things, or research things, they want to find one problem and reduce everything to that problem, because it's easier to conceptualize and tackle one issue.

Although Ororo perceived the campus not to be intersectional, Ororo told multiple stories in which she held true to intersectionality and holding others accountable as well. When Ororo engaged in a conversation with a group, she overheard one of the group members say, “Well, we don’t need to worry about all that queer shit.” Ororo called the group member out and engaged in the following way:

I looked at him, and I was like, ‘First and foremost, you're not even using queer the way I use queer, so I'm already offended. You literally live on Hotep Twitter, and you're trying to say that we don't need to worry about women's rights or queer rights in a Black movement that was literally founded by queer Black people. All you want is literally a liberation that is based off of the crappy system we had before. Congrats! I can tell you how that works politically, and let's look at a lot of countries in Africa when you literally take up the exact same role that your oppressors had. Congrats! It doesn't work.’

Ororo was passionate about her peers understanding intersectionality. As she discussed identities and how to approach making change, one example she shared was based on previous experiences:

If you're a cis-Black man, you suffer from one, because you don't have an intersection, you're just a straight, or white woman, you have one. It's like all the people in those marginalized communities who don't have intersecting identities, so you get weirdness there. It's like, yeah, you're right about some things, but you cannot reduce everything to just one problem.

Ororo was keenly aware of the impact of visibility. She said, “I don't feel like half the stuff I do would have been as impactful [if I were] still closeted or had I been not really upfront about who I was racially, or how I grew up, or if I didn't speak about things that were important to me.” Ororo discussed the fight for marriage equality. One-issue activism was a concern for her. She said, “My biggest fear about gay marriage was, oh, we've won, it's over. There is no more homophobia. We are done. All queer issues have been solved forever. The gays can get married. I'm like, yeah, and you can get fired on Monday for your wedding.” Ororo strived to call attention to intersectionality of all identities into the work that she did in order to create positive change. She declared one example during her internship:

When I was doing research at the [NGO], I remember every single person who came would talk about. . . . When we were discussing development, I was like, ‘Okay, but what are you doing for marginalized groups in those countries, including marginalized sexualized identities, being female, etc?’ They're like, ‘We didn't come prepared with a slide on this,’ and I was like, ‘Well, maybe you should actually be thinking about that.’ They're like, ‘Well, we're worried about water access,’ and I was like, ‘Okay, but you understand that all these issues are linked.’

Although Anthony did not make sexual identity known on campus, his identities heavily influenced his experience at the University. His multiple identities allowed him to “fit in where I get in, wherever it may be.” He understood his identities and used them to

build relationships across campus, “I think with the identity, the experiences that I have, and that empathetic and faith grounding in basis, I'm able to interact with almost anybody on any level. I think that's another great thing that I have is just the interaction.” Although Anthony operated in intersectional spaces as a BMLGBQ person, he did not like labels. Anthony believed that categories limit who he was because he chose to be all of himself instead of part of himself, “That’s why I guess I just say I’m [Anthony].”

Andrew acknowledged his multiple identities as a BMLGBQ student leader. Andrew always “[tried] to find the intersection” of his own identities that may have “caused [him] to struggle.” Andrew was still trying to understand what his identities meant to him. Andrew struggled to share the pressures of being a student leader for all and maintaining privacy as a leader:

I am Native American, and I am African American and the role as a student leader there is like obviously the whole like you want to be approachable. You want to be accessible and personable to the people that you lead, but you also don't want to cross that line of them knowing too much about who you are, and I've never tried to hide my sexuality. I don't feel a need to fake masculinity or to fame masculinity. I'm just like okay I'm going to be who I am, and if at the end of the day I also really [think of] sexuality as a pendulum too so I didn't come into college like I think I said this in my last interview like knowing that I was gay.

As Andrew discussed his identities, he was much more comfortable talking about his racial identities and role as a leader, but still discovering what his sexual identity meant to him. As Andrew was learning what his sexual identity meant to him, he wanted to be a resource for others to also explore their own sexual identity, straight or not. Andrew declared,

I also think that being Black and being Native American I've also seen how important it is to have these conversations especially about homosexuality and about like the LGBTQ community. Because I've learned that a lot of these students are not hearing about this in their communities. A lot of the students that are in [BSO] or that are in HurstonU [NASO]. A lot of them are hearing like, ‘No,

you're not supposed to be that way.' From maybe their homes or their churches or especially in the African American community, Black men have this overwhelming need to be very masculine and very dominant. I feel like as student leader, it's also kind of required of me to talk about these types of things like these identities and always look at them in an added intersection.

At another point in our conversation, Andrew offered:

As a student leader, I always try to be that resource for the students and say like, 'hey I am here for you.' I understand that it's a journey and even with your sexuality as a heterosexual person. It's still a journey. It's still something that is worthy exploring, especially during college. I want to be a resource for you no matter what obstacles you're facing.

He also identified as someone who lived with mental illness and depression. Andrew discovered his depression after his experience of trying to join the Black Greek letter organization. After that experience, he “went on to establish [himself] in different parts of campus.” He wanted to “find ways that [he] could champion diversity instead of looking down upon it.” Andrew and I spent time discussing how his depression was often seen as a stigma with his Black and Native American identity groups. Breaking down the “stigma surrounding mental health” was something Andrew was “very passionate about.”

Andrew was also an extremely private person. He did not believe the people he led should know everything about who he was as a person. He continued describing this “very fine line” as the line that separated who you were as a leader and what was personal. Nouri described something very similar during our interview. Nouri had a real fear that either she would not be taken seriously as a leader or that she would be a target of discrimination. She explained it this way:

I think sometimes I feel like in order to be a good leader I have to hide parts of my identity, I have to put my identity as a leader before my identities of those other identities, because I feel like people may not take me as seriously. If they find out these other parts of my identity, then that's going to make them not take me as seriously, or not be . . . I don't know. Basically, just discriminate [against] me because of those identities. I remember one time, I was doing the privilege

walks, which I hate now, because they included parts of that, and I didn't feel like . . . It was a leadership thing to do the privilege walk because a lot of us were like, 'They'll see this and then we'll be able to grow from it together,' but it felt like me sharing this part of myself was just opening myself up to potentially having it being used against me. That's what's happened, the first girl that I was with, literally outed me. People will know about my sexual identity and then they'll use that [against me].

Nouri's experiences of being marginalized created a lens with which she approached the intersections of her identities. Nouri recognized that all of her identities were "all connected," but the visibility, or lack thereof, of her identities weighed on her. Nouri shared this unique experience where she struggled to find her place:

I am the marginalized within the marginalized. So being a queer person and as a person of color, I think it really just makes me feel that in these settings where I am in a leadership position that I need to validate myself even more for people to listen to me. Then, also, sometimes, I feel hesitant to like speak up, because I already feel people are going to be critical of me because of my identities. Especially in situations where I know someone's beliefs about things, like where they be like, were they religious and they kind of stand against, like they aren't really supportive, they discriminate against people who are non-like . . . who are within the community of being LBGTQ+.

Nouri also found her identity sometimes got erased when she was in a leadership role on campus. In one of her positions, she often stepped up to support students on campus during times of crisis. She did not consider it erasure at the time, because she believed she was fulfilling her duties to her fellow peers. It was not until one of her students, who was aware of her identities, checked-in with Nouri to ask how she was doing. It was when she realized she did not always have to hide her identities because of her roles on campus or in life. On the other hand, when it came to campus activism, Nouri often felt that she was welcomed and had space to be herself. She proclaimed vehemently:

Demonstrations here on campus where the people organizing the demonstration went out of their way to make sure that people who were like, all those identities had a voice. So they privileged them speaking first, or they privileged talking about those experiences. I think that was when I was like, 'Okay I am a part of

this group. This is where I feel like I know I have a voice and I have a space.’ It was kind of discomforting because it was an act of resistance, in like the fact that they were doing that because it was not normal. So I was like, ‘Yay, this is awesome I get to do this,’ but then like, ‘Dang it, I only get to do this in this space as an act of resistance to like what is normative.’

