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MAKING MEANING IN THE MARGINS: IDENTITIES, BELONGING, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITMENTS IN A CROSS-RACE INTERGROUP DIALOGUE FOR QUEER AND TRANS COLLEGE STUDENTS

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MAKING MEANING IN THE MARGINS: IDENTITIES, BELONGING, AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITMENTS IN A CROSS-RACE INTERGROUP
DIALOGUE FOR QUEER AND TRANS COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

NINA M. TISSI-GASSOWAY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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College of Education
Social Justice Education

MAKING MEANING IN THE MARGINS: IDENTITIES, BELONGING, AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITMENTS IN A CROSS-RACE INTERGROUP
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When thinking about my dissertation journey and this research study, this quote from Paulo Freire (2018) frequently comes to mind.

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (p.72)

Just as Freire wrote, the knowledge that I developed in the course of my SJE journey and the knowledge that I share here in my dissertation was only possible through my interactions with others. While the act of writing a dissertation is certainly a solo and often isolating experience, developing the new knowledge and understanding that I share in these pages was very much a community effort. The gifts of insight that many others have given me through our interactions, conversations, classes, and relationships are present in these pages. I have countless people to thank for helping me get to this point.

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Last, to the participants and all those who made it possible to conduct this research study--Thank you. The 11 queer and trans students who participated in this study trusted me with their stories and their truths. It is an honor to be able to share pieces of their experiences through this dissertation. There were so many times in this process when I wanted to give up and, each time, it was thinking of these students that kept bringing me back to my desk to keep writing. These stories need to be shared, read, and

uplifted. I know that this study is but a beginning of the work I and others can do to uplift

queer and trans student voices and make college and university campuses better for all

marginalized students.

ABSTRACT

MAKING MEANING IN THE MARGINS: IDENTITIES, BELONGING, AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITMENTS IN A CROSS-RACE INTERGROUP
DIALOGUE FOR QUEER AND TRANS COLLEGE STUDENTS

SEPTEMBER 2020

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This qualitative research study used constructivist grounded theory methods to explore the lived experiences of 11 queer and trans undergraduate college students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds in a cross-race intergroup dialogue (IGD) course. Using document analysis of course assignments and post-dialogue semi-structured interviews allowed for rich inquiry into how these queer and trans students made meaning of their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and social justice commitments. This study contributes new knowledge about the meaning-making processes of queer and trans college students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds and the role that IGD plays in supporting their meaning-making. This study will help inform practice and scholarship about the experiences of queer- and trans-identified college students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds and how they make meaning of their intersecting identities, commitments to social justice action, find support, and foster belonging on campus. This study demonstrates the role that IGD can play in supporting the meaning making processes and community development of queer and trans college students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Students of color and queer and trans students on college campuses report higher

rates of alienation, isolation, racism, cis-heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination,

which then negatively impact students' persistence to graduation, mental health, and life

chances more broadly (Dunbar, Sontag-Padilla, Ramchand, Seelam, & Stein, 2017;

Garvey, Squire, Stachler, & Rankin, 2018; Spade, 2015). Queer students, trans students,

and students of color drop out at higher rates than their straight, cisgender, and White

peers in predominately White institutions nationwide (Aud et al., 2012; Garvey et al.,

2018; Sanlo, 2004). There is a growing body of studies that document the experiences of

queer and trans college students of all races and a smaller but still an increasing amount

of studies on queer and trans students of color. However, these studies mostly focus on

the negative experiences of queer and trans college students or on student success

trajectories. There currently exists a dearth of information on how queer and trans

students, and more particularly queer and trans students of color, make meaning of their

college experiences.

Efforts to study and support queer and trans students have largely been a

majoritarian project, meaning that they have been designed to understand and support the

"majority" of students. Like most majoritarian projects, seeking to support the majority of

students has resulted in studies that understand, and resources that support, meaning-

making development among more privileged students on college campuses. Little

attention has been paid to the unique and complex experiences of marginalized students

who hold multiple marginalized identities, such as queer and trans students of color, and

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how these students make meaning of their experiences on campus. Higher education student development theories and studies have largely failed to critically explore the cost that is often associated for marginalized students, such as students of color or trans students, to associate with, enroll at, and "belong" to an institution of higher education. Structures and processes within the institution embed social identity group-based privilege and oppression (Hurtado et al., 2012; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). While institutions' practices may have a neutral façade, they often serve to maintain inequality among groups (Hurtado et al., 2012; Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006) and serve as barriers to true inclusion of marginalized populations within higher education. Without explicit exploration of the role of the institution, higher education literature posits the institution as a neutral space and suggests that all students should want to "belong" to it or within it. For many marginalized students affording higher education, facing oppressive institutional bureaucracy, and navigating racist, cissexist, and heteronormative campus climates can often be a costly endeavor—financially, mentally, and physically. The strategies that marginalized students have used to survive, thrive, and belong in higher education have not been as well attended to within higher education literature.

Within higher education scholarship, little attention has been paid to the intersecting social identities queer and trans students also hold, including their race, ethnicity, nationality, (dis)ability status, and social class. These identities intersect to create a complex and particular experience for these marginalized students that can be missed when researchers focus solely on students' gender and/or sexual identity. The same critique can be applied to studies that focus on race and ethnicity in the experiences

of students of color that do not use an intersectional lens to also understand the impact of the other intersecting identities that students of color hold. Students' multiple identities, especially when students face interlocking forms of marginalization based on their identities, greatly impact students' development and meaning-making process.

In recent years, some higher education scholars have thoughtfully advanced the full application of intersectional frameworks to the study of college students. One such example of intersectionality taking root within higher education is the well-cited Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The RMMDI, portrays two dimensions of the interactive nature of relationships among components of identity construction: context, meaning-making, and identity perceptions. Contextual influences, or the way that a particular context or setting can influence how a student experiences the saliency of their identities as they interact with different influences, such as sociocultural conditions, current life experiences, or career decisions, are represented in the RMMDI as arrows external to identity. Students' meaning-making capacity is drawn as a filter. The permeability of the filter is dependent on the complexity of the student's meaning-making capacity. The depth and complexity of the meaning-making filter influences how a student incorporates any contextual influences into their understanding of their identities. The RMMDI helps to demonstrate the centrality of meaning-making in a students' identity development process.

Baxter Magolda (2009) documents the activity of process and meaning-making as a key way of examining the holistic development of students, including their identity development process. Meaning-making is inclusive of elements that we have control over, or object, and the elements that have control over us, or subject. Over time, phases

of meaning-making development are at particular points of the subject-object relationships. This relationship guides how students construct their thinking, feeling, and how they see themselves in relation to others. As young adults begin to compose their own reality, they renegotiate the relationship of their internal voices and external influences. This renegotiation is driven by two powerful yearning (Parks, 2000)—a yearning for one's own distinct agency and a yearning for belonging, connection, inclusion, and relationships. Baxter Magolda's (2009) holistic theoretical perspective on meaning-making includes three main points of development: following external formulas, crossroads, and self-authorship. As students move through their meaning-making development toward self-authorship, they move away from external influences of authority and begin to develop their own inner voices and internal capacity for decision-making. Self-authorship is the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identities, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Meaning-making processes help students understand who they are in the world, how they want to act and react in the world, and with whom they want to be in community. As they become more sure of their internal commitments, they also become more attuned to where and with whom they choose to belong.

Not only is developing a sense of belonging a key part of a student's meaning-making process, research on college students' persistence also suggests that students' sense of belonging is also a key factor impacting their desire and ability to graduate from college (Strayhorn, 2012). In higher education literature, sense of belonging refers to a student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued, and

important to others on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). Extensive research has demonstrated that sense of belonging can be impacted through a number of academic and social factors (Strayhorn, 2012), such as frequency of interaction with faculty members, tutoring, involvement in organizations or sports teams, and living in on-campus housing (Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). Sense of belonging takes a heightened importance among marginalized student populations (Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) and, at the same time, studies show that marginalized students (i.e., students of color, queer students, and trans students) are more likely to experience a lower sense of belonging (Hausman et al., 2007; Hurtado et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). In efforts to address marginalized students' sense of belonging and meaning-making processes more broadly, college and universities increasingly support the creation of identity-based cultural/resource centers as well as social-identity-based student organizations and programming for students of color (Patton, 2006) for queer students (Marine, 2011) and more recently for trans students and queer and trans students of color. However, due to lack of institutional support, including limited staffing and resources, many of these support efforts continue to be guided by a monolithic premise— one that assumes that all queer students have, for example, similar experiences and, therefore, may need similar forms of support. As a result, support efforts often fail to holistically serve students with multiple, intersecting identities and limits who feels truly supported and affirmed within these identity group organizations and resource centers.

Without asking critical questions about meaning-making and students' intersecting identities, researchers and practitioners have failed to understand the importance of peer relationships as a necessary strategy for queer students, trans students,

and students of color to successfully navigate the institutional and societal structures that were not built to support them. Limited attention has been paid in higher education studies to peer-to-peer socialization and relationship development as critical contributing factors to marginalized student success and meaning-making development. Research has demonstrated that frequent interaction and socialization with other students is necessary for students to feel a sense of belongingness (Hurtado et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2012) and that developing authentic friendships is a very important contributing factor for queer students' meaning-making process and sense of belonging on campus (Duran, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Attending to the importance of individual relationships in marginalized students' college experiences could repurpose the idea of belonging, not as an institutional construct but as an individuated one that is a core part of student's meaning-making.

Critical and Queer Theory

Critical race and queer scholars have also demonstrated the centrality of relationships for people of color and queer people (Bailey, 2013; Eng, 2012; Freeman, 2015; Rodriguez, 2013; Weston, 1997). These scholars have articulated how relationships and community are vital for people of color and queer people for a variety of reasons, from the formations of queer "chosen families" for purposes of survival, to exploring the radical potential of queer coalitions for political action. Queer theory understands that intersecting identities, such as race, class, and ability, impact social relationships and shape different and perhaps even conflicting notions of community. Critical theory recognizes the role that institutions such as higher education, play in continuing and strengthening oppression and domination of marginalized populations. Scholars suggest

that relationship development with peers not only contributes to queer students' success in college (as measured by attrition to graduation) but are also a critical resource for surviving and for thriving throughout life as people of color and queer people (Eng, 2012; Halberstam, 2003; Weston, 1997). Hence, scholars and practitioners in higher education must attend to relationship development as a relevant contributing factor of queer students' meaning-making development, sense of belonging, and achieving success in college.

Intergroup Dialogue as a Possible Intervention to Support Meaning-making

One effort that some colleges and universities have utilized to support the exploration of social identities, privilege, power, and the development of peer relationships are critical intergroup dialogues (IGD). IGD programs began at the University of Michigan in 1988 and aim to develop increased critical awareness about the roots and consequences of differences across social identities, explore commonalities and differences, develop relationships, and support individual and collective capacities to promote social justice (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007). IGD is a critical-dialogic pedagogical model that brings together participants from different social identity groups to engage in a facilitated process that blends content knowledge with experiential activities. The dialogue's content and process emphasize critical reflexivity to examine the sociopolitical context impacting group relations to develop a more complex understanding of self, systems of privilege and oppression, and connections across differences. Over 150 campuses nation-wide have now developed curricular and co-curricular IGD programs. Within higher education, most IGD courses and programs bring students from privileged and disadvantaged social identity groups to engage in

meaningful conversations and learning across differences. The majority of dialogues focus on race and ethnicity, as this was and continues to be a main focus of campus tensions.

Growing empirical evidence demonstrates the positive outcomes of IGD courses and the ability of this pedological practice to facilitate the development of participants' understanding of social group identities and inequality as well as the development of dialogue skills to support and strengthen participants' relationships. IGD also focuses specifically on supporting understanding and relationships across difference and increasing students' desires and skills to take action to create change. In response to growing programs and positive dialogue outcomes, many institutions have developed a number of variations on the IGD practice. More recently, college and universities have begun conducting *intragroup* dialogues, which focus on other identities, such as gender, sexuality, religion and developing dialogues that bring together people from within the same community. However, little scholarly attention has been given to these emerging forms of IGD and the experiences of students who have participated in dialogues focused on sexuality (Dessel, Woodford, Routenberg & Breijak, 2013; Dessel, Woodford, & Warren, 2011) and intragroup dialogues (Ford & Malaney, 2012). Studies of the IGD model have historically been limited to dialogues that focus on one particular identity or manifestation of oppression and not on dialogues that explore the intersections of various social identities. Future research must attend to the unique learning and developmental possibilities of intersectional and intragroup IGD models. Dialogues that bring marginalized students together from within a specific community could extend the impact of dialogic practices. Through creating an intentional, semester-long space for

marginalized students to come together, an intersectional, intragroup IGD model could increase a sense of belonging among participants and support the exploration of the intersecting identities that result in nuanced, complex meaning-making for marginalized college students. It could support students in developing the skills and knowledge necessary to build relationships across difference and take action for social change. Specifically, participating in a sustained, facilitated, cross-race/ethnic experience, such as an intersectional, intergroup critical IGD could help students to surface and make meaning of their identities, relationships, and social justice commitments in critical ways, that are not currently possible in other spaces on college campuses.

Statement of the Problem

Students of color and queer and trans students on college campuses report higher rates of alienation, isolation, racism, cis-heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination, which then negatively impact students' persistence to graduation, mental health, and life chances more broadly. Programs that affirm and support the development of queer and trans college students' meaning-making and sense of belonging are needed. However, institutional efforts to support a sense of belonging have largely failed to critically explore the cost that is often associated for marginalized students, such as students of color or trans students, to associate with, enroll at, and "belong" to an institution of higher education. Attending to the importance of individual relationships in marginalized students' college experiences could repurpose the idea of belonging, not as an institutional construct but as an individuated one that is a key part of students' meaning-making process. IGD can be an effective pedagogical practice for supporting connection and sense of belonging as well as developing students' capacity and skills for making

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meaning of and addressing social justice issues. There is a gap in research about the specific impacts of an intersectional, intragroup IGD in general and specifically for queer and trans students of various racial backgrounds, which will be addressed in this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore meaning-making as exemplified in the lived experiences of queer and trans undergraduate college student participants in a cross-race intragroup dialogue course. The study sought to develop a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of queer and trans participants of various racial backgrounds in an intersectional cross-race dialogue. This study could contribute new knowledge about the ways students describe and make meaning of their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and social justice commitments. This study also explored the potential of intersectional intragroup IGD models to support queer and trans students' meaning-making processes and sense of belonging.

Research Questions

Based on my review of the relevant literature and my own lived experience, I developed the following research questions:

1. How do queer and trans student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of their **intersecting identities** and **sense of belonging**?

2. How do queer and trans college student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of **cross-race relationships** and **taking action for social change**?

3. How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the intergroup dialogue experience** on understanding their intersectional identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change?

Context of the Study

I conducted a qualitative study utilizing constructivist grounded theory methods focusing on 11 undergraduate students. The 11 students were enrolled in a 4-credit undergraduate IGD course at a large public higher education institution in New England, Large NE Public. The course was designed as a cross-race dialogue for all queer and trans (LGBTQ+) identified students. The pedagogy of IGD includes people from at least two different social identity groups (i.e., White people/people of color) who participate in a co-facilitated, structured 11-week dialogue experience supported by course readings and reflective writing assignments (Zúñiga et al., 2007). The queer and trans students in this study engaged in an 11-week course that focused on race, ethnicity, and the individual, cultural, and institutional manifestations of racism. The course was co-facilitated by two graduate-level students who held similar identities to the participants of the dialogue. One facilitator identified as a White, non-binary, queer person. The second facilitator identified as a Black Jamaican queer male.

Significance of this Study

An examination of the lived experiences of queer and trans participants in cross-race/ethnic dialogues and an exploration of the way participants describe and make meaning of their intersecting social identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and social justice commitments is significant for many conceptual and empirical reasons, and it is also important to me both personally, as a genderqueer, queer, White person, and professionally, as an scholar and educator.

Conceptual and Empirical Significance

As mentioned in the introduction, there has been little attention paid to the unique and complex experiences of marginalized college students and their intersecting identities. Few studies have focused on the importance of relationships on marginalized students' meaning-making within higher education. There are currently no published studies on the experiences of queer and trans college students in cross-race dialogues. This study offers more perspectives on the experiences of queer and trans college students of various racial backgrounds and how they describe and make meaning of their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and social justice commitments. This study also provides insight into the role of IGD experiences on these constructs through expanding understanding of the experiences of queer and trans participants in intersectional intergroup dialogues. There have been no previous studies that have explored the relationship between IGD and marginalized students' meaning-making processes or connection to their sense of belonging. Findings from this study could inform how higher education scholars approach meaning-making research and on how IGD scholars and practitioners conduct future intergroup and intragroup dialogues targeted for queer and trans-identified college students of various racial backgrounds.

Personal and Educational Significance

The findings from this study will also be significant for me, both as an individual and through my roles as a social justice educator and dialogue practitioner. I have seen and experienced first-hand the pedagogical possibilities of IGD and have experienced immense personal and professional growth through being involved in IGD practices. As a White, queer, genderqueer person, I have seen and personally experienced many different

queer communities and witnessed the racial segregation and tensions that exist

throughout them. Lastly, as a college student and as a student affairs practitioner, I saw

and experienced the way many marginalized students (including myself) struggled to find

community and feel as though we belong on college campuses. As someone who has all

of these lived experiences, I am personally curious about the possibilities of bringing

queer and trans students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds together in an IGD

experience that will be explored in this study.

Glossary of Key Terms

This glossary of terms will provide working definitions for some of the key terms

I will be working with in this proposal.

Cross-Race/Ethnicity Intergroup Dialogue: Facilitated critical conversations

between people of at least two different identities, over a sustained period of time, and

focus on a particular topic. The dialogues are structured with emphasis on exploring

commonalities and differences and understandings of the systems of privilege,

oppression, and practices for liberation for the overarching educational goals of

consciousness-raising, building relationships across differences and conflicts, and

strengthening individual and collective capacities to promote social justice.(Gurin, Nagda

& Zúñiga, 2013; Zúñiga et al., 2007; Zúñiga, Lopez & Ford, 2012; Zúñiga & Nagda,

2001).

Cross-race/Ethnic Relationships: Meaningful relationships formed among

people of different racial or ethnic identities. These relationships could provide

connections, new understandings about self and others, and could serve as the basis for

collaboration and taking action for social change.

IGD Involvement: The experiences, perspectives, and emotions that participants recall and describe in relation to their participation in this 11-week undergraduate Intergroup Dialogue Course focusing on race/ethnicity, including their hopes, challenges, and learning outcomes (cognitive, relational, and action).

Lived experienced: The accounts, understandings, and feelings recalled and shared by participants about their lives in general and about their involvement and participation in the dialogue course. These experiences are shaped by their intersecting social identities and their own individual contexts.

Meaning-making: Brings together theorizing on different dimensions of development to center the activity of process and meaning-making as a way to examine the holistic development of students, including their identity development process (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Meaning-making is a holistic approach to development that examines the intersections between the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal is crucial to more fully understand the process of how students understand themselves, the world around them, and the relationship between the two.

Queer and Trans College Students: People who are enrolled as undergraduate students at a college or university who self-identify as holding marginalized gender and/or sexual identities. "Queer" is currently commonly used as a specific sexual identity and as umbrella term for any student who identifies as holding a marginalized sexual identity. This could include students who identify as queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, aromantic, or same gender loving (SGL). Trans is currently commonly used as both an abbreviation for transgender and as an umbrella term for anyone whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth (cisgender).

This could include transgender, transwoman/transman, non-binary, genderqueer, or agender. I employ queer and trans as identity terms for their ability to use current, common, in-community language that serves as umbrella terms for anyone with marginalized sexual and/or gender identities. While all participants enrolled and completed an IGD course advertised and labeled as being "For all Queer and Trans students (LGBTQ+)," the participants in this study hold a variety of sexual and gender identities. Throughout the study, when referring to a particular participant, I use their own words to identify their specific sexual and gender identities.

Queer and Trans College Students' Lived Experiences: The accounts, understandings, and feelings recalled and shared by queer- and trans-identified participants about their lives in general and about their involvement and participation in the dialogue course. These experiences are shaped by their intersecting social identities and their own individual contexts.

Sense of Belonging- A feeling of connection or being "stuck to" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17) another individual, group, community, and/or institution. Students' sense of belonging is Influenced by a variety of academic, social, and external factors as well as by each student's context (including their intersecting social identities) and their perceptions of the campus environment. Sense of belonging is of particular importance for students of marginalized identities, such as students of color and/or queer/trans students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

<u>**Overview of Dissertation Chapters**</u>

This introduction has provided the background and significance for this research study, the purpose of the study, and has outlined the research questions. In Chapter 2, I

will review the three sensitizing concepts that served as the points of departure for this study and framed how I approached my research. The three concepts are (a) empirical and theoretical literature related to college student identity development and meaning-making, (b) critical theoretical perspectives on the experiences of people with marginalized gender, sexual, or racial identities, and (c) empirical literature related to race and sexuality focused intergroup dialogue outcomes in higher education.

Chapter 3 describes the constructivist grounded theory research methodology that I used to explore my research questions, including details about the context of the study, data collection methods, and data analysis. This chapter also includes a discussion of ethical trustworthiness, and reflexivity considerations as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presents my findings related to my first research question, on how participants describe and make meaning of their intersecting identities and sense of belonging. Chapter 5 presents findings related to my second research question, on cross-race relationships and taking action for social change. Chapter 6 is my final findings chapter, that explores findings related to my third research question, focusing on the role of the IGD experience on their meaning-making processes.

In Chapter 7, I synthesize the study and integrate the findings, utilizing a conceptual model to show how the findings are connected and impact one another. Last, I provide recommendations for practitioners and scholars based on the new understandings gained through this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<u>**Overview of Chapter**</u>

As I detailed in the Introduction Chapter, this study examined the lived experiences of queer and trans participants in cross-race dialogues, in general, and the way participants describe how the IGD shapes their sense of belonging, impacts their desire and capacity to build relationships across race and ethnicity, and how they take action for social change, in particular. Consistent with the tenets of constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) to qualitative research, I utilized three sensitizing concepts to integrate relevant empirical and theoretical literature into my research process. Given my guiding interests, which were shaped by my personal, professional, and scholarly experiences, I had three sensitizing concepts that started and guided my study. The three concepts are (a) empirical and theoretical literature related to college student identity development and meaning-making, (b) critical theoretical perspectives on the experiences of people with marginalized gender, sexual, or racial identities, and (c) empirical literature related to race- and sexuality-focused IGD outcomes in higher education. Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, I utilized my sensitizing constructs to help spark my thinking about my research topic and to provide initial but tentative ideas to pursue and questions to raise (Charmaz, 2014). I also used my sensitizing concepts "as tentative tools for developing their ideas about a process that they defined in their data…sensitizing concepts may guide but do not command inquiry, much less commandeer it" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 30). In short, my sensitizing constructs offered "points of departure" and a "loose frame" for looking my research

interests. As I discuss in Chapter 7, they also function as a key way of anchoring my findings to the broader literature around: identity, meaning-making, and belonging; critical queer theory and perspectives on the experienced of students with marginalized identities of gender, sexuality, or race; and IGD.

In section one, I review the empirical and theoretical literature for my first sensitizing concept, student identity and meaning-making in higher education. This section includes an overview of higher education's theories of identity development, intersectionality, meaning-making, sense of belonging and related empirical studies. Section two includes a review of my second sensitizing concept, critical theoretical perspectives on the experiences of people with marginalized gender, sexual, and racial identities. In this section, I discuss how critical theory can be used to enhance and reconceptualize identity, belonging, and relationships among queer and trans college students. The third section explores the third sensitizing concept by defining IGD and reviews empirical literature of race- and sexuality-focused IGDs in higher education. By discussing these three sensitizing concepts both as I understand them and as they are represented in relevant literature, my goal is to orient the reader to the way that I understand my research study and relationship to the broader field of inquiry (Charmaz, 2014).

Section One: Students' Identity Development, Meaning-making, and Sense of Belonging in Higher Education

Social scientists have recently recognized the importance of intersectional approaches to understanding people's experiences. Intersectionality, which emphasizes the way that mutually reinforcing and interdependent systems of oppression, seeks to understand people's differential experiences based on the identities they hold and the way

in which those constellations of identities afford power or contribute to alterity. Although intersectionality has long been used in other social science disciplines (e.g., legal studies, women's studies, sociology), it has arrived more recently to higher education where scholars have been engaged in an ongoing debate about how it should inform both research and practice (Jones & Abes, 2013). Notably, scholars of identity development have increasingly adopted intersectional approaches that emphasize the importance of student navigation of systems of power, privilege, and oppression to their meaning-making processes. The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) centers both identity and meaning-making by demonstrating how a person's understanding of self and others is shaped both by environmental context and their own evolving understanding of the world. Likewise, theories of self-authorship emphasize the interconnectedness of interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal understanding, and cognitive patterns of thought in the meaning-making processes. This simultaneous attention to self, others, and understanding of the environment is also referenced in higher education literature on sense of belonging, a term used to describe student's perceived connectedness and feelings about whether they matter to others on campus (Strayhorn, 2012).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term first identified by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and based on the theorizing of Black feminists, such as the Combahee River Collective (1977), who sought to explicate the difficulty in separating different forms of oppression, such as race, class, and gender, because "they are most often experienced simultaneously" (p. 234). Black women and other women of color have continued the

theorizing and discussion of intersectionality. Based on the work of these scholars of color, intersectionality can be understood as the effects of holding multiple minoritized identities, which means that the person experiences multiple, intersecting forms of oppression.