Nouri did wish that campus demonstrations were not the only time she got to be her whole self. In most instances, she said she got to be herself when the students on campus were addressing pain. She continued, “It’s like pain is what bring us together. I wish it wasn’t that way, but I think that’s the biggest struggle.”

Alyx also struggled to find space on campus with the intersections of all of her identities. She once attended a meeting for mixed Asian students and remembered that they attempted to engage on queer issues, “but it was in just such a passing way” that Alyx and another queer student in the room looked at each in awkward silence. This was a time that Alyx reflected, “There are very much these moments where only a part of me is fitting in, in this room” which she considered a challenge towards her own understanding of how her multiple identities intersected. Alyx found community with her BMLGBQ student leader identity in the LGBTQSO. Alyx did not experience the same outsider status because of her biracial identity in this space. Alyx reflected:

The issue of being a "halfie" isn't something that really pops up with queer identities as much. I never felt the struggle of like, I only qualify for this for half the time. When it came to incorporating other parts of my identities, I think once I stepped into a leadership role in the club I had a lot of the opportunities to plan for inclusiveness within the queer community or intersectionality in the queer community. I've had this chance to make it a more inclusive organization, so that's been a wonderful experience for me.

### **Chapter Summary**

Throughout this chapter, I presented a glimpse into the foundational experiences of five participants that gave meaning to their experiences. Participants shared histories



of their families, major experiences regarding their racial and sexual identity, and their educational journey during this study. Finally, each participant shared a glimpse of the impact and influence they hoped to have. Summaries of each participant follow:

First Alyx was a sophomore, half Singaporean Chinese and half Romanian queer woman. Alyx, a double major in the social sciences, was still finding her place at HurstonU. Alyx wanted to serve as a role model of those that she led. Andrew was a junior, half Black and half Native American gay man. Andrew, also a double major in the social sciences, was an extremely private person who was still exploring who he was, racially and sexually. Andrew wanted to ensure that accessibility for other marginalized people was a priority. Third, Anthony was a junior, half Mexican and half Black bisexual man. Anthony, also a double major in the social sciences, did not like to label himself, but understood the importance of visibility. Anthony wanted to serve students that may have a similar experience to him, as a role model and mentor. Fourth, Nouri was a senior, a half Black and half White, bisexual woman, also double majored in the social sciences and was extremely involved in all facets of the institution. Nouri wanted to have an impact supporting women and children trying to escape impoverished and abusive situations. Fifth, Ororo was a senior, a half Black and half White, lesbian and queer woman, also a double majored in the social sciences, and was unapologetically loud about her identities. Ororo's dream was to work for the United Nations and have a global impact.

Although some participants considered what they were sharing as extremely private, it did not stop them from sharing powerful stories. The candor of the stories enriched the findings in this study. Chapter V explores themes and patterns that explore

how participants made meaning of their leadership experiences through the lens of being a BMLGBQ student.

Additionally, in this chapter, I presented the stories of five student leaders. The chapter focused on how BMLGBQ students made meaning of their racial and sexual identities as undergraduate student leaders. Themes developed during this study focused on biracial and multiracial identity, sexual identity, leadership identity, and intersections of identity materialized. Themes realized in this inquiry explored understanding of biracial and multiracial experiences (including sense of belonging, operating in monoracial spaces, code switching, functioning as a biracial and multiracial student and in various spaces, and exclusion), sexual identity experiences (including understanding of their sexual identity during college, sense of belonging, relationships, and exclusion), leadership experiences (including meaning of leadership, finding space and community, characteristics, and challenges of leadership), and intersectional experiences including (intersectionality of racial, sexual, and leadership identities).

Common among all themes were participants' need to find a sense of belonging, find community and a feeling of isolation. The stories also exhibited participants' resilience. While this chapter presented findings, the next chapter summarizes the findings and connects them to theory, implications for research, and future research considerations.

**CHAPTER V**  
**SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND**  
**IMPLICATIONS**

In this study, I explored ways that biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual and queer undergraduate student leaders made meaning of their experiences. As someone who has identified as a biracial multiracial gay and queer man working in the south, I observed many students over my time in student affairs learn and grow in their identities in the context of their biracial, multiracial, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer leadership. Through this study, I explored the many experiences that biracial multiracial students have had on a college campus. Additionally, I explored ways that students experienced their identities in silos and at intersections particularly as it related to their leadership roles on campus. The research questions that evolved in this study included:

- Q1 How do BMLGBQ undergraduate student leaders make meaning of their experiences?
- Q2 How do BMLGBQ students make sense of their multiple marginalized identities in the context of their leadership role?

A critical cultural constructivist blended paradigm was used for this study. The *constructivist paradigm* was utilized in order to show that there was no one universal “Truth” for the five participants. In fact “truth” resides in multiple ways for this inquiry. In addition, meaning constructed from this study was “emergent, contextual, personal, socially constructed, and interactive” (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15). The critical cultural paradigm was also used in this study and reflected in the students chosen to study. The

five participants' stories were used to inform recommendations to make institutions of higher education more inclusive environments for students living with multiple intersections of identities in campus leadership roles. The use of this blended paradigm was symbolic of social justice and action (Guido et al., 2010).

Narrative inquiry was the methodological approach used in this study. Narratives highlighted the system of privilege, power, and difference the five participants' experiences by revealing the multiple truths of first-hand experiences (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Riessman, 2008). Two in-depth interviews took place with the participants in order to gain a better understanding of the experiences of BMLGBQ student leaders.

In this chapter, I present a summary of the research and discussion based on the experiences of these BMLGBQ student leaders intersecting identities of leadership, race, and sexual identity; intersectionality in college; leadership in college; sexual identity in college; and racial identity in college. Additionally, I share implications and recommendations for this research for higher education administrators and student affairs educators. I conclude this chapter with suggested areas for future research.

### **Summary and Discussion**

The BMLGBQ student leaders in this study shared stories highlighting their experiences during their undergraduate time at HurstonU. Findings indicated that participants' multiple identities resonated in silos and intersections. Participants described their biracial multiracial, sexual, and leadership identity experiences in their undergraduate career. Additionally, participants shared experiences of the intersections of their multiple identities and how they faced challenges and/or resiliency. All of their

experiences formed who they were as BMLGBQ student leaders at a prestigious university in the south.

### **Intersecting Identities of Leadership, Race, and Sexuality**

One purpose of this study was to examine how BMLGBQ student leaders made meaning of their undergraduate experiences in college. All participants had varying experiences of leadership from assigned to emergent (Northouse, 2013). Alyx, half Singaporean Chinese and half Romanian, queer, sophomore, was an officer in the campus LGBQ student organization, and involved in campus political organizations during the Presidential campaign. Andrew, half Black and half Native American, gay, junior, worked on campus as a tour guide and executive officer in a Black/African American centered student organization and Native American student organization. Anthony, half Black and half Mexican, bisexual, junior was an officer in the campus largest social justice organization and mentor with other organizations on campus. Nouri, half Black and half White, bisexual, senior, held multiple on-campus jobs, was involved in a Latina Greek organization, and directed a late-night safety program for the university. Ororo, half Black and half White, lesbian, senior, was involved in study abroad, participated in service centered internships, interned with the United Nations, and volunteered often in service to the local community. Experience, age, and institutional status made a difference with participants varied levels of experience practicing their leadership.