While intersectionality has been co-opted and incorrectly applied to simply speak to overlapping identities, in its true theoretical roots, intersectionality can be a helpful analytic tool for critically analyzing the ways that oppressive structures, such as racism and cisheterosexism, reinforce one another and lead to unique lived experiences for people with multiple, interconnected social identities (Collins & Bilge, 2016). An intersectional analytic frame is important as "the events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are normally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways" (p. 4). Intersectionality places emphasis on the intersecting structures of inequality, dominance, and oppression. Collins (1990) refers to these interlocking systems of oppression as the "matrix of domination" (p. 228). Rather than overlapping, additive approaches to understanding different oppression as discrete systems (i.e., racism, classism, heterosexism, etc.), the matrix of domination provides a focus on the ways that the systems constitute "axes of oppression" (p. 228) and allows for the exploration of the ways that systems of power, such as race and gender, are supported by conjoining structural patterns. An intersectional analysis moves beyond individual identities and demonstrates how individual identities are products of these larger systems of oppression and are situated within them. For example, intersectional understanding of systems of domination defines power in relationships between and within groups of people. These

forms of power can be seen both at the macro-level in institutions, like higher education, and at the micro-level in individual interactions between students and staff members. Micro- and macro-level forms of domination are happening all the time, simultaneously to support and reaffirm each other to create and sustain social hierarchies and power. Therefore, exploring an individual's experiences or identities without placing it within an intersectional analysis of the systems of structures the person exists within would provide an incomplete picture of the person's lived reality.

In an attempt to more fully understand the complexities of who college students are and how their multiple social identities shape their college experience, there has been a growing body of scholarship on intersectionality within higher education. However, intersectional frameworks have inaccurately been applied within some higher education scholarship and has resulted in distancing from the historical origins and intentions of intersectionality (Jones & Abes, 2013). Many scholars have utilized intersectional frameworks in an attempt to understand individual identities. While this scholarship does provide an important contribution to the field, as it can provide a clearer understanding of how students experience and construct their identities within intersecting systems of power, this individual focus shifts away from a structural analysis of social problems that is necessary within an intersectional framework (Collins, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2013). Intersectionality is not *only* about identity. To more accurately understand the experiences of students with marginalized identities, intersectionality must also include "connecting individuals to groups; groups to society; and individuals, groups, and society--all in connection to structures of power" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 141)

Intersectionality and Identity in Higher Education

In recent years, some higher education scholars have thoughtfully advanced the full application of intersectional frameworks to the study of college students. One such example of intersectionality taking root within higher education is the well-cited Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwen, 2000). In an effort to extend on previous work focused on students' multiple identities (Deaux, 1993; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Jones and McEwens (2000) developed their model to provide a more complex understanding of college student's identity within societal contexts and demonstrate the many dimensions of identity development. Jones and McEwen were particularly interested in documenting the ways that students understood their own identities, experiences of difference, and the influence of the multiple dimensions of identity on their evolving sense of self. At the center of the MMDI model, is a core sense of self. Surrounding the core are intersecting circles that represent significant identity dimensions. The intersecting rings signify how "no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions" (p. 410). The core and the intersecting circles of identity dimension sit within a larger circle that demonstrates the context in which the individual experiences their multiple dimensions of identity.

The core serves as the center of the model and is experienced as a personal identity that is often protected from view of others. Frequently described as students' "inner identity," their core self was the part(s) of their identity that they guarded and kept close to themselves. These core identities were less susceptible to outside influence. Students described their core using attributes of how they saw themselves, including

kind, intelligent, compassionate, or independent and often resisted terms that conveyed external definitions of identity categories when describing their core sense of self. Individual identity was experienced by students at far greater complexity than external identity labels permitted.

Surrounding the core are intersecting circles of identity that represent significant identity dimensions. Each student defined these circles differently, based upon their own important identities, but they included race, gender, sexuality, religion, and social class. The identity circles intersect with one another to demonstrate that no one dimension of identity may be understood on its own. An identity could only be understood in relation to other dimensions. The importance, or saliency, of the identity dimension is represented on the model by dots located on each of the identity dimensions. The proximity of dot to the core represents the salience of that identity to the student at that time. For example, if race is particularly salient for a student, the dot on the racial identity dimension is depicted close to the identity core. The intersecting rings and the various locations of the dots indicating saliency also represent that more than one identity can be relevant to the student at one time.

The context within which a student experiences multiple dimensions of identity is represented on the MMDI as a large circle that includes both the core identity and the intersecting circles of identity dimension. This represents the way that a particular context or setting can influence how a student experiences the salience of their identity as they interact with different influences, such as sociocultural conditions, current life experiences, or career decisions. Just as intersectionality theory denotes, the influences of particular contexts and systems cannot be underestimated in how students construct and

experience their identities. Students understood their identity dimensions as both internally experience and also influence by external contexts. Jones and McEwen (2000) found that when students experienced identities being imposed from the outside, they did not see that dimension as integral to their core. However, they also found "when interacting with certain sociocultural conditions such as sexism and racism, identity dimensions may be scrutinized in a new way that resulted in participants' reflection and greater understanding of a particular dimension" (p. 410). The MMDI offers an important model to help researchers and practitioners understand the complexity of the identity development process of college students. The model highlights the importance of contextual influence in a student's identity development process as a factor that could help or hinder their development of identity.

The MMDI was reconceptualized in 2007 by Abes, Jones, and McEwen. The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) was informed by contemporary theorizations on multiple and intersecting identities, including social construction, feminist, and postmodern conceptualization of intersectionality as well as evolving higher education research on identity development, meaning-making, and self-authorship. The RMMDI, unlike the original MMDI, portrays two dimensions of the interactive nature of relationships among components of identity construction: context, meaning-making, and identity perceptions. Contextual influence, rather than being represented by an all-encompassing circle, are represented in the RMMDI as arrows external to identity. Students' meaning-making capacity is drawn as a filter. The permeability of the filter is dependent on the complexity of the student's meaning-making capacity. The depth and complexity of the meaning-making filter influences how a

student incorporates any contextual influences into their understanding of their identities. The RMMDI demonstrates the centrality of meaning-making in a student's identity development process.

Role of Meaning-making in Identity Development

Baxter Magolda (2009) brought together theorizing on different dimensions of development to center the activity of process and meaning-making as a way to examine the holistic development of students, including their identity development process. Meaning-making is a holistic approach to development that examines the intersections between the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal; it is crucial to more fully understand the process of how students understand themselves, the world around them, and the relationship between the two. Meaning-making is inclusive of elements over which we have control, or object, and the elements that have control over us, or subject. Over time, phases of meaning-making development stand at particular subject-object relationship. This relationship guides how students construct their thinking, feeling, and how they see themselves in relation to others. As young adults begin to compose their own reality, they renegotiate the relationship of their internal voices and external influences. This renegotiation is driving by two strong yearning (Parks, 2000), a yearning for one's own distinct agency and a yearning for belonging, connection, inclusion, and relationships. Baxter Magolda's holistic theoretical perspective on meaning-making includes three main points of development: following external formulas, crossroads, and self-authorship.

During the developmental period of "following external formulas" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 629), students use external formulas to decide what to do, what to

believe, and how to be in the world. Large studies of diverse college students found that the majority (86%) of college students followed external meaning-making formulas in their first year and 57% of second years continued to use external meaning-making (Baxter Magolda et al., 2009; King & Baxter Magolda, 2007; King, Baxter Maolda & Masse, 2008). Baxter Magolda (2009) described three "micro steps" (p. 629) within the external formulas of meaning-making. The first micro step is characterized by a complete and consistent uncritical acceptance of external authority. Encountering some uncertainty results in students enter the middle stage of external formulas, which Baxter Magolda characterized by "discomfort with uncertainty, lack of clarity of one's own perspective, and a sense of obligation to live up to expectations" (p. 629). However, students were unsure what to do with this uncertainty and continued to turn to authorities to resolve it. As tension rose due to multiple, conflicting expectations for students in the middle stage, they proceeded to "late external meaning making" (p. 629). In this meaning-making "micro step," students demonstrated an increased openness to uncertainty, recognized the need to be themselves, and an awareness of potential conflict of their own expectations with others' expectations.

Torres and Hernandez (2007) studied how racism and cultural expectations shaped Latinx college student's journey toward self-authorship. They found that Latinx students in this period of their meaning-making process, understand their ethnic identities based on external formulas and adopted cultural orientations according to trusted family and known peers. Similarly, Abes and Jones (2004) found that their participants used external expectations to understand and making sense of their sexual identities. During this development time, lesbian students in their study wanted to be seen as normal, to fit

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in with their peers, and used identity labels that were in line with others' expectations of them. This included adopting labels without question or consideration for how their various social identities intersected and impacted each other (Abes & Jones, 2004). These studies and others that looked at meaning-making processes with specific student populations (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004) highlight the importance of context in shaping meaning-making processes. In recognizing the short comings of external formulas, whether they be about social identities, faith and beliefs, or career directions, led students into the next developmental period of meaning-making, crossroads.

When students enter cross-roads in their meaning-making development, their internal voices began to emerge, and they began to unravel held assumptions. Parks (2000) aptly describes this moment as a shipwreck because the beliefs and understandings that had served as shelter and protection and took the student where one wanted to go comes apart. Sometimes a shipwreck moment is jarring for students, like when a student of color recognizes racism and then needs to work through negative stereotypes about their racial or ethnic identities (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). In Torres and Hernandez's study, Latinx students encountered new perspectives and definitions of Latinx that were different from those of their family. Similarly, LGB students began to realize the limitations of stereotypes and began to feel frustrated by identity labels, feeling that they were insufficient in describing how they made sense of who they are (Abes & Jones, 2004). During this moment, lesbian students also challenged others' expectations for who they out to or were "allowed" to be (Abes & Jones, 2004). Baxter Magolda's participants mostly encountered shipwrecks after college when they experienced difficult relationships, unsatisfying careers, or major health crises. Students

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in crossroads experienced discomfort because they knew they needed to construct their own beliefs and values but often did not have the internal inertia to do so. Baxter Magolda (2009) found that students experience two subphases within crossroads: listening to their own internal voices and cultivating their voices. A shift out of crossroads, "requires bringing internal voices to the foreground to coordinate (and perhaps reconstruct) external influence" (p. 630). Baxter Magolda concluded that experiencing the pain of a shipwreck, listening to and cultivating their internal voices, and engaging in supportive relationships helps students and young adults to strengthen their internal voices sufficiently to author their lives across a variety of circumstances. This shift denotes the third phase of meaning-making: self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Self-authorship is the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identities, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Within self-authorship, Baxter Magolda identified three elements: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments. In trusting their internal voice, participants began to recognize the distinction between reality and their reaction to it. They realized that while they could not control what happened in the world or their lives, they could control how they reacted to what happened. This realization helped move reality from subject to object for these participants and helped them begin to take responsibility for choosing how they would respond to and interpret reality. In this element of self-authorship, some of Torres and Hernandez's (2007) Latinx participants began to trust their internal voice and define their own cultural reality to create their own principles to frame it. Similarly, lesbian

participants in Abes et al.'s (2007) study began to trust their internal voices in making sense of the discrimination they experienced.

As participants strengthened their trust in their internal voice, they began to organize their choices into commitments. These commitments formed a philosophy, or "internal foundation" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 631) that guided their reactions to reality. Torres and Hernandez (2007) noted that some Latinx participants developed their internal foundations late in their college careers and were no longer intimidated by differences and able to maintain their own cultural values, even in diverse contexts. Abes et al's (2007) lesbian participants integrated their religious, sexual, and racial identities into a complex system that guided their own beliefs, identities, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, Abes, &Torres, 2008). This reorganization of one's choices, beliefs, and identities and forming an internal foundation that many participants described as being "at home" (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 632) with oneself. While many participants felt they had constructed their own internal commitments, they often struggled to live them in their everyday lives (Baxter Magolda, 2009). As participants become more secure and settled in their commitments, they became second nature, so much so that participants often did not think consciously about them. The commitments led participants to experience a greater sense of security that led to a greater sense of freedom. Baxter Magolda concluded that securing internal commitments led simultaneously to a sense of security and also a sense of possibility.

Baxter Magolda's (2009) article documented the activity of meaning-making and demonstrated the need for holistic perspectives to understand the development of college students. Incorporating holistic perspectives and multiple theoretical frameworks allowed

Baxter Magolda and other higher education scholars to more fully understand the underlying *process* or *activity* of meaning-making rather than just specifying the particular meaning that arises for different student populations. For example, Abes (2009) advocates for "bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data" (p. 141). Abes and Kasch (2007) utilized queer theory to reinterpret longitudinal data on the experiences of lesbian college students to better understand the role of heteronormativity in these students' journey toward self-authorship. This new analysis allowed them to document the role of resisting power structures in cultivating a student's own voice. They also found that participants performed new versions of their social identities (sexuality, gender, religion, and social class) to resist heteronormative structures and, thus, continuously redefining the meaning of their social identities. Therefore, Abes and Kasch found that the development of these social identities is a process of "becoming" (p. 629) and is not assessed as more or less complex. The queer theoretical interpretation of their data allowed them to focus on the continual interaction between participants' understanding of self and society and among social identities that are uninhibited by external or internal definitions. This finding suggests that students' capacity to reconstruct their social identities as well as the power structures students experience in their social contexts (Abes & Kasch, 2007).

Belonging as a Manifestation of Meaning-making

As students gain a greater sense of understanding of who they are and the way that the world works, it fundamentally alters the way in which they think about themselves and their environment. Making-meaning of the world through their own

internal commitments and living out their commitments sometimes promotes a sense of belonging and community; other times, it promotes a sense of alterity. Standing firm in their own understandings of themselves and the world can sometimes be at odds with the expectations others have of them or not be congruent with other members of the communities with which they live and interact. This can especially be true for marginalized students as they progress through their meaning-making development during their college years.

Higher education researchers have long-studied sense of belonging (Bean, 1980; Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993)--noting the importance of feelings of connectedness (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), social integration (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Spady,1970), and institutional fit (Bean, 1980; Cabrera et al., 1992) to key student success outcomes, such as persistence (Cabrera et al.1992; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993), degree completion (Cabrera et al., 1992), and overall academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2012).

Sense of belonging has shown to be impacted by a variety of social and academic factors, such as involvement with sports teams or student organizations, living on-campus, frequency of interactions with faculty members, and tutoring (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). A student's sense of belonging has been shown to directly impact their commitment to their college or university and their intentions to persist as well as their actual persistence in college.

Building from foundational studies by Hurtado and Carter (1997), most contemporary theorists have agreed that sense of belonging is particularly meaningful to those who "perceive themselves as marginal to the mainstream life of college" (p. 324).

As part of their study, Hurtado and Carter reviewed previous theories and research on

Integration (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993) and contended that assumptions of

congruence and approximation of normative or dominant values of an environment

continue to be present in higher education researchers' uses of the concepts of social and

academic integration. Hurtado and Carter's critiques note a key underlying assumption in

the acculturation of students into college: "the assumption that the cultural differences of

ethnic groups should be diminished and that to be successful, minority students must

adopt the values of the dominant college environment—an assumption that is potentially

harmful in practice" (p. 327). Hurtado and Carter stated that the concept of membership

is useful to understand "minority students' ability to function in multiple worlds, that of

their own cultural group and that of other cultures" (p. 327). Many researchers had

studied students' involvement in social groups and organization on campuses; however,

they often did not include culturally relevant or specific organizations. Hurtado and

Carter contended that participation in mainstream organizations may not promote

necessary forms of support for Latino students (and other marginalized students) to be

successful. As such, they were interested in understanding students' participation in a

wide range of membership and activities within multiple communities in colleges in order

to better understand which activities contribute to an overall sense of belonging among

diverse students.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that membership in social-community

organizations and religious clubs had a significant association with sense of belonging

among their Latino participants. Hurtado and Carter theorized that Latino students who

are members of a religious organization may have a stronger sense of belonging because

the clubs allow students to maintain connections with external communities that could provide a link to the communities they were familiar with prior to starting college. This could suggest the importance of links to external affiliations for students from marginalized groups in developing a sense of belonging. Additional analysis also revealed that students who perceived the campus environment as having racial-ethnic tension were found to have significantly lower levels of a sense of belonging than their peers. This demonstrates the considerable impact that students' perceptions of the campus community have on their individual sense of belonging.

Since Hurtado and Carter's (1997) study, many researchers in higher education have taken up projects to better understand students' sense of belonging and the factors that impact this process and outcome. A quick reference search can demonstrate the copious ways sense of belonging is now studied within higher education. A student's multiple, intersecting social identities, such as sexuality and race, simultaneously influence their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Researchers have conducted studies on sense of belonging focusing on many different populations of college students including first-year students, STEM students, women students, students with disabilities, international students, students of color, and queer students and on how various academic and social programs influence students' sense of belonging. Higher education scholars and practitioners are invested in the concept of belonging as it has been demonstrated to produce other positive outcomes. Satisfying the need to belong can lead to many benefits for college students, such as engagement on campus, academic achievement, and happiness. However, the link that is often of most interest is how sense of belonging has been linked to students' college persistence intentions (Strayhorn, 2012). Therefore, the

goal of many institutions has become shifting campus environments so that they can positively foster students' sense of belonging by helping students find ways to connect with, or "feel stuck to" (p. 17) others on campus.

Sense of Belonging and Queer Students

Many researchers have taken particular interest in examining the experiences of students of color and queer students through the lens of belonging. A student's multiple, intersecting social identities, such as sexuality and race, simultaneously influence their sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand how students of color and queer students perceive their own subjective sense of affiliation with the institution. However, only three published studies (Duran, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) have looked specifically at queer college students of varying racial backgrounds and how they define and develop a sense of belonging on campus. Vaccaro and Newman conducted a grounded theory study of the experiences of eight, mostly White (n=8, 6 White students, 2 students of color), lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, pansexual-, and queer- (LGBPQ) identified students and how they define, develop, and make meaning of a sense of belonging during their first year of college. Their study led to three main findings: 1) participants generally define sense of belonging as a sense of community, of acceptance, of knowing you can be yourself, and of safety; 2) associate belonging within three different contexts: university, group, and friendship; and 3) participants' meaning-making in these contexts were intricately related to their identity as LGBPQ people, with varying levels of comfort and outness regarding their sexual identity.

Sense of Belonging and Queer Students of Color

Similarly, Strayhorn's 2012 national study of gay students of color at predominately White and historically Black colleges and universities found that friendships are a significant positive factor in developing a sense of belonging. To satisfy their emergent need to belong, gay men of color who participated in the study, engaged in various activities on and off campus. These included salient communities, such as ethnic and gay nightclubs and student organizations; spirituality and religion, such as church attendance and prayer; and relationships, including dating, hooking up, and fictive kin. Strayhorn found 55% of students in the study established fictive kin relationships with fellow students, community members, or gay faculty of color to seek satisfaction of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). These fictive kin relationships were family-like connections they developed with meaningful individuals, such as boyfriends, community members, gay faculty members of color, older gay students, and allies that they could rely on for support. Students reported that these relationships connected them with people of similar identities or to those who accepted them for who they are as well as helped with their incorporation into college life. These were all important for students in their sense of belonging.

Duran's (2018) study of queer students of color, used a photovoice phenomenological methodology to explore campus belonging. For the queer students of color in Duran's study, belonging resulted from having both of their marginalized identities validated, was dependent on each student's personal interests, and existed in smaller networks not to feeling connected to the whole campus community. While Vaccaro and Newman's study demonstrated that their mostly White (6 of 8 participants)

first-year LGBPQ students felt a sense of belonging to the institution, Duran's queer students of color participants only felt a sense of belonging toward smaller networks that they were a part of on campus. Duran stated this finding illuminates how sense of belonging may differ for queer students of color than for White queer students. This supports previous researchers' theories and findings (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012) that belonging is largely shaped by each student's context and their perceptions of the campus environment.

Summary of Identity and Meaning-making Sensitizing Construct

Based on the research reviewed in this first sensitizing construct, I approached my research study with the following understandings: students' identities must be researched, understood, and supported intersectional, that meaning-making is a key part of how students develop and understand their intersecting identities, and that as students progress through their meaning-making development, they also develop a clearer sense of where and with whom they choose to belong. While there exists a dearth of empirical studies on queer and trans students' meaning-making processes and sense of belonging, the emerging research illuminates the ways queer and trans students develop in their meaning-making process and foster a sense of belonging on college campuses. To support meaning-making processes and feel that they belong, queer and trans students must have an opportunity to explore their identities in intersectional ways, be surrounded by people of similar and different identities, and find people and places that affirm them in their queer/trans identities as well as other social identities they hold (i.e., racial identities). All of the authors concluded that relationships matter significantly in queer students' meaning-making and sense of belonging. Students' relationships with their

peers, mentors on campus, and with fictive kin influence their feelings of connection and

belonging. Duran's (2018) finding that students can feel a sense of belonging as it relates

to their smaller peer group is an important departure from other theorizing and findings

about belonging that link students' sense of belonging only with the institution at large.

Attending to the importance of individual relationships in queer and trans students'

college experiences could repurpose the idea of belonging, not as an institutional

construct but as an individuated one that is a core part of student's meaning-making.

Section Two: Critical Perspectives on the Experiences of Marginalized People

Renn (2010) stated, "College and university have evolved to tolerate the

generation of queer theory from within but have stalwartly resisted the queering of higher

education itself" (p. 132). Indeed, higher education has been the site of much research on

LGBT/queer people, identities, and activism; however, it has seemingly remained

untouched by queer theory (Renn, 2010). Even 10 years after Renn wrote on the status of

queer research in higher education, queer theory and other critical theories remain

marginal and under-utilized in higher education scholarship, especially in the context of

understanding students meaning-making, development, and sense of belonging. Renn

contended that increased adoption of queer theoretical approach (and I would also extend

this to other critical theoretical bodies, such as critical feminist and critical race

theoretical approaches) would enhance understanding of queer students' experience in

higher education as critical and queer race scholarship seeks to disrupt normalizing

discourses.

Critical theory makes explicit relations of power and privilege in society and

highlight the significance of societal norms in shaping the ways we conduct our lives.

These theory bases can help to expose foundational assumptions upon which we have

built many structures, policies, and cultural practices in society. Critical theories' ability

to provide new ways of looking at structures, norms, and relationships seem particularly

helpful for higher education scholars who work to understand the ever-changing

experiences of college students. Critical theory is diverse and vast fields of study that are

rapidly expanding and involve a lot of disparate ideas. As such, there are many ways

critical theory can be utilized to help (re)examine the experiences of queer students in

college. However, in this review I focus on four themes that emerged from my review of

critical and queer theoretical literature: questioning the institution as a neutral/beneficial

place, challenging majoritarian definitions of success and failure, examining how

intersecting racial identities impact formations of queer community, and the necessity of

queer kinship as a space for meaning-making in queer communities.

The Institution as a Neutral and Beneficial Place

Most higher education scholarship positions the institution as a neutral system

that is designed to benefit all students. However, like any organizational system, higher

education institutions support and replicate systems of domination and oppression

through their policies and practices. One of the main things that critical and queer

theoretical perspectives can offer is the deconstruction of the normative functions of

higher education institutions, that is, queer theorists encourage scholars to recognize the

fact that no act that takes place within a system can be ideologically neutral.

Intersectionality scholars (e.g., Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989) remind us that forms of

power can be seen both at the macro-level in institutions, like higher education, and at the

micro-level in individual interactions between students and staff members. Micro- and

macro-level forms of domination are happening all the time, simultaneously to support and reaffirm each other to create and sustain social hierarchies and power. Therefore, exploring the ways that the system of higher education reaffirms macro- and micro-level forms of domination and discrimination is necessary to complete understand students' experience in college.

Critical theorists Moten and Harney (2004) contended that the university is always a state strategy, advancing state agendas, and, therefore, the actual beneficiary of the institution is the state and not the people (students, faculty, or staff). With this understanding, Moten and Harney suggested that the only possible relationship to have with the university is to be in the "Undercommons" or to be "in but not of the university" (p. 101). This can be seen in direct opposition to the notion of students developing a sense of belonging to a college or university. The institution can be actively hostile to the identities some students hold and can inhibit their meaning-making intentionally or not. With this understanding, it can be important for scholars and practitioners to question what is the benefit of students, especially students with marginalized identities, to have a positive relationship with the institution when the institution is operating against their best interest? In their exploration of the concept of the undercommons, Moren and Harney contended that subversive intellectuals (or maroons) must problematize the university and its connections to the state, labor force, professionalization, social reproduction, and criminalization. The same can be extended to scholars who intend to fully analyze the experiences of students in higher education. This examination cannot start with the university as a given. To do so would be to continue to replicate the status quo. If scholars seek to understand how to better the university, we have to fully

understand the true functions of the university and work against them. As Moren and Harney contended, "to be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it" (p. 105).