Predominant models of leadership used in higher education, such as *Servant Leadership* (Greenleaf, 1970), *The Leadership Challenge: 5 Exemplary Practices* (Kouzes & Posner, 1987), *The Social Change Model of Leadership* (HERI, 1996), *The Relational Model of Leadership* (Komives et al., 1998), and *The Leadership Identity*

*Development Model* (Komives et al., 2005), do not address social identity models (Guthrie et al., 2013). Although these models do not reflect socially constructed identities, the five participants' leadership experiences were closely linked to their biracial/multiracial and sexual identities. Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model is a process where students move through multiple stages as they are developing self, navigating group influences, evolving and changing their own view of self with others, and broadening their view of leadership (Komives et al., 2005). Additionally, models such as the *Factor Model of Multiracial Identity* (Wijeyesinghe, 2001) and *Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity* (Abes et al., 2007) were models that took into account factors and dimensions of racial ancestry, early life experiences, socialization, cultural attachment, physical appearance, social context, historical context, political awareness, spirituality, and other social identities. Ultimately, the LID Model, Factor Model of Multiracial Identity (FMMI), and Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) complement each by highlighting a student's journey, but leadership is not part of FMMI or MMDI and social identities are not directly part of LID Model. As participants continued to engage in leadership experiences on campus, they grew as individuals understanding their social identity and their leadership efficacy. Although there were some similarities in each participants' journey, their journey was mostly unique from each other.

The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity incorporates a capacity for meaning-making and model encompasses three types of meaning-making filters: formulaic, transitional, and foundational (Abes et al., 2007). In the formulaic meaning-making filter, student leaders see each of their identities as independent from

each other, basically they live their social identities in silos (Abes et al.). Anthony and Nouri's meaning-making filter was formulaic. Anthony and Nouri compartmentalized and often saw each of their multiple identities as independent from each other (Abes, et. al.). Anthony was not public about his sexual identity and kept that hidden in most of his interactions with his peers as a student leader. Nouri was also not public about her sexual identity and shared that with her partners and family members.

Contrary, the foundational meaning-making filter gave participants the lens to clearly understand and interpret the complexity of their multiple identities (Abes et al., 2007). Ororo and Alyx shared stories that would be considered in-line with a foundational meaning-making filter. Alyx identified closely with her racial, sexual, and leadership identities. She spent more time living positively in the intersections of her identities than other participants. Ororo consistently engaged in conversations around her identities and intersectionality. Both, Ororo and Alyx had a clear understanding of the intersections of their identities and how the relationships of their identities interacted and coexisted with each other.

Finally, the transitional meaning-making filter is an intermediary between formulaic and foundational where participants were able to either understand, reinterpret, and/or redefine contextual influences with the complexity of identities (Abes et al., 2007). Andrew could be considered in line with transitional meaning-making filter. Andrew shared stories exhibiting the limitations of his gay identity on stereotypes. Additionally, he began to experience a significant amount of self-doubt on his identities and abilities based on his rejection from the Black Greek Lettered organizations. Andrew sought a group that aligned with his character and felt he was rejected because of his

sexual identity. This caused Andrew to engage in the campus community in ways that would further those with marginalized identities, but always careful to share his non-visible identities in a public manner. The findings were broadly in line with the MMDI meaning-making filters. In short, some participants said their identities were intersectional, while other participants placed their identities in silos and did not easily see them as interconnected most of the time.

### **Intersectionality in College**

In most instances, intersectionality was situational for participants and varied in how each students' identities intersected with each other. For instance, some participants' identities intersected mostly with race and sexual orientation. In other instances, participants' identities intersected with race and leadership. Another way participants' identities intersected was sexual identity and leadership. In other instances, participants' racial, sexual orientation, and leadership identities intersected.

Participants had varying degrees of positive and negative experiences with the intersection of racial and sexual orientation identities. Ororo often unsuccessfully sought out spaces that were Queer People of Color (QPOC) identified. When Ororo could not locate those spaces on campus, she often went into the surrounding community to find her "people." Ororo also encountered dissonance on campus because she was loud and proud about her identities, which was unlike most people she encountered on campus. Andrew had more experiences of exclusion when he first came to his institution versus inclusion based on his identities. His exclusion from the Black Letter Greek organization caused him much pain and, from the stories he shared, altered his approach to getting



involved. Additionally, Nouri struggled to find a space as a biracial and bisexual woman. She felt that she was often seen more as an ally, rather than a member of the community.

Another theme this study identified was how the intersection of race and leadership identity occurred for participants. The student leaders often participated in campus activism, either actively or passively. Even when participants, like Nouri and Ororo, did not feel they could find community in campus organizations, they found it through activism at the institution. Anthony was often participating in campus activism within the context of his racial and leadership identity. Anthony participated in campus rallies and mentored members of student organizations. Anthony chose to be on the front lines, both for himself and for others. Andrew's form of activism was different from other participants. He engaged in other leadership positions on campus in order to close the gap between marginalized and dominant identity groups. Andrew saw the campus as a system that was "not meant to work for us." Andrew never saw himself attending rallies but more engaging in meaningful conversations with the organizations with which he was involved to enact meaningful change.

A third theme was how the intersection of sexual and leadership identity occurred for participants. Alyx spent more time living positively in this intersection of identities than other participants. Alyx had a positional role in the LGBTQ student organization and most of her peers were members of the LGBQ community at her institution. Nouri explored this intersection of her identity from incorporating this perspective into her leadership roles on campus without divulging her identity to others. Nouri always spoke up in her sorority when they were planning events or ensured hiring practices for the campus program she directed were inclusive of sexual identity diversity.

One additional theme was the holistic intersection of racial, sexual, and leadership identities. Ororo and Alyx were the only two participants who shared stories exhibiting they lived in accord and coexistence with their intersectional identities. These two participants had also reached integration of their biracial and multiracial identities (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Andrew's multiple identities often impacted his leadership lens. For Andrew, how he approached a situation depended on context. As he shared his stories, it was clear he was still learning to navigate all the various identities he holds. Anthony and Nouri were not overtly public about their sexual identity on campus as other participants. Interestingly, though these two leaders were not "out" on campus, they advocated for the LGBTQ community. Anthony and Nouri's LGBTQ identity was salient for them, mostly because they were not as public about their sexual identity as other participants.

These findings were broadly in line with the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI; Abes et al., 2007). Participants had a strong understanding of their inner-self which consisted of their personal experiences, characteristics, attributes, and personal identity (Abes, et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Additionally, as participants shared their stories, they revealed examples of significant dimensions of their identity that included race, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation, ability, ethnicity, and culture were more salient at times than others depending upon context (Abes, et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000).

### **Leadership Identity Development in College**

One theme to emerge was participants took on formal and informal leadership roles on campus in order to give back to the greater community. For instance, Ororo's

discussion about being a leader was always about “making something better” versus adding to her resume. Ororo wanted to focus on making the world a better place and that occurred in both her service to student organizations on campus and international non-profit organizations.

Second, another theme to emerge was the importance of relationships in students’ roles as leaders and within organizations which affirm their social identities. Anthony and Andrew’s leadership was centered on building authentic relationships with people. Both participants wanted to serve as role models and mentors for their respective communities. For example, Anthony did not want students to experience the same pitfalls he experienced during his transition into higher education. Andrew wanted to reduce and remove the obstacles he and other students faced in college coming from a lower socio-economic status and rural areas of the state (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

All participants shared relational characteristics they thought would make a good leader. Ororo always wanted to be in a supportive role and believed she made the perfect vice president. She was always willing to serve as the behind the scenes leader. For Anthony, it was listening and being a resource. He believed empathy was a critical skill to build authentic relationships. In order to better interact with others, Anthony engaged in active listening and always asked questions to learn about others. Andrew saw advocacy as an important relational value. He believed his role as a leader was to create opportunities for students similar to himself. For Nouri, it was listening and advocacy. Nouri believed she had a responsibility to be a voice for the voiceless. Alyx, recognized her “ability to work well with others.” She was not sure if she had the wisdom to guide people, but to be a resource for others was her passion. It was clear participants

represented not only relational behaviors but also exhibited servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Komives et. al., 2005).

Being the youngest participant, Alyx's perspective of leadership emerged from her student officer role with the LGBTQ student organization. Alyx easily shared she wanted to have a greater impact on the community she served, but her community was in a student organization. Nouri's perspective of leadership also emerged from her several positional leadership roles in on-campus organizations and in her volunteer role in the local area. Although Alyx and Nouri's concepts of leadership were more positional and assigned, rather than informal and emergent, it did not take away from the greater community they knew they were a part of or that they wanted to change (Northouse, 2013).

These findings were broadly in line with Komives et al.'s (2005) leadership identity development (LID) model. When leadership identity was looked at independently from social identity models, the stories shared by participants clearly articulated their movement through the LID model. Participants moved through the various six stages of leadership identity of awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration in the context of developing self, navigating group influences, evolving and changing their own view of self with others, and broadening their view of leadership (Komives et. al., 2005). Ultimately, participants were all continuing their journey to understanding who they were as leaders and the underlying development influences of adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, reflective learning were essential factors of their journey (Komives et. al., 2005).

## **Sexual Identity**

One of the purposes of this study was to understand how participants made meaning of their sexual identity at the university. Participants' level of public outness was often in relation to how they were raised, living in the south, and how they perceived impact of coming out. With the exception of Alyx, none of the other participants found their sense of belonging in a LGBTQ student organization or institutional service center. Although participants varied in how public they were about their sexual identity, it did not stop any of them from being advocates for the LGBTQ community on campus or in the surrounding community.

Anthony and Nouri were participants who revealed their sexual identity only to certain individuals but not openly to everyone. Anthony participated in this study wanting a true understanding of what anonymity meant because he was not out at his institution. Although Anthony came out to his family and mentors, few people on campus knew that he identified as anything that was not heterosexual. Nouri was out to a select group of people. Nouri shared her identity with her family, partners, and also select students at her institution. Although Anthony and Nouri were keenly aware of their sexual identity, they did not outwardly engage in leadership activities centered on their intersecting identities, but their social identities did influence them as leaders.

Andrew was a very private person. His peers across the institution knew that Andrew was gay, but he did not like to discuss his sexuality and personal life. In some instances, the privacy his family guarded when he was growing up influenced his actions. In other instances, he did not want his sexual identity to influence negatively his

opportunities on campus and beyond. Andrew also thought it was critical to be personally and financially secure before he came out to his family.

Orooro and Alyx were the only participants who were clearly out, loud, and proud of their identities within the LGBTQ community. Orooro identified as lesbian. Alyx identified queer. These two participants were also comfortable with the complexity of their biracial and multiracial identities. Although Orooro did not find a space in a student organization, similar to racial identities, she experienced finding space amongst an academic and activist community. Alyx found community with the LGBTQ student organization. Orooro and Alyx actively engaged in leadership opportunities across the institution in the context of their sexual identity.

Although participants could be easily identified in Cass's (1979, 1996) sexual orientation identity formation model, stage theories failed to address the complexity of multiple identities. These student leaders' progression with their sexual identity was influenced by their racial and leadership experiences. Sexual identity was a mitigating factor in the development of these BMLGBQ student leaders (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Additionally, these findings were generally compatible with identity development, the sexual identity development theory lacked going into depth in environmental factors and influences. For this study, living in the south was a major perceived influence on a participants' outness. Another influence of a participants' outness was related to their race and familial background. The last aspect that could be considered a strong influence on participants' outness was financial stability.

### **Biracial and Multiracial Identity Development in College**

One purpose of this study was to understand how participants made meaning of their biracial and multiracial identity in the context of their leadership experiences at the University. One of the themes to emerge from my analysis of biracial multiracial identity was participants who identified as having one Black parent, which included Ororo, Anthony, Andrew, and Nouri who had similar experiences trying to find themselves space and community on campus in comparison to Alyx, who did not identify with Blackness. I found that Ororo, Anthony, Andrew, and Nouri attempted to find space was also heavily influenced by their familiar upbringing. Ororo was raised by her White father. Anthony was raised by his Latina mother and sister. Andrew was a transracial adoptee with White parents. Nouri was raised by her White mother. Parental upbringing was a major influence on how they sought Black spaces on campus. On the other hand, Alyx was raised with both parents (Singaporean and Romanian) who shared her identities. She was involved in her racial communities prior to coming to this institution of higher education, so more of her time was spent exploring her sexual identity.

Ororo, Anthony, Andrew, and Nouri all had various reasons for wanting to connect with their Black identity and either had ease or difficulty time making the connection to their Black heritage. Anthony and Andrew connected more easily with their Black identity when they were on campus. Traditional gender expressions at a southern university likely influenced how Anthony and Andrew were accepted or excluded from Black-centered student organizations. Anthony made connections with other Black men through mentoring programs, outreach, leadership roles in organizations, and a highly visible presence on campus. Anthony connected easier with

Black-centered campus student organizations than Andrew did. Anthony was not out on campus. Anthony presented as more masculine in regards to traditional gender expression. Andrew initially struggled to find a place within the Black community at the institution. He was rejected from a Black Greek Letter organization but found a place in a leadership position with the Black and African American student organization. Andrew was out but more secretive about his “business” (i.e., personal life) on campus. Andrew presented as less masculine in regards to traditional gender expression.

Ororo and Nouri connected differently with their Black identity on campus than Anthony or Andrew. Although both women visually pass as non-Black, both were invested in the Black community and campus activism. Activism was their leadership participation within the Black community. They, too, were impacted by the tragedies befalling the Black community in the U.S. Ororo found herself often attempting to disrupt the status quo on campus. She not only did so in predominately White spaces, but she also focused on Black spaces that were consumed by “Hotep” culture. Nouri found herself in Black spaces but often was not out with her sexual identity in those spaces. Nouri perceived Black spaces not as open to non-heterosexuals so she chose when to be and not be out. On the other hand, Ororo rallied around her sexual identity in those spaces and called people out when they were not accepting of all of her identities.

When exploring solely racial identity, these findings were broadly in line with Renn’s (2000) model of biracial, multiracial and mixed-race identity development. Ororo, Anthony, Andrew, or Nouri were raised predominantly by non-Black parents, they never loathed the Black parts of their identity and moved through some patterns quicker than others. Since all participants were also social justice driven, they had a keen



understanding of concepts of power and privilege and wanted better to understand how they, as individuals, and their identities, could fit into other aspects of their identities.