Challenging Majoritarian Definitions of Success and Failure

One key way in which higher education institutions may center their own interests and marginalize those of their students is in adopting a systemic approach to student success. Higher education scholarship clearly indicates that an institution's interest in nurturing student success stems both from an interest in helping students achieve their goals and also careful attention to budget and accountability. However, these versions of success have been narrowly defined by higher education scholars and institutional pressures to perform the work of higher education effectively and efficiently may lead to the erasure of student perspectives on student success. In short, queer theory helps to show that, while higher education institutions have defined success based on high test scores, engagement in leadership roles in student organizations, or timely graduation from college, they may have lost track of the importance of student identity development and meaning-making, particularly for marginalized students whose needs may not always be at the forefront of institutional decision-making. At the most mundane level, this discontinuity may produce a lack of alignment between student and institutional definitions of success or failure, and at the most extreme, it may lead institutions to label stunning successes for individual students as a failure by institutional definitions.

Queer theorist Halberstam (2011) stated that common understandings of failure are linked to capitalism. In a market economy, there must be winners and losers and success is linked with profit. However, failure can also be seen as:

> A way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed, failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities. (p. 88)

Queer theory offers an alternative to hegemonic systems in its association of failure with non-conformity, anti-capitalist practices, and differing relationship configurations. As such, Halberstam suggested that failure must be located within the range of affects that we call queer and asks if it is possible to produce generative models of failure that do not just posit two equally bleak alternatives (futurity/positivity and nihilism/negation); rather, failure can be seen as a prompt to discover, to fall short, to take a detour, find a limit, to avoid mastery, to critique, to challenge power.

Expanding notions of failure help to illuminate the limited way in which systems, such as higher education institutions, view and then reinforce the success/failure dichotomy. What possibilities could exist for supporting queer students of varying racial background if we expanded definitions of success and the opportunities within failure? Questioning dichotomies and binaries within the system of higher education also allows for exploration of intersectionality and what possibilities could exist if institutions could de-bureaucratize student experience and allow for exploration of the intersections between gender, sexuality, and race in the failure of institutions. Many higher education services support the aggregation of student experience, investing in majoritarian projects that not only limit versions of success but also prohibit exploration of intersectionality. With specific offices or services for various social identities, like a multicultural center,

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sexuality center, and religious life, institutionally (and intentionally) no room is left to explore intersectionality. Like most majoritarian projects, the students most able to withstand this siloing of identity support services are the students who are least impacted by it—the more privileged students who may only experience marginalization based on single identity. This often results in more marginalized students getting more messaging that the institution was not made for them, furthering feelings of alterity and isolation among the most marginalized students.

Queer Racial Identities and Queer Communities

Critical and queer theory also offer a more complex lens into students' experiences and meaning-making by challenging scholars to go beyond overly generalizing and treating queer students as a monolith who all experience higher education institutions in the same way. Students' multiple, intersecting identities must be taken into account when seeking to understand their experiences. Critical queer scholars, like Barnard (2004), caution against generating identity communities on the assumption of commonality among queers and, rather, encourage the emphasis on the differences among and within queers. Disidentitification (Muñoz, 1999) explores the unique ways that those outside of mainstream racial and sexual identities often make meaning of their own identities through transforming cultures by working on, with, and against dominant ideology for their own purposes.

Barnard (2004) explored how sexuality and race are not disparate forms of subjectivity but, instead, are systems of meaning and understanding that formatively and inherently define each other. They do not exist independently of each other; race is always already sexualized, as sexuality is always-already raced. The single-issue

homogenization implied in the gay community is but a fantasy that has been invoked by institutions of the state (such as higher education) in attempts to enforce compulsory heterosexuality (Barnard, 2004). However, some more privileged (White, wealthy) gay and lesbian people have been interested in assimilating into these institutions and, in doing so, have become the singular vision of queer people that gets represented in mainstream media and non-profit organizations. This results in support services that operate under homogenized, white-washed assumptions of how best to serve all queer people and immense racial division within queer communities (Barnard, 2004). Queer people of color not only experience heterosexism but also experience the constraints of racism (and classism, sexism, ableism, and so on) and, therefore, are not fully supported or recognized through single-identity politics.

Barnard (2004) cautions that "when any marginalized subjectivity (i.e., gayness) becomes the basis for community, it will in turn, create and enforce marginalizing prioritizations and exclusions" (p. 4). Cohen (1997) stated that current conceptions of queer identities and politics are limiting by the "dominant constructed norms of state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality" (p. 441).This has certainly been the case on many college and university campuses in attempts to organize queer community support organizations and/or resource centers. These college communities have failed to acknowledge the differing relations to dominant and normalizing power that exist for queer people with varying racial (and class) identities (Cohen, 1997).

True radical, transformational potential is located in the ability for queer people to create a space that is in opposition to dominant norms, where non-normative, marginal, and most vulnerable positions are centered, and an intersectional lens is utilized to

recognize how an interlocking system of domination regulates and polices most people (Cohen, 1997). Cohen stated that the transformational queer politics "does not search for opportunities to integrate into dominant institutions and normative social relationships, but instead pursues a political agenda that seeks to change values, definitions and laws which make these institutions and relationships oppressive" (p. 445). An intersectional analysis is needed to fully understand who and what the true enemy is and where and how potential allies can be found. Cohen contended that community and movement building should not be rooted in a shared history or identity but rather in a shared "marginal relationship to dominant power" (p. 458). As such, scholars interested in understanding meaning-making processes of queer and trans college students must complicate and destabilize notions of community and identity by recognizing that multiple systems of oppression are in operation within the students' lives and the institutions use social identity categories to regulate and separate students (Cohen, 1997).

Disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) explores the ways that those with racial and sexual identities that fall outside of mainstream culture navigate their identities not just through the binary options of "with" or "against" mainstream identities but, rather, by transforming and fashioning a queer world for themselves. Munoz's perspective on how marginalized people perform, survive, and create change in society is crucial to understanding alternative possibilities that exist for marginalized students as they make meaning of their identities and the world around. Muñoz stated that marginalized people can transform culture by working on, with, and against dominant ideology, a process he calls "disidentification." Through disidentification, marginalized people are able to explore the intersections and short-circuiting of identities that results from misalignments

with the cultural and ideological mainstream norms. Muñoz's work also stresses that disidentification is a performance, or an attempt to fashion one's own queer world. Meaning-making and identity develop to require space for rehearsal and an ability to try on new ways of being. College is a key time in which many young adults rehearse identities and campuses often provide the space needed for trying on new ways of thinking, being, and performing in the world. Intersectional and intentional places and spaces for marginalized students to understand, rehearse, and perform their intersecting identities in supportive environments are necessary developmental opportunities but are often lacking in formalized college courses and services.

Queer Kinship as a Space for Meaning-making

Kinship theory, originating from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and critical race theory, is interested in understanding the governing principles of relationality (Freeman, 2015). Since queer people's relationships have historically and currently fit outside of those traditional recognized and, therefore privileged, by the state, (Freeman 2015; Weston, 1997) making meaning of other forms of relationality has long been of interest to both queer people and queer theorists. Through laws, systems, and cultural practices, nuclear families (those of a heterosexual couple and/or a parent-child) is a privileged construct and is seen as the only legitimate form of kinship (Weston, 1997). However, many kinship relationships "exist and persist that do not conform to the nuclear family model and that draw on biological and non-biological relations, exceeding the reach of current juridical conceptions, functioning according to nonformalizable rules" (Butler, 2002, p. 14). Freeman (2015), Weston (1997), Butler (2002), Halberstam (2015),

Rodriques (2013), and many others have used queer theory to explore and make meaning of queer relationality and kinships.

Many queer people develop "families of choice" (Weston, 1997, p. 40), this "choice being relative, as it is made under circumstances they have encountered in the world due to their queer and other intersecting social identities, such as race and class (Weston, 1997). These relationships are differential from families of origin in that the individual has discretion to decide who they would count as kin (Weston, 1997). Queer kinships often do not imitate or substitute relationships that an individual has with their family of origin, but, rather, it extends upon family relationships. Especially for queer people of color, whose families often represent ties to their racial, ethnic, and/or religious cultures and communities, it is not often desired or possible for queer people, given how important these ties are (Rodriguez, 2013; Weston, 1997). Often queer kinships come about through a shared history. Weston stated, "This shared history testifies to enduring solidarity which can provide the basis for creating familial relationships of a chosen or nonbiological sort" (p. 36). In addition to a shared history, these relationships usually incorporate symbolic demonstrations of love, material or emotional assistance, and "other signs of enduring solidarity (p. 109). Drawing from Bourdieu's (1977) model of practical kinship, Freeman (2015) noted that kinship is a *habitus* or pattern of behavior that demonstrates care for and commitment to each other. These queer kinships are often built or sustained through private and public queer spaces, such as gay Latinx bars (Rodriguez, 2013). Rodriquez noted the importance of these spaces in the making of queer familia. "Such spaces supply a sense of familia because of the ways in which they foster a sense of latino/a queer belonging" (p. 328).

Freeman (2015) contended that understanding queer kinship is crucial in that a culture's repetition of particular practices actually produces what seems to be the material facts that supposedly grounds those practices in the first place, and when those repetitions are governed by a norm, other possibilities are likely unthinkable and impossible (p. 297).

For higher education scholars, understanding queer kinship theory can help to not only illuminate the many possible forms of relationality that students can and do experience but also the importance of such relationships to queer students and their well-being, happiness, and sense of belonging. Queer kinships are essential not only to students in their time at college but also to their life more broadly. As Freeman (2015) articulated, "Kinship is a private, unevenly distributed social security." Kinships and the *habitus* and spaces that sustain them provide enduring support and security for queer people that may not exist within traditional or biological forms of relations.

Summary of Queer Theory Sensitizing Concept

The exploration of the four themes that emerged from critical and queer theory (questioning the institution as a neutral/beneficial place, challenging definitions of success and failure, examining how intersecting racial identities impact formations of queer community, and the necessity of kinships for queer people) underscores the importance of relying on such theoretical bases to help to expand current understanding of the experiences of queer students of varying racial background, particularly as it concerns to how they develop a sense of belonging and build community on campus. Much can be gained through utilizing critical and queer theoretical approaches to expand current understanding of the experiences of queer and trans college students of varying racial background and how they develop a sense of belonging and build community on

campus. The empirical finding as well as the theoretical themes that emerged in this

sensitizing concept served as a point of departure for my study and guided my research in

an intersectional, critical, and queer direction. This review also highlights the importance

of focusing on the peer-to-peer relationships that do and can exist for queer students on

college campuses. Knowing the importance that these relationships shape queer students'

experiences in college and beyond, affirms the need to implement more spaces and

mechanisms for supporting students in their development of the skills necessary to build

and sustain meaningful peer relationships.

Section Three: Intergroup Dialogue Empirical Literature

<u>What is Intergroup Dialogue?</u>

IGD is a critical dialogic pedagogical model that brings together participants from

different social identity groups to engage in a facilitated process that blends content

knowledge with experiential activities. This structured dialogic process focuses on the

realization of three core education goals: consciousness raising, building relationships

across differences and conflicts, and strengthening individual and collective capacities to

promote social justice (Zúñiga et al., 2007). As Zúñiga et al. have noted, both the

techniques involved and the capacity to realize these outcomes make critical IGD "a

distinct approach to dialogue across differences in higher education" (p. 2). Since IGD

was first developed in the late 1980s at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor to help

address a heightened nationwide attention to acts of overt racism and racial justice

uprisings on college and university campuses, IGD has been adopted on over 150

campuses and takes many different forms: some of these programs function as co-

curricular activities, other function as a credit-bearing course offered in psychology, sociology, education, communication, or social work programs (Zúñiga et al., 2007).

IGD is grounded in the assumption "that interpersonal and cross-group relations on campus are affected by the histories and current realities of intergroup conflict in the United States and that these conflicts must be explored through dialogic encounters" (Zúñiga et al., 2007, p. 3). Communicating about these relations and identity-based differences is not easy and can be emotionally difficult. Tensions often develop between participants as they explore their individual lived experiences and social/historical forces that divide them. Working through these conflicts and working toward understanding requires sustained communication and involvement (Zúñiga et al., 2007), not just a one-time workshop. Typically, IGD is a series of 8 to 12 structured meetings lead by trained facilitators.