Nouri, Andrew, and Anthony considered their identities as whole parts of themselves. Rather than merely identifying as biracial or multiracial, they identified with single identities (i.e., Black and White). For instance, Nouri identified as White and Black. Andrew identified as Native American and Black. Anthony identified as Latin and Black. For each of these participants, they were not just half of one culture or half of one race. The participants reiterated that they were whole people and whole cultures. Renn (2000) postulated that students would hold multiple monoracial identities and those identities were fluid dependent on context. The context was often situated around sexual and leadership identities, along with familial background.

Oro and Alyx were more in harmony with their biracial and multiracial identity. Both women could flow in and out of spaces aligning with their identity with more ease than the other participants. For Oro, she found this easier because being half White and attends a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), she found White space in “abundance.” Alyx arrived at the institution with a firm understanding of her racial identities. She experienced being “othered” more at HurstonU and countered the othering by finding spaces that continued to give her solace with her identities. Oro and Alyx arrived on campus with a clear understanding of their biracial and multiracial identity. This finding was consistent with Renn’s (2000) fourth pattern that allowed students to self-select their identity contrary to traditional U.S. government racial categories. Although Oro was raised by her White father, her boarding school experience and attendance at a Black church attributed to her having a better grasp of her two racial identities before attending

and during college. Alyx's upbringing by both parents with both cultures also helped her grow to understand her identities better prior to coming to college. Alyx only began to question some parts of her identity when she came to the university.

Self-labeling was essential for student (Renn, 2000). Outside factors that included institutional setting, family support, community setting, private space, and/or personal space (Renn, 2000). All of the participants shared stories that exhibited their journey to understanding better of their biracial and multiracial identity development. Those stories shared various stages of experiences during their time in higher education and exhibited a full understanding of each of their biracial and multiracial identities. Participants have reached a point where it was clear that their ability to self-identify was critical to making sense of their leadership experiences at the university.

### **Recommendations**

Centered by a constructivist paradigm with a critical-cultural lens, findings from this study suggested several implications when considering how best to create space and support BMLGBQ student leaders. The considerations included participants' experiences and my own experiences as a scholar practitioner. The recommendations were categorized into three areas: recommendations for academic and student affairs administrators, recommendations for student programming, and recommendations for student organizations.

#### **Academic and Student Affairs Administrators**

Institutions need to determine who their primary constituents are; students or legislators. This is time when federal and state funding may be in question for public colleges and universities. Politics matter. Regional location matters. When tragedy occurs

nationally and internationally, institutions have been slow to respond for fear of political retribution. There have also been times that institutions were not even responding. The lack of or limited responses by institutions have been leaving some students feeling abandoned. This abandonment has often angered those students. Staff and faculty have also felt abandoned by the institution. Institutions must make it a priority to respond to small and national tragedies with more immediacy. Institutions must also be thoughtful and caring in their response. Dr. Bertice Berry (2009), renowned author and featured keynote speaker at the NASPA Annual Student Affairs Conference shared a sentiment such that the reason we see change happening in our country is because of the work that is happening on college campuses everywhere. Funding has been an issue for institutions. If institutions would take a stand for what was right and based on the values of the organization and funding was jeopardized, then alumni would have a responsibility to support and give back to the institution.

Universities and colleges often have Latin words to describe their values, such as scholarship, justice, leadership, service, liberty, light, and so on. These words have different meanings for institutions, but ultimately, academic and student affairs administrators are in pursuit of the university's commitment to students and the greater community. Participants shared that their institution was failing the students they were meant to serve. Institutions have been caught up in political ideology of state and federal governments versus fact. University administrators have shown a lack of understanding of identity development models and there has been a demonstrated need for creating space for students on campus (Guthrie, et al. 2013). When students are in a leadership positions, they have felt they had an opportunity to make positive change for their

community (Komives et al., 2013). This study revealed that students were seeking role models and institutions were failing to meet their needs.

University administrators, faculty, and staff have to take a stand and serve as role models for their communities, including incorporating inclusive excellence into the work and be intentional about hiring practices of staff and faculty. If administrators start centering inclusive excellence into everything they do, it will trickle down into every part of the system. University administration must establish trainings for faculty, staff, and students that exemplify inclusive excellence. Faculty, staff, and students need a greater understanding of inclusive excellence, which will have a great impact on the institution positively impacting settings in the classroom, work place, and community. For example, additional trainings, such as Safe Zone trainings, for all faculty, staff, and students would show the institutions' commitment to the LGBTQ community. Mandatory and optional trainings would provide staff, faculty, and students the opportunity to grow in their understanding of others places an institution's values front and center.

Academic and student affairs administrators who explore meaningful ways of incorporating inclusive excellence into the classroom curriculum would create a welcoming atmosphere. As seen from this study, students should not have to go out of their way to bring examples of marginalized identities into the classroom. Faculty training would enhance teaching by helping instructors identify and incorporate examples of diversity and inclusion into the curriculum. Faculty should be trained not to tokenize students in the classroom by singling anyone out to represent one of their identities. Faculty have a responsibility to set the tone in an academic setting and the institutions must give them tools to be successful with all students in their classroom.

A lack of visible role models with whom students connect on universities and college campuses. Participants in this study could rarely connect with individuals who shared similar identities. University administrators should hire across identities and create community for staff and faculty to build relationships and connect those individuals BMLGBQ mentors with students. When I asked Andrew what the institution could better do to support his growth as a BMLGBQ student leader, he said, “Making sure that our [LGBTQ] center is being reflective of Black LGBTQ folk and people.”

University administrators must create spaces on campus where faculty, staff, and students to connect with individuals who share their multiple intersecting identities. Colleges and universities across the country either support specific identity centers, multicultural centers, or no centers to support its community. Creating spaces for both intersectionality and conversation would allow students to participate in spaces most salient for them and show-up as their authentic selves. Participants in this study were challenged to find a sense of belonging because the intersections of their identity were never considered by the institution. Likely, if students with intersecting racial and sexual identities had spaces where they could be their whole selves, it adds to the success they have persevered on their own to achieve.

Finally, institutions of higher education need to become more transparent in decision-making that impact students. Institutions will not always please every constituent. If institutions become more transparent, it would increase the level of trust that students would have with the system (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Trust is at the center of good and effective leadership (Northouse, 2013). If transparency is modeled by university administrators, theoretically, other staff, faculty, and students will model

similar behavior, ultimately leading to good and effective leadership that could have larger positive impacts in society.

### **Students**

Student programs have contributed to a student's sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Departmental programs designated for students must support the values of the institution. University administrators must be more intentional in their student leadership programming, as participants grew from their various leadership experiences. Participants were actively engaged in various leadership programs, although they were not always able to attribute a program or experience to leadership development. For BMLGBQ student leaders and other students on campus, having programs apply experiential learning, team-based learning, sociocultural discussions, service-learning, and mentoring and advising were critical to finding space for their voice on campus (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Meixner & Rosch, 2011). As participants engaged in these activities, they grew personally and professionally from them. Participants also strove to replicate programs for other groups and organizations of which they were a part. Ororo felt the campus grew to be more inclusive and accepting because of institutional programs. Ororo said, "I feel like, even a lot of with the Safe Zone training [established for students, staff, and faculty to support the LGBTQ community] and stuff on campus, and those different types of things, I feel like those have helped with people around here."

Programs incorporating experiential learning increase student's effectiveness as leaders as they practice skills such as initiative, integrity, trust, and teamwork within this paradigm (Meixner & Rosch, 2011). A critical component of this type of learning is the application and practice of leadership knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Meixner & Rosch, 2011).

Experiential learning offers students opportunities to learn more about themselves by understanding strengths and weakness (Meixner & Rosch, 2011).