IGD is designed to enhance students' capacities to work across differences and to participate effectively in diverse campus settings and prepare them to enter our ever-diversifying society. Across the country, IGDs have been conducted on a variety of topics and manifestations of oppression, including anti-Semitism, classism, and colorism (Zúñiga et al., 2007). The most common dialogue topics include racism and sexism. As a result, most studies included in this review focused on the general outcomes of all student-participants in race-focused dialogues. Since race-focused IGDs are the most common type of dialogues that take place at college and universities, the outcomes of this type of dialogue are also the most well-researched and reported of all types of IGDs. However, there has been a recent implementation of dialogues focused on whiteness/White privilege (Alimo, 2012; Ford, 2012; R. Saldaña, 2011; Yeung,

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Spanierman, & Landrum-Brown, 2013) and sexual orientation/heterosexism (Dessel, Woodford, & Warren, 2011). More recently, in an attempt to focus explicitly on these forms of privilege, IGD practitioners have begun adopting intragroup dialogue. Intragroup dialogues bring together a group of students based around a shared or common identity. These dialogues give students an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences that exist among members of a social identity group. Dialogues with all students of color and dialogues with all White students are becoming increasingly common offerings in dialogue programs across the country. However, only one study has been conducted on the experiences of students of color in an all students of color intragroup dialogue (Ford & Malaney, 2012), and currently, only two studies report on the experiences of White students within all-White intragroup dialogues (Ford, 2012; R. Saldaña, 2011). These dialogues show similar outcomes to those of IGDs, which I review below but also have been shown to offer more effective spaces for students with shared identities to develop more complex understandings of those identities (Ford, 2012; Ford & Malaney, 2012). Collectively, these three studies on intragroup dialogue reveal its potential to provide transformative experiences for participants but in ways that do not differ markedly from what the literature on IGD already documents. These findings suggest that intragroup dialogues can serve as a unique opportunity for students to dive into the complexity of their racial identity with other students of the same or similar race. Unfortunately, no published empirical literature yet explores the intragroup dialogue experiences of queer and trans students. As such, my literature review focuses primarily on IGD outcomes.

Race-focused Intergroup Dialogue Learning Outcomes

After conducting a thorough search, using the search methodology and limiting criteria described above, I was able to find 16 articles, chapters, and doctoral dissertations that discuss the learning outcomes of undergraduate participants in race-focused IGDs. Eight of these studies rely on qualitative methods, such as document analysis of pre- and post- final papers, post-dialogue interviews, or a combination of the two (Alimo, Kelly & Clark, 2002; Ford, 2012; Ford & Malaney, 2012; Murray-Everett, 2016; Saldaña, 2013; Sorensen et al., 2013;Yeung et al., 2013; Zúñiga, Mildred, Varghese, Dejong, & Keehn, 2012). Eight studies utilized quantitative data analysis methods relying on pre- and post-test measures of participant outcomes (Alimo, 2012; Gurin, Sorensen, Lopez, & Nagda, 2015; Gurin-Sands, Gurin, Nagda, & Osuna, 2012; Markowicz, 2009; Nagda, Kim, Truelove, 2004; Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003; Sorensen et al., 2013; Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, Stephan, & Gonzalez, 2011). Sample sizes for studies varied tremendously from 7 students to 501 students, with qualitative studies generally relying on small sample sizes and quantitative studies varying tremendously. All studies explored the learning outcomes of the student participants in race-focused dialogues and the unique factors that led to those learning outcomes. Most of these outcomes were applicable to all student-participants, meaning that they were found to be true for both White students and students of color in race-focused dialogues. However, some studies highlighted specific, differential learning outcomes based on students' racial identity.

Learning Outcomes of Race-focused Dialogues

Empirical literature on the outcomes of race-focused dialogues highlight the many ways in which IGD shapes participant meaning-making. Specifically, this literature

highlights the ways in which participation in IGD shaped cognitive, affective, and action outcomes. Importantly, however, the effects of IGD are not experienced uniformly across participants—with students of racial and ethnic backgrounds reporting positive effects on meaning-making but White students reporting different outcomes from those of marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds.

All participants experienced positive outcomes with regard to cognitive processes—that is, the way that they structured their thoughts about the relationship between self and society (Alimo et al., 2002; Gurin-Sands et al., 2012; Murray-Everett, 2016) and considered race to be a salient social identity (SID) category about which they thought often (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003). Empirical studies also consistently showed that all participants realized gains in critical thinking as a result of IGD participation (Alimo et al., 2002; Gurin et al., 2015; Murray-Everett, 2016). Findings about enhanced meaning-making related to self and society highlight how many students, in reflection, recognized that their thinking prior to the IGD experience was less complex, critically conscious, and open minded than they had originally understood it to be (Alimo et al., 2002). Similarly, findings about participants' meaning-making related to race as a salient SID category noted that participants gained increasingly complex understandings of how their own experience fit into broader patterns within society. Specifically, racial salience findings indicate that after participating in IGD, participants of all races considered race as a core SID in how they saw themselves. All students thought more frequently about being a member of racial group, suggesting that interracial dialogue can positively contribute to raising awareness of the centrality of one's racial identity (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003). Finally, findings related to critical thinking provide a broader context for

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understanding all findings related to meaning-making, namely, that participants in IGD

processes left those experiences with an enhanced capacity for analyzing their own

experiences, the truth claims of others, and the way that society functions. For example,

the structure of IGD guarantees conversations and interactions across difference, and this

is essential in developing more critically conscious thinking. One dialogue participant

reflected on her experience and stated,

> The things I learned in the dialogue program were things that I could not learn
> from a textbook or a lecture. I didn't really think about it and it was really the
> stories and the personal interaction that really came through for me. (Alimo et al.,
> 2002, p. 51)

This student's reflections speak to how students come to think more critically through the

context of their IGD participation.

In sum, the cognitive outcomes studies included in this literature review

demonstrate the marked increases in the sophistication of meaning-making for all

participants in race-focused IGDs, including participants of color and White participants.

Through their IGD experience, participants gained new ways of thinking and seeing in

the world. Participants honed their critical thinking skills and developed a critical

understanding of society. The studies suggest that students were able to develop a new

understanding of themselves. Participants of all racial identities became more aware of

their own positionality in the world and how their racial identities have impacted their

lived experiences. Empirical literature on IGD also suggests that cognitive outcomes for

all participants within race-focused IGDs support the realization of relational outcomes as

well. Relational outcomes, which speak to the emerging feelings and emotions students

develop through dialogue participation about interacting with others, make use of many

of the learning outcomes or variations in thought process introduced by the cognitive outcomes described above.

Relational Outcomes

As they interacted across difference and rehearsed skills in cross-cultural communication, all participants in race-focused IGDs also realized relational outcomes. These outcomes included increased comfort in talking about race and challenging others (Alimo et al., 2002; Murray-Everett, 2016) and increases in empathy (Markowicz, 2009; Sorensen et al., 2011; Sorensen et al., 2013). Collectively, these relational outcomes demonstrate participants' growing willingness and capacity to engage in meaningful interactions across difference within the context of stronger, more empathic relationships. Consistent with literature on meaning-making, an increased capacity for interpersonal understanding is essential for ongoing understanding of oneself.

Theories of meaning-making emphasize the importance of shifting from externalized sources of authority to more self-directed determinations of what is true and good (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Consistent with this literature, empirical findings demonstrate that all participants in race-focused dialogues gained increased comfort in challenging the problematic assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of others (Alimo et al., 2002; Murray-Everett, 2016). Notably, these findings appear to be globalized (Murray-Everett, 2016)—meaning that participants can apply these new skills beyond the context of the IGD in which they were developed. In part, this capacity for globalization arises because they arise from a fundamental shift in worldview prompted by exposure to the multiple perspectives from which individuals from different groups all view the same phenomena. As Alimo et al. stated,

It is possible that participation in IGD moves ALL students from viewing interaction with those racially or ethnically different from themselves as negative- whether in academic or social contexts - to viewing it as something they can at lease passively positively engage. (p. 52)

One particularly important set of empirical findings related to the increased capacity for engagement across difference concerns the increased feelings of empathy as a result of IGD experiences (Sorensen et al., 2011; Sorensen et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2013). Simply put, whether participants choose to engage in interaction across difference or not, higher levels of empathy demonstrate a concrete change in the way that they are making meaning of their experiences and may indicate an increased likelihood of future behavioral change (Sorensen et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2013). Notably, designs incorporating longitudinal follow-ups have also shown that these findings persist over time (Sorensen et al., 2011) and are present whether the form of empathy being examined is largely affective or driven by a critical examination of structural forces shaping a person's experience (Wong et al., 2013). The findings of Wong and colleagues suggest that IGD's relational outcomes include the development of multi-directional empathy wherein almost equal percentage of empathy directed from White students to students of color (67%) as there was from students of color to White students (70%).

The relational outcomes of race-focused dialogues reviewed above demonstrate the ability of IGD courses to change and improve the way participants interact with others. These studies suggest that IGD participation can significantly increase students' empathy, both within their racial group and across racial lines. The studies suggest that dialogue is able to increase participants' comfort in talking about race and challenging others. Increased empathy and comfort in talking about race allows for new ways of understanding and being in relationship with people of different racial identities.

Action Outcomes

As noted above, changes in both cognitive and relational outcomes functioned as key forms of meaning-making that prefaced changes in the behaviors of participants in race-focused IGDs. These action outcomes include acting to educate and collaborate (Gurin-Sands et al., 2012; Sorensen et al., 2013) and an increased confidence in taking action (Murray-Everrett, 2016; Nagda et al., 2004). Gurin-Sands et al. (2012) found that IGD participants developed a stronger understanding of their own identities, which supported their ability to educate others and build alliances across differences. These findings were subsequently echoed by those of Sorensen and colleagues (2013), who developed a composite index of action consisting of acting to educate self, acting to educate others, and acting collaboratively. Their findings suggest that participation in a race-focused IGD resulted in a higher index of action than for non-participants.

Participating in facilitated face-to-face interactions and hearing personal stories from other participants during the IGD course also allowed participants to develop a more intimate understanding of the impacts of prejudice and discrimination on people that they know. The personalization of discrimination strengthened participants' desire to take action for social change (Nagda et al., 2004). Likewise, participants reported concrete behavioral changes as well. For example, Murray-Everrett (2016) demonstrated that pre-service teachers who participated in a race-focused IGD resulted in both the development of facilitation skills and the later utilization of those skills in teaching. These facilitation skills enabled the pre-service teachers to better lead classroom discussions on racism and other social justice issues. In sum, action outcomes reviewed

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above highlight how race-focused IGD courses can impact how students feel about taking action and increases their desire and ability to take action.

Summary

The 11 studies reviewed above demonstrate how outcomes for participants in race-focused IGDs could result in an increased capacity for meaning-making. These cognitive, relational, and action outcomes were found to be significant for both students of color and White students who participated in IGD courses. The studies also provided an understanding of how cognitive, relational, and action outcomes are connected and can lead to one another. Cognitive outcomes, such as critical thinking skills and self-awareness, were shown to be connected to relational outcomes, such as an increased comfort in talking about race and increased empathy. For example, participants' heightened ability to see the world from different perspectives could create more capacity to empathically understand the experiences of others. Prior studies have shown that this form of perspective-taking is fundamental to meaning-making (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Similarly, increased comfort in talking with others about race and increased relational empathy could aid in the development of participants' desire and ability to take action with others across-race to create change. The net effect of these findings is to show that all participants in race-focused IGDs realize positive outcomes integral to meaning-making; however, as I will show subsequently, participants also realized additional, differential outcomes based on their racial identity. These findings raise questions about whether some participants benefit more from IGD and whether studies of meaning-making in IGD might reveal differential patterns across participant identity.

**Differential Outcomes Based on Race/Ethnic Group Membership in
Race-focused Dialogues**

While the findings reviewed above hold true for all student participants across racial identity groups, some studies also reported on differential findings that were true only for students of color or White students. In this section, I show how cognitive, relational, and action outcomes contribute to the meaning-making of IGD participants as they come to understand themselves, others, and society as a whole in increasingly complex ways.

Cognitive Outcomes

Studies of IGD consistently demonstrate cross-race variations in both pre-dialogue characteristics and post-dialogue cognitive outcomes. For example, during Gurin et al.'s (2015) pre-dialogue tests, White students had higher rates of attributing racial inequality to individual causes, whereas students of color more frequently attributed racial inequality to structural causes within society. However, in their post-dialogue, all students demonstrated an increase in structural attributions for racial inequality—with White student participants showing the largest gain and making up a sizeable portion of the gap in their understandings of racial inequality. Likewise, Ford (2012) showed that, while many White participants had White ideological scripts prior to participants in an intergroup or intragroup dialogue course that they used to normalize privileges associated with whiteness, these scripts were at least partially ameliorated by dialogue participation. Specifically, Ford found that participants in the intergroup and intragroup dialogues had developed a much more sophisticated understanding of how, as White people, they were socialized to minimize race and were better positioned to articulate the meaning of their own whiteness.

These findings echo those of R. Saldaña (2011) and Yeung et al. (2013) whose findings suggest that intentional discussions of whiteness contribute positively to White racial identity development. A similar form of meaning-making has been shown in intergroup and intragroup dialogues that center the experiences of multiracial students: Ford and Malaney (2012) found that multiracial participants in dialogues demonstrated an increased saliency and meaning of their racial identity, understanding of the complexity of racial identity development, and understanding of how structures of power and privilege impact their agent and target identities. In these dialogues, a key processual dimension of participant meaning-making seems to be IGD's focus on developing increased knowledge about the social construction of whiteness, White privilege, and institutional racism (Ford & Malaney, 2012; Yeung et al., 2013). These differentiated but fundamentally consistent findings for participants of color and White participants highlight the importance of carefully considering variations across race within IGDs. As Zúñiga et al. (2012) have shown, when students reflect on other participants' stories, most commonly, these reflections are often about within-group differences: students of color most frequently gained new awareness of in-group differences and how someone may be more or less disadvantaged based on their gender, socioeconomic class, where they grew up, and immigrant/citizenship status, whereas White students highlighted within-in group differences based on class, religion, immigration and citizenship status, first language, gender and sexual orientation. Overriding this deeply engrained tendency to personalize all dialogue experience and to, instead, connect them to broader structural factors is a key strategy for promoting participant meaning-making.

Relational Outcomes

Although IGD produces many critical cognitive outcomes, the empirical literature documenting these outcomes makes very clear that they stem from interpersonal relationships developed within and beyond the course. One of the most important themes that emerged from Zúñiga et al.'s (2012) analysis of racism conversation topics was the importance of the sharing of personal experiences. For White students, personal experiences of racism "brought home" the concept of racism. For some students of color, hearing others' personal experiences with racism alerted them to the idea that racism is still very much alive and happening in our society. For many participants, IGD offered the first real opportunity for this interaction across difference. Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) have shown that while students of color and White students differed in their thinking about racial identity and comfort in talking about racial issues prior to starting the IGD program, participation in the dialogues did NOT affect students of color differently than White students. However, these same findings revealed that students of color valued the dialogue learning process more than the White student participants. Nagda and Zúñiga suggested this finding may be due to the fact that students of color felt more included in the learning process in comparison to traditional classrooms where they are sometimes the only student of color or asked to serve as a token representative of their race.

Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) noted that students of color had the support from a dialogue facilitator who is from their own or similar racial/ethnic background. Nagda and Zúñiga concluded that, since the learning process showed to be a crucial predictor in outcomes, IGD's facilitated structures have potential for creating meaningful intergroup engagement. Nagda and Zúñiga's study results suggest that learning occurred for both

students of color and White students. It also points to the potential of IGD as offering a counterspace for both students of color and White students because of its ability to structure the dialogic encounter about racial issues and encouraging equal participation in the dialogue from all students. Ford and Malaeny (2012) drew a similar conclusion from their work, wherein they suggested that that IGD provided multiracial participants an opportunity to frankly and openly discuss relationships between skin color and self-esteem, their individual biases and prejudices as well their experiences of race at college that was sorely lacking elsewhere on campus. Separately, IGD-as-space has been shown to be important for White participants as well—not as a counterpace but rather as an opportunity to share personal information and receive critical feedback about their own colorblind racism that might prove challenging elsewhere on campus (Yeung et al., 2013).

Action Outcomes

Although empirical studies of IGD remain limited in their capacity to demonstrate concrete behavioral changes, they consistently show action outcomes that reveal potentially transformative changes. However, as with other kinds of IGD outcomes, these display some variability by race. Alimo (2012) noted that, while IGD contributes positively to all participants' commitment to social justice, it has the potential to promote White racial ally development and the adoption of a White anti-racist standpoint. These changes are only possible due to the racial privilege of White participants and therefore not observable for students of color. These findings also align with those of Yeung et al., (2013) who found that participating in IGDs motivated White students to take small steps toward becoming allies. In their interviews, students reported a number of changes in

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their behaviors and social relationships (Yeung et al., 2013). Findings from Yeung et al. and Alimo support the growing research on the impact of IGD on encouraging and supporting White students in taking action. Notably, similar commitments to change have been observed in studies focused on students of color, where Ford and Malaney (2012) found that multi-racial students articulated the importance of personal accountability and responsibility in creating change following participation in an IGD experience. In sum, these studies suggest that IGD can be a way of increasing White students' frequency of taking action as racial justice allies. White students are also more motivated to take action after participating in a race-focused dialogue. Whether they may be large or small, these actions can aid in meaningful social change work.

<u>Summary</u>

In sum, the studies discussed above that reviewed differential outcomes for students of color and White students in race-focused IGDs demonstrate that IGD can be a valuable, educational experience for all students. While students of color and White students may experience *different* learning outcomes, or outcomes at different levels, the studies suggest that *important* learning experiences are taking place for all students. IGD is shown to be a beneficial developmental experience for all students, as it supports cognitive and relational outcomes that support students' meaning-making development. The studies also help in providing possible explanations of what may account for these differential outcomes within the unique IGD experience, in comparison to more traditional academic spaces.

Outcomes of White student participants suggest that participating in a race-focused IGD could strongly support the development of racial identity consciousness and

an understanding of socialization and whiteness. Having an increased self-awareness and nuanced understanding of how whiteness and White supremacy shape our society and the lived experiences of students are invaluable for any White student who desires to build cross-race relationships and take collective action for social change. Differential outcomes of students of color participants in IGDs have been less documented than the outcomes of their White peers. However, the one current study (Ford & Malaney, 2009) focusing on multiracial students suggests that participating in IGD could support students of color in important meaning-making processes, including making meaning of their racial identity, understanding the complexity of their racial identity development, and understanding of how structures of power and privilege impact their agent and target identities. IGD has been shown to be an important and unique counterspace for students of color. Since only one study currently exists on the specific outcomes for student of color participants, more research is needed to better understand the experiences and learning outcomes of students of color in race-focused dialogues.

Sexuality-focused Intergroup Dialogue Learning Outcomes

Race has been and continues to be the most prevalent topic of IGDs offered on college campuses. However, as this pedagogical practice continues to expand, more colleges and universities are offering dialogues on other social identities and social justice issues. While still sparse, offerings for dialogues on sexuality are increasing. Four empirical articles and chapters have explored the outcomes of participating in a sexuality-focused IGD. There are no current studies that explore the experiences of intragroup dialogues among all queer college students, as these dialogues have rarely, if ever, been offered on college campuses. In 2011, Dessel et al. released the first empirical study on

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IGDs focused on sexual orientation that focused on the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) undergraduate students in sexuality dialogues. Since then, there have only been three other empirical studies published on these dialogues' outcomes. Dessel et al. (2013) examined the outcomes of heterosexual students in sexual orientation dialogues. Joslin, Dessel, and Woodford (2016) investigated the experiences of Christian, secular, and LGB students in a Christianity and sexual minority IGD. Miles, Henrichs-Beck, and Bourn (2014) explored the potential of IGD methods for engaging straight, queer, and religious students around the topics of religion and sexual orientation. All of these studies begin to illuminate the outcomes of student participants in dialogues focused on sexual orientation. As with the race-focused studies, learning outcomes found in the studies on sexuality-focused dialogues fall into three categories: cognitive, relational, and action.

General Learning Outcomes of Sexuality-focused Intergroup Dialogues

Joslin et al.'s (2016) qualitative study (n=10) utilized semi-structured interviews to understand the experiences of masters of social work students in Christianity and sexual minority IGDs. The researchers wanted to know more about 1) What motivated students to participate in this dialogue and what did they hope to gain? 2) What challenges did the group face? and 3) What did students learn through their participation in the group?

Joslin et al. (2016) found that a few students across the identity groups joined the group to have a chance to engage meaningfully in conversation about sexuality and religion, which, for some, was not being adequately addressed in their other classes. Many students believed they had a responsibility to learn more about the topic and

welcomed the opportunity to participate in the dialogue. For some Christian-heterosexual participants, motivation came from wanting to demonstrate that not all Christians dislike LGB individuals and just want to live out their faith. Last, some students were interested in joining the group to help them to grow personally in learning across differences and a desire to explore meaningful topics.

Joslin et al. (2016) articulated some challenges in putting together and facilitating the IGD. According to dialogue pedagogy and based on power differentials in society, LGB people would be considered the oppressed group in these dialogues. However, a number of the secular-LGB participants and a Christian-heterosexual participant argued that the Christian-heterosexual students assumed the position of the oppressed group because of their negative experiences in the social work program. For the LGB-secular students, this self-positioning by the heterosexual students left little room for the LGB students to share their experiences of oppression, especially religiously based discrimination, which would be critical to fostering learning among heterosexual students. This self-positioning made many LGB students feel silenced and powerless in the group. The dialogue group was also challenged to effectively include the experiences of the students who identified as both Christian and LGB. A third challenge was around the appropriate use of the term ally. Nearly all of the heterosexual-Christian students in the group called themselves allies at some point during the dialogue, even if they endorsed negative beliefs toward LGB people. Overall, the LGB-secular students described feeling frustrated and silenced by the views of the Christian-heterosexual group around allyhood and their positioning as the oppressed group, and many LGB-secular

students coped by disengaging from the discussion and hesitated to raise concerns during the dialogue.

The Joslin et al. (2016) and Miles et al. (2014) studies reported on the outcomes of all student participants in their sexuality and religion focused dialogues. Though there were unexpected challenges in the dialogue groups as discussed previously, important learning outcomes did occur for all participants. These reports suggest that learning outcomes occurred for all students in the cognitive, relational, and action categories.

Cognitive Outcomes

Joslin et al. (2016) found that a number of the participants indicated that the dialogue positively impacted their knowledge and attitudes or aspects of them. All student participants reported gaining a more complex understanding of intersecting identities. For those in the Christian-heterosexual group, the dialogue appears to have helped them to better understand their LGB peers and issues affecting LGB individuals. Many of the secular-LGB students described developing a more nuanced understanding of the centrality of religion in the lives of LGB students of faith and some of the struggles they face because of their dual identities. For several of the secular-LGB participants, the dialogue was the first time they had engaged with LGB-Christian people, and they were grateful for the opportunity to learn about how one might struggle with the intersection of these identities. The students in the secular-LGB group appeared to be the least impacted in learning about their Christian-heterosexual peers but greatly appreciated the chance to learn about the experiences of the LGB-Christian students. Last, the impact of the group seemed to be the most striking for the Christian-LGB students, specifically in identity

integration, although many of them did not talk a lot about their sexual identity in the group.

In 2014, Miles et al. conducted a similar study (n=9) with undergraduate participants in a religion and sexual orientation IGD. The team used mixed methodology to understand how participants in religion and sexual orientation dialogues at a relatively conservative college experienced the dialogue's group climate and found it to be the most important events that occurred in each of the sessions. Miles et al. found that students gained a broader understanding of intersectionality, developed greater understanding of social identity groups, and developed a more critical consciousness of social justice issues.

Relational Outcomes

Miles et al. (2014) also found that participants in the religions and sexual orientation IGD experienced development in group climate. The survey measures found that avoidance of problems decreased, and engagement increased. However, conflict remained the same. Miles et al. suggested that this could be a reasonable outcome to expect in an IGD experience. Through dialogue, participants are able to hone their critical understandings and the skills to engage in difficult conversations. Therefore, more conflict could occur among participants at the end of the dialogue as a result of students' newly developed comfort and ability to engage across difference. Miles et al. also reported that group members established meaningful relationships that created a sense of trust and safety. Through dialogue, students were able to build connections across difference, engage in open personal sharing, and learned how to approach conflict without debate. Participants also reported a reduction in intergroup prejudice.

Action Outcomes

Joslin et al. (2016) and Miles et al. (2014) also reported action-focused learning outcomes from sexuality-focused dialogues. Joslin et al. found that participation in Christianity and sexual minority IGDs inspired many participants to want to alter their behaviors to become more supportive of LGBT people and issues. Miles et al. (2015) also found that, at the end of the dialogue, participants were motivated to further their learning on LGBT issues, participate in future IGDs as well as advocate for social change.

Summary

Miles et al. (2014) and Joslin et al. (2016) reported on the learning outcomes of all student participants in the sexuality- and religion-focused dialogues. Their studies suggest that valuable outcomes occurred for all participants in all three outcome categories. Student participants were able to develop increased understanding of issues affecting LGB people, build connections across identity groups, and a desire to take action to be more supportive of LGB people and learn more about LGB peoples' experiences. The studies also reported that students struggled with how to make meaning of their multiple, intersecting identities as Christian-LGB people. For these reasons, I am interested in exploring how students in my dissertation case study make meaning of their intersecting racial, gender, and sexual identities and how these intersecting identities will impact their experiences in the dialogue course.