Mentoring is grounded in a mutually beneficial relationship between the mentor and mentee. College and university departments must enhance identity-based programs that establish mentoring to create visibility and connections for students. Participants reflected on their experience of connecting with a mentor when engaging in conversations about their identity. In turn, participants served as mentors to other students on campus who shared similar identities. Programs such as these would create critical space for sociocultural conversations (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Nouri stated, “Sharing my experience helped other people understand why I had certain opinions that I had.” Nouri’s opportunity to share her experiences with others also brought attention to why she wanted to participate in inclusive change.

Higher education administrators and student affairs practitioners must create programs for students with developed outcomes. Outcomes for students which would best serve them incorporate elements of diversity, social justice, and/or equity (Komives, et al., 2011). Nouri discussed programs such as Tunnel of Oppression, a 30-minute interactive theater program, which gave a picturesque example of the daily experiences of marginalized people as an extremely meaningful program for her and her peers. Other programs established by resident assistants, leadership offices, community service offices could appropriately incorporate elements of diversity, social justice, and/or equity and fulfill the mission and values of the institution and subsequent departments. These types of programs must also teach students how not to feel guilty about their various privileged

or marginalized identities. Programs should illustrate that students are part of a system and they have an opportunity to learn and change it or participate and be a bystander.

University academic and student affairs departments must find the resources to develop and implement high impact and high immersion programs for students.

Participants in this study said that campus programs they attended which were longer in length than a couple of hours, such as workshops, were extremely enriching to their experience at the institution. One participant found her passion in social justice because of her involvement in two particular high impact programs focused on social justice and positive change.

Biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer (BMLGBQ) student leaders in this study were challenged to find a sense of belonging on campus at times and for various reason. Academic and student affairs administrators must do a better job of outreach and marketing for BMLGBQ student leaders and other students and student leaders with multiple marginalized identities. Alyx shared the sentiment that, by the time she knew where to get involved on campus, it was too late. She also said, “I would love to have a directory of active student organizations on campus.” Academic and student affairs administrators collaborating and cross-promoting programs would model behavior highly beneficial for student organizations. When identity-based offices on campuses collaborate, it models intersectional spaces for students to participate in assisting students to find a sense of belonging on campus.

### **Student Organizations**

Involvement in student organizations was an integral part of the study participants’ experience. Some student leaders solely participated in identity-based



organizations, while others engaged in all-types of organizations. The number of people, in their personal and academic lives, who knew of participants' sexuality influenced their authenticity in the organizations they joined and and with the exception of Alyx, all participants had varying degrees of comfort with public knowledge of their sexual identity. For instance, Andrew was essentially rejected from an organization because of his sexual orientation. Nouri did not feel comfortable sharing her sexual orientation with a student organization in which she was involved, although the national chapter of the organization was accepting of sexual diversity. Anthony was not comfortable being out with any of the organizations in which he was a member. Essentially, identity-based student organizations did not offer a safe place for participants within the context of diverse-sexual identity. For this reason, participants often felt siloed in identity-based organizations because their sexuality could not be acknowledged. For these students, race was a more salient identity in identity-based student organizations.

University administrators need to support specific identity-based student organizations to ensure those organizations have an understanding of campus resources and opportunities to collaborate to meet students' diverse needs. When identity-based campus organizations are actively engaging in collaboration with each other, then spaces of intersectionality could naturally occur in college and university communities. Alyx struggled to find other opportunities of involvement on campus. She explained:

I think it's very hard to break out of your one little corner on campus at times. Trying to reach out to other groups is very important but it's also very difficult because there isn't really a way to do it easily on campus since there is no directory of every group on campus, so there's no easy way.

Creating and supporting collaborative spaces could facilitate student organizations working together for campus-wide programming rather than continuing to operate in

exclusive spaces. Students, like participants in this study, could then organize programming that was also intersectional, like their identities.

Student organizations need stronger leadership training support for both members and advisors. When asked what could universities do better for BMLGBQ student leaders, Ororo said:

If you're going to be forming a group, there needs to be a basic 101 course that you need to have on, how can you make everybody included? Like, if you're going to form the [Black Centered student organization], and if you're going to form the [LGBTQ student organization] thing, all the people who are the president of that, or even just outreach coordinators, need to sit down in a class and be like, 'Yo, remember that there're intersecting identities.'

Developing leadership training that is inclusive and change-oriented for student organizational leaders could have a trickledown effect of normalizing conversations about identities.

In order to effect change, student leaders need to learn certain skills (Komives, 2013; Meixner & Rosch, 2011). Student organizations offer an effective means of facilitating team-based and peer education. In team-based learning, students learn how to apply skills they learn within the team to their everyday activities within other team settings (Meixner & Rosch, 2011). Team-based learning enables students an understanding of “process-oriented leadership skills” (Meixner & Rosch, 2011, p. 320).

Finally, identity-based student organizations have struggled to find advisors supportive of their needs. Staff and faculty advisors have served as role models and mentors for student organizations' members. Advisors must be trained to serve more effectively in these roles. Student organization advisors willing to be vulnerable by sharing their identities, both hidden and non-hidden, have the potential to influence its members who feel they could do the same.

### **Considerations for Future Research**

This study focused on how BMLGBQ student leaders made meaning of their experiences. The stories participants shared gave meaning to their experiences during their undergraduate career. Research was limited on multiple socially constructed identities in conjunction with leadership identity development. Few studies critically examined the complex topic of biracial and multiracial identity and/or sexual identity (Renn, 2000). Few studies critically examined leadership identity development in the context of socially constructed identity development (Guthrie et al., 2013). The combination of both complex topics of multiple identities adds to an already scant literature base.

This study provided a brief glimpse into the lives of BMLGBQ student leaders. Participants' familial background had a significant impact on what they were looking for when they attended the university. One participant came from, what could be considered, a traditional two-parent household. For these reasons, that participant had a stronger understanding of their racial identity, while their sexual identity became more salient in college. Other participants sought to understand both their racial and sexual identities in college. Future studies which employ oral history are needed to understand this phenomenon. Participants' personal reflections of their family history, upbringing, high school and university experiences, and how they highlighted their marginalized and oppressed identities would add more depth to an understudied topic (Creswell, 2007; Plummer, 1983).

More research focusing on cultural influences of the various geographic regions of the country and multiple intersecting identities. During this study, locale was salient

for some participants. Living in the south as people of color who were non-heterosexual was clearly challenging for participants. Some participants embraced the challenge, while others shied away from it.

Gender was not a primary factor in this study although it emerged that the experiences of Black male student leaders was different than Black female student leaders. Adding gender identity as a component of this study would have enhanced an understudied topic and would be inclusive of all gender identities (cisgender and transgender). Additional research to expand on identities for clearer understanding of intersectionality, salience, and leadership would also add to literature needed for practitioners and educators to do better work for students to enhance student learning.

Finally, further research on institutional practices of inclusive excellence would enrich the lives of all in the campus community. Questions which need to be answered include: What practices are institutions doing to create spaces for multiple identities? What are the experiences of students on those campuses? How can institutions better serve students with marginalized identities? How can institutions of higher education create a world with better leaders? These and other questions need to be examined in order to begin to meet the needs of BMLGBQ student leaders.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, a brief summary of the study findings and their connection to current theories, recommendations, and future research were highlighted. This chapter explored the BMLGBQ student leaders made meaning of their multiple identities. Those themes centered on the intersecting identities of leadership, race, and sexuality, in

addition to leadership identity development, sexual identity development, and biracial and multiracial identity.

Intersecting identities of leadership, race, and sexuality was the first theme was explored. The BMLGBQ student leaders were reintroduced with their identities, university status, and leadership experience on campus. Then predominant models of leadership, FMMI and MMDI, were also reintroduced. Additionally, meaning making filters were shared to explain that intersectionality was situational for participants in most instances. Participants shared stories of intersectionality based on racial and sexual identity, racial and leadership identity, sexual and leadership identity, and racial, sexual, & leadership identity.

The next theme explored was leadership identity of BMLGBQ student leaders. The first pattern to emerge in this theme focused on participants' wanting to give back to the greater community. Next, the importance of relationships to these BMLGBQ student leaders in their respective roles on campus were discussed. Then participants elaborated upon what they believed were the relational characteristics that make a good leader, support, advocacy, empathy, and active listening. Participants approached leadership in a multitude of ways. Some participants focus on leadership was to change the world, other participants focused on their positions within a student organization.

Sexual identity of BMLGBQ student leaders was the next theme explored. This theme highlighted how participants' level of public awareness of their sexual identity impacted their ability to find a sense of belonging. Ranging from being "unapologetically" public about their sexual identity to seeking anonymity across campus participants had difference experiences from each other. Only two participants were

clearly out with their sexual identity. Other participants either cloaked their sexual identity or did not consider themselves out. Even so, these BMLGBQ student leaders did not let their sexual identity, public or not, influence their roles of advocates for the LGBTQ community.

Next, biracial and multiracial identity development of BMLGBQ student leaders was explored. This theme examined how participants found community in monoracial and multiracial spaces. Finding space and seeking a sense of belonging was especially important for BMLGBQ student leaders who identified as half Black. Participants' understanding of their identity as their whole self and not just a part of self was evident. Participants' experiences were in harmony with their biracial and multiracial identity and revealed.

Finally, recommendations for academic and student affairs administrators, programming for students, and student organizations were discussed and recommendations on participants' stories and my practice as a scholar practitioner are highlighted. The importance of university administrators incorporating inclusive excellence into the work of the institution are discussed. Institutions of higher education which serve its constituents have a greater impact on the campus, surrounding and greater communities. Next, recommendations for student programming are detailed. Participants shared the importance of programs in which they were involved with on campus creating a sense of belonging. Due to the experiences of the BMLGBQ student leaders, it became apparent of the need for mentoring programs. This section concluded with recommendations for student organizations. In short, more training for student organization leaders and advisors is needed.

This chapter concluded with considerations for future research. These included expanding this study to understand the intricacies that BMLGBQ student leaders experience, especially when other identities and history were available to enrich the study. More studies can include gender and expand beyond the collegiate experience. Oral histories can be completed to have a deeper understanding of familial influence on meaning making. Exploration of what institutions are doing to create spaces for BMLGBQ and other marginalized student leaders would add significantly to the literature.

## EPILOGUE

During my plentiful years in higher education, my journey has given me the opportunity to explore all aspects of my identity. I have spent 16 and a half years of my adult life as a student in higher education; 7 years towards my bachelor, 3 years towards my master, and 6 and a half years towards my doctorate, not accounting for time taken off during programs. During that time, I have grown to understand who I am as a queer person of color, who is also biracial and gay, half Cuban and half Black, as well as a student affairs educator, higher education professional, social justice advocate, leader, learner, and sometimes an activist. My exploration has taken me to many parts of the country that include Florida, Michigan, Illinois, Colorado, and North Carolina. In each region of the country, I have learned more about who I am based on the surrounding community in which I reside. When I lived in Miami, being Cuban was most salient for me. When I lived in Tallahassee and Michigan, my sexual identity was most salient for me. When I lived in Illinois, being Black became most salient for me. When I lived in Colorado, being biracial and queer was most salient for me. As a recent resident of the south and during a highly divisive time in the U.S., I have found my own understanding of my identities have continued to be challenged on a daily basis.

The dissertation journey has been filled with many challenges and rewards. As a BMLGBQ leader living in the south, the experiences of the participants closely resembled my own experiences as a professional. As I shared my own story with participants, I realized our stories were more similar than not in many ways; only



separated by two-decades. My interactions with each participant left me feeling excited about learning about their experiences and how they so closely resonated with my own. At the same time, I did not anticipate the challenge of identify participants for this study. Identifying participants in the south who were public about their sexual identity and identified as biracial and multiracial was much more difficult than anticipated. As I reflected on my own journey, it became apparent during this dissertation process that I grew in my own understanding of what I need to do as a higher education administrator.

### **Reflecting on Shared Experiences**

I connected with each participant's story in various ways. For instance, Anthony and I connected based on our experiences with our biological fathers. Andrew and I connected based on our attempts at finding a home with organizations on campus. I connected with Nouri, Ororo, and Alyx around our passion for politics and the type of involvement on campus. Overall, we all had similarities in our stories during our undergraduate careers and how we reflected on our identities at varying stages of our lives.

As I reviewed the transcripts, I relished the research-participant relationship that developed. It gave me the opportunity to continue to reflect upon my own experiences and share those. During my conversations with Andrew, I found that I reflected more on my identity as a gay and queer man. Specifically, we discussed our experiences of living in the south and the challenges that we faced. I processed,

It's the unfortunate piece of the society we live in, but even more so we live in the south now. Being new in the south, I have found talking about sexual identity is very different for me than Colorado, where I can give you a list of everybody who identified as LGBTQ that worked on campus and then it was a strong student community as well.

During my conversations with the participants, it was enlightening and disheartening to hear that most of our experiences around our sexual identities in the south were not encouraging.

During my conversations with Ororo and Nouri, we had very similar experiences to our understanding of our biracial multiracial identity. I bantered with both women about how our racial identities became more salient based on context. For instance, I shared with Ororo:

One of the things that comes to mind is I do identify as mixed. I identify as biracial, but when I'm home in front of my mom and my dad, I talk about being black in North Carolina. My mom's like, "You're also Cuban." She gets this opposite where she's like, "Don't forget this other half." I'm like, "Mom, I'm always Cuban. Don't worry, but the experience I'm having as a black person as well, it's very salient to me."

As we continued in our discussion, our conversation shifted to passing as society perceives us to be safe Black people or straight. I said, "I feel that frustration where I'm like, okay, I may pass in this way or another way," but also acknowledging that this was not who I was. With Nouri, we talked about the challenges of navigating our biracial identity with our multiracial families. Reflecting on my experiences with Nouri:

I feel like, in some instances very similar experience, so my mom is a white Cuban and my biological dad was black, but I grew up with my mom and that whole side of my family, but was close with my biological dad's. . . . My grandmother on that side and then my cousins. So, in some instances, a very similar experience, but I also think growing up in Miami, everybody assumed I was Cuban, and not until I went to Florida State that I really experienced that when everybody assumed I was Black. All of the sudden I was just in one identity and not in an identity that I was comfortable or grew up in any way, so I did not know much about that. The Black side of my family all lived in New York and I grew up in Miami, so we were just so far apart, so I didn't have that growing up.

We spent some time discussing our experiences in the current climate in the U.S. and the murders of Black people. As we discussed this further, I said that, "I take pride in my

Cuban identity, there is no question about it, but also there's sometimes, there's things that are salient in this part of my life, and there are other things that are salient in that part of my life.” Discussing my multiple experiences with police officers, I continued, “I don't get pulled over because I'm Cuban, but I feel like when I get harassed by an officer in a car, it's not because I'm Cuban, it's clearly because I am Black. I have specific experiences that are related to my skin color.” Now that I live in the south, I am more cognizant of what this means. Living in Colorado, I was pulled over by police officers a number of times. Every time I was questioned by a police officer, my father’s lessons of courtesy mixed with fear always permeated every inch of my body.

As Alyx and I discussed her involvement with student organizations on campus, I also reflected on my own journey at Florida State University. I found it difficult to find a home in identity based organizations. As we shared our experiences, I said,

I feel like I've had similar experiences in my own undergraduate experience, but specifically around student organizations, in particular, and joining them and trying to find which identities aligned best. I joined CASA, which is our Cuban American Student Association, but I am not a native Spanish speaker. I joined the BSU which is our Black Student Union, but I just felt like I never fit in, never been able to find a home, specifically in race-based organizations. At the time, I was not involved in the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), but my roommate was, and so probably would've found my home there, I just didn't do it.

I found my home with organizations that were not identity based but gave me opportunities to explore my identities.

### **Making Meaning of This Study**

As BMLGBQ students in this study shared the challenges and successes with their development as leaders during their undergraduate experience, I had the opportunity to also stir lost memories of my own experiences. The opportunities afforded to me at Florida State University have been what peaked my interest towards becoming a higher

education administrator. As an administrator, I have had a wealth of experiences that have given me unique opportunities to grow in my understanding of self and others. I have recognized that I have had time on my side to understand who I am. Participants in this study have not had the same luxury as I. It was clear to me that Ororo's boarding high school experience and gap year during her undergraduate career propelled her understanding of herself. She had opportunities years ahead of other participants in this study. Participants from more rural areas, such as Andrew and Anthony, were still learning how to navigate their multiple identities. Anthony and Nouri were able to give voice to their sexual identity, which they were not public about. Andrew was able to give voice to his passion for equity and understanding for others from rural communities. Ororo was able to give voice to her passion for having a global impact. Alyx was able to provide a voice for her passion for queer politics.

## **Conclusion**

During my time with Nouri, I shared my thoughts on Root (1992) with the following explanation:

It really just says I can identify how I want, when I want, to who I want, and it's nobody else's business but my own. It's much longer, and much more supportive of trying to figure out how, "What do I want to name myself, and when do I want to name myself, and what does that look like, and it's nobody's business if I don't even want to."

As I have continued to grow in my understanding of my identity, my conversations with participants reinforced my commitment for my community and other marginalized people. In closing, throughout the research I came to the realization and shared with Anthony, "collectively, we are stronger as a community." This experience has expanded upon my purpose in higher education to go beyond my work as a practitioner and to

become a scholar practitioner. That is how the change I want to see in this world come to fruition.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**



Institutional Review Board

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Biracial/Multiracial Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer Students Make Meaning of their Leadership Experiences

Researcher: Bobby Kunstman, MLD  
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership Program

Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

Email: kuns3078@bears.unco.edu

Research Advisor: Florence M. Guido, Ph.D.  
School of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Phone: (970) 351-2308

Email: flo.guido@unco.edu

My name is Bobby Kunstman, a seventh year doctoral student in the Higher Education & Student Affairs Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado. My primary research focus is to add and create literature that supports the needs of underrepresented, marginalized, and oppressed student populations at institutions of higher education.

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to understand the leadership experiences of biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer (BMLGBQ) undergraduate students. This study will seek to understand how you make meaning of being BMLGBQ and a student leader at an institution of higher education. The study will also seek to understand what barriers you face as a college student. Additionally, this study will seek to understand what tools you use to cope and excel as a campus leader. Finally, this study will seek to understand how universities hinder and best support the growth and development of BMLGBQ student leaders. The experiences that you share will assist in filling a gap in the literature for higher education and student affairs professionals towards supporting BMLGBQ college student leaders.

Page 1 of 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant's initials here)

The study is set up with two-interview sessions lasting no more than 90 minutes each. For each session, you will be meeting with me for a one-on-one interview in a place and at a time most comfortable and convenient for you. I will ask you a series of questions based on your experiences as a BMLGBQ student leader. The first interview will consist of questions focused on yourself, your racial identity, your sexual identity, and your leadership experiences. The second interview will consist of questions focused on your experiences as a BMLGBQ student leader at an institution of higher education. For both interviews, I will provide a list of the questions in advance for you to review and reflect upon. Each interview will be recorded for the purposes of transcribing. After each interview, I will share a completed transcription with you in order for you to ensure that your voice is accurately reflected.

I will maximize confidentiality of all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be presented with either a pseudonym that you have selected or your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. You will not be identified in written materials with exception to the data you have provided attached to the pseudonym you have selected. All identifiable information that links you to your pseudonym will be kept private. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your name and other identifying information private. I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require me to show your information to a court OR to tell authorities if I believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

Potential risks in this project are minimal. The risks associated with participation in the study are no greater than the risks associated with sharing information in a classroom or other educational setting. There may be discomfort associated with sharing personal stories, but I intend for the interviews to provide safe space to share as much as you are comfortable with. I will make every effort to help you feel comfortable, and if at any time you are uncomfortable with a question, you can decline to comment. A foreseeable benefit will be the opportunity for you to move forward from this experience more enlightened by the reflection and conversations around making meaning of undergraduate experiences as someone who is a BMLGBQ student leader. Costs for participants might include any expenses associated with transportation to and from the interview site. Additional costs will be additional time that you commit to reviewing and updating transcripts from each interview. There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

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Participant's Signature

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Date

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Researcher's Signature

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Date

**APPENDIX B**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: June 30, 2016

TO: Robert Kunstman, MLD  
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [898168-1] Biracial Multiracial Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer Students Make Meaning of their Leadership Experiences

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: June 30, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: June 30, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 30, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

**Bobby -**

**Thank you for your patience with the UNC IRB process during the summer. The first reviewer, Dr. Roehrs, has provided approval without any requests for revisions or additional materials. Subsequently, I reviewed your materials and am also providing approval. Thanks for preparing a detailed and consistent explanation of your proposed study. Please check the consent form and the email for gatekeepers to correct a couple of typos before use in your participant recruitment and data collection.**

**Best wishes with your interesting and relevant research.**

**Sincerely,**

**Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair**

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.



**APPENDIX C**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS--ROUND 1

1. What pseudonym would you like to use for this study?
2. Tell me about yourself.
3. How did you develop an understanding that you had more than one racial identity? Can you share about that journey?
  - a. What did that journey and having multiple racial identities mean to you?
4. How did you develop an understanding of your sexual identity? Can you share about that journey?
  - a. What did that journey and identifying as LGBTQ mean to you?
5. How do you navigate your racial and sexual identity on campus?
6. Tell me what leadership means to you and how you live your meaning of leadership.
7. Tell me how your racial and sexual identity influences your role as student leader on campus.
8. Tell me about an experience where your role as a leader has impacted your racial and sexual identity.

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS--ROUND 2

1. Explain why you chose to attend this institution.
2. Tell me what it is like to be biracial multiracial lesbian gay bisexual queer student leader on campus.
3. Can you describe an experience of when you felt excluded based on your BMLGBQ identity?
  - a. Can you describe an experience where you felt included?
4. Can you describe an experience of when you felt excluded because you were a student leader?
  - a. Can you describe an experience where you felt included?
5. How has being a student leader on campus created opportunities or opened doors for you?
6. Tell me about barriers you have faced on campus in regards to identity as a BMLGBQ student leader.
7. What barriers have you experienced on campus in regards to being a BMLGBQ student leader?
8. How has being a leader on campus helped you navigate all of your identities to excel?
9. What do you believe your university can do to better support the growth and development for BMLGBQ student leaders?