Differential Outcomes Based on Sexuality Group Membership in Sexuality-focused Dialogues

While Joslin et al.'s (2016) and Miles et al.'s (2014) studies focused on the outcomes of all participants in their sexuality focused dialogues, the Dessel et al. (2011) study focused specifically on the outcomes of lesbian, gay, bisexual student participants

and Dessel et al. (2013) covered outcomes specific to heterosexual participants in sexuality-focused dialogues. Differential outcomes for both LGB participants and heterosexual participants were found in the cognitive and action categories.

Outcomes for Queer Student Participants in Sexuality-focused Intergroup Dialogues

Dessel et al. (2011) conducted a small qualitative study of seven sexual orientation dialogues that took place at an undisclosed university between 2000 and 2007. In their research, Dessel et al. focused on the experiences of LGB students participating in dialogue by systemically analyzing their narratives presented in their final course papers. The researchers sought to develop an understanding of sexual orientation dialogues from LGB students' perspectives, not to examine the effectiveness of the sexual orientation dialogues.

Cognitive Outcomes

There were several cognitive outcomes found by Dessel et al. (2011) among their LGB identified participants. Every LGB student participant described their experience in the course as enlightening and rewarding, transformative and an opportunity for personal growth in one's own sexuality and feeling of self-efficacy (Dessel et al., 2011). Participants developed a more positive sense of self through participating in the dialogue. LGB students also reported learning about identities within LGB communities and challenged biases and assumptions they had about those identities. Students began to grasp the concepts of multiple and intersecting identities in race, gender, social class, and sexuality. The students recognized that these various other social identities gave them privilege, even as members of a marginalized social identity group (Dessel et al., 2011).

LGB students also became more away of the systemic forces of oppression, including the huge role the media plays in heterosexism and other forms of oppression.

Action Outcomes

Dessel at al. (2011) found that the sexuality-focused dialogues served as a supportive space for LGB students to explore difficult topics. Dessel et al. suggested that, through becoming more conscious of society's injustices, LGB students began to see an increased importance in taking action to challenge power imbalances in society that are based on sexual identity. Student participants "emerged with new learning about themselves and others and experienced the empowerment to engage in personal and social activism for change" (p. 1149). Dessel et al. found that students reported taking action on both the individual and structural level. On the individual level, some students began claiming their LGB identities more publicly by outing themselves, sometimes for the first time. This included students who came out to their family, friends, displaying buttons and other symbols of LGB pride on their backpacks, discussing LGB issues more frequently, and interrupting homophobic language. On the structural level, student participants reported planning to engage in further activism, including activism in the LGB community and within their spheres of influence. During the dialogue, one student even wrote to the Dean of Academic Affairs at their college and requested that an LGB awareness training be conducted for all engineering students.

Summary

Dessel et al.'s (2011) study reported many outcomes for the LGB participants in sexuality focused dialogues. Their study suggests that dialogue can result in meaningful cognitive and action outcomes for LGB students. Through sexuality-focused IGD, LGB

students experienced transformative personal growth and developed a more positive sense of self. They also honed their understanding of their intersectional identities, such as race and class. LGB students reported that they felt an increased importance in taking action on issues affecting LGB people. Dessel et al.'s (2011) study suggested that LGB dialogue participants are also taking action on the individual and structural levels. The outcomes reported in Dessel et al.'s study suggested that sexuality-focused dialogue can be an important developmental experience for LGB students. For these reasons, I am interested in exploring the outcomes of my own case study dialogue for queer and trans students. Will the outcomes be similar or different for queer and trans participants in a race-focused dialogue as they are in this sexuality-focused dialogue study (Dessel et al., 2011)? Does the dialogue focus contribute to the differences? If so, how?

Outcomes for Straight Student Participants in Sexuality-focused Intergroup Dialogues

In 2013, Dessel et al. published their findings of heterosexual student participants (n=46) in sexual orientation IGDs. Similar to their 2011 study, Dessel et al. utilized qualitative analysis of final papers and post-dialogue semi-structured interviews. Dessel et al. (2013) findings suggest that heterosexual students' learning outcomes were also found in two of the three outcome categories, cognitive and action.

Cognitive Outcomes

Dessel et al. (2013) found that heterosexual students who participated in the IGD developed affirming perceptions of LGB people and the LGB community. This helped students to begin tackling stereotypes they held about LGB people. Heterosexual students also reported gaining a better understanding of the heterosexist society that they live in. Through the dialogue, students were able to learn more about heterosexism. They saw

how media and other institutions, including the government and religious organizations "promote and project heterosexual norms" and recognized their own heterosexual privilege. Students also developed an increased understanding of intersectionality. Dessel et al. (2013) stated,

> Participants were able to recognize connections and relationships between their different identities and the experiences of sexual minority students. In particular, participants were able to identify shared experiences among targeted identity groups, such as similar problems faced by being female or a racial minority. (p. 1073)

Action Outcomes

Heterosexual students also reported changes in behavior they intended to make following the end of the dialogue as well as reported actual changes they had begun to implement in their lives already (Dessel et al., 2013) These changes were noted to occur interpersonally, intrapersonal, and on a systems or societal level. Dessel et al. found that the individual actions that heterosexual dialogue participants intended to take after completing the dialogue include to challenge behaviors and actions of people in their lives, to increase their relationships with LGB people, to interrupt discriminatory language used by peers and family, to further self-education on LGB issues, and being more open as an LGB ally. Institutional actions heterosexual students intended to take included voting for equal rights for LGB people, attending pro-LGB marches, and working to become a dialogue facilitator (Dessel et al., 2013). Dessel et al. found that over half of the heterosexual students who participated in the dialogue also reported several forms of action they had already taken. These actions included challenging friends and family when they heard stereotypical jokes or comments and promoting conversations on LGB issues in their classes. Students reported having changed their own

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language patterns and displaying ally buttons on their backpacks and clothes. Dessel et al. found that heterosexual students have researched LGB issues in order to be better informed advocates when confronting homophobic behaviors and conversations.

Summary

Dessel et al.'s (2013) study reported that heterosexual student participants in sexuality-focused dialogues experienced cognitive and action outcomes. Through participating in the dialogue, heterosexual students were able to tackle stereotypes they held about LGB people and develop an increased understanding of homophobia and their own heterosexism. Through examining their own intersecting identities, heterosexual students were better able to relate to LGB students' experiences. After the dialogue, heterosexual students were more likely to challenge others and change their own behaviors to be more inclusive and supportive of LGB people. Heterosexual students were also more interested in increasing their relationships with LGB people. All these findings suggest that sexuality-focused dialogues can be a meaningful and important experience for heterosexual students who are interested in developing more knowledge and skills to be in support of and alliance with LGB peoples.

Conclusion

The four studies on sexuality-focused dialogues included in this review suggest an impact on LGB and heterosexual students' development through participation in IGD. More work and assessment are needed in this area, especially in the inclusion of transgender-identified students and the exploration of LGBT students participating in an intragroup dialogue, with all participants identifying within the LGBT community. For future sexual orientation dialogues, Dessel et al. (2013) also suggested that dialogue

creators and facilitators challenge the binary that may exist. "The binary intergroup dialogue model may imply a homogeneous experience for any particular social identity group. We emphasize that within group diversity needs to be recognized, as LGB individuals' experiences vary greatly" (p. 1076)

Factors that Contribute to Learning Outcomes

While each of the prior studies' main foci were on the learning outcomes of undergraduate student participants in race-focused IGDs, many of the authors also had findings that spoke to the factors within students' IGD experience that led to the reported learning outcomes. Since IGD is a unique pedagogical model, it is important to understand the process that takes place during the dialogue and the factors that influence the learning outcomes of student participants. The studies included in this review highlighted the importance of dialogue factors and their ability to shape learning outcomes. These factors can be grouped into three categories: factors relating to the Dialogue Pedagogical Model, factors relating to communications processes, and factors relating to psychological processes.

Dialogue Pedagogical Model

IGD utilizes unique pedagogical practices that do not take place in other, traditional classrooms. Dialogue facilitators use practices that are interactive in nature and extend learning beyond just the sharing of information but also create opportunities for student to student interactions, personal reflection, and storytelling. The studies included in this review reported on a lot of factors relating to the dialogic pedagogical model, including active participation, valuing of the model, the facilitated dialogue

structure, skilled group facilitation, and group cohesion. These studies suggest that the dialogue pedagogical model can have a great impact on students' learning outcomes.

Active Participation

Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) found that students in their quantitative study (n=42) benefited from active participation in dialogue. They found that the benefits students receive from IGDs are dependent not simply on being a part of the encounter but on being active participants and valuing the dialogic learning process in IGDs. This finding suggests that active dialogue participation should be an important consideration when designing and facilitating future dialogues.

Valuing of Dialogue Model

Similarly, the Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) also found that the more the students valued the dialogic learning process, the more pronounced the change for them. Nagda and Zúñiga found that students' valuing of the dialogic learning process predicted significant and positive changes in five of the eight outcomes: centrality of race, perspective-taking, comfort in communicating across differences, beliefs about conflict, and bridging differences. With these strong results, the authors confirmed that the more students valued the dialogic learning process, the more pronounced the change would be for the student. The results suggest that "the benefits students receive from intergroup dialogues are dependent not simply on being a part of the encounter, but on being active participants and valuing the dialogic learning process in intergroup dialogue" (p. 122).

Facilitated Structure and Dialogic Process as Critical Factors

The unique dialogue learning process in IGD is due, in part, to the facilitated structures and dialogic processes that occur. Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) stated, "The

identification of the dialogic learning process as a crucial predictor in outcomes suggests that potential of facilitated structures for meaningful intergroup engagement" (p. 122). To see if general learning processes have similar impacts as the dialogic process, Nagda and Zúñiga included items in their factor analysis that could reveal the impact of the general learning process. The authors used those factors to measure general learning process as a predictor. The authors found that general learning did not significantly impact any outcomes. Thus, they were able to conclude that measures of engagement across differences are particular to the IGD course. "These results further strengthen our findings of dialogic learning process as a critical factor in fulfilling intergroup dialogue goals" (p. 122).

Skilled Group Facilitation

Nagda and Zúñiga (2003) also highlighted the critical role that facilitators play in supporting the dialogic process. Facilitators shape the dialogue by leading the group in structured activities, helping ground the dialogue in common experiences and simultaneously encouraging the sharing of multiple perspectives among the students. Facilitators also model important dialogic communication skills: listening, sharing, asking questions, identifying assumptions, exploring differences, and forging collaborations. "Students are, therefore, able to experience how dialogue works in vivo, and how differences can be openly acknowledged and woven into the conversation" (p. 124).

Markowicz's (2009) quantitative study (n=74) also explored the value of trained IGD facilitators on participants' learning outcomes. Since each of the five dialogue groups in Markowicz's study had different co-facilitators, the author examined if there

were any significant differences in the co-facilitators' level of effectiveness. Results of the study show that there were no significant differences in co-facilitator effectiveness between each dialogue group. These findings suggest that, while facilitators held multiple different identities and differing levels of experience, there were no significant differences in group leader characteristics across the dialogue groups. This suggests that the strength and training of dialogue facilitators should be an important consideration of future dialogue planning.

Group Cohesion

Markowicz's (2009) study also explored the impact of group cohesion on student's outcomes. The author found that there was a significant within-group main effect for group cohesion. Markowicz defined group cohesion as "group members' involvement in and commitment to the group and the concern and friendship they show for one another" (p. 46). In this study, group cohesion increased from pre- to post-test in each of the five groups. This increase suggests that the dialogue groups were functioning as expected and that group cohesion might be significantly related to group outcomes examined in the study (Markowicz, 2009).

Communication Processes

Studies included in this review also highlighted communications processes that take place in IGD courses that can impact students' learning outcomes. Communication processes refer to the interactions and exchanges that take place between participants throughout the dialogue. These factors include group the sharing and hearing of personal stories.

Sharing and Hearing of Personal Stories

In their qualitative study (n=8), Alimo et al. (2002) found that the sharing and hearing of personal stories coupled with the guidance of the facilitators was instrumental in developing more complex and critical conscious thinking. Alimo et al. stated, "The IGD experience is qualitatively different than what happens in the classroom because students' stories—their personal narratives—become the vehicle for learning about a subject, instead of peripheral to or altogether excluded from learning" (p. 51). Similarly, one of the most important themes that emerged from Zúñiga et al.'s (2012) analysis of racism conversation topics was the importance of the sharing of personal experiences. For many students, these stories helped them understand how systemic racism happens and enacts inequalities.

<u>Psychological Processes</u>

Studies included in this review also highlighted psychological processes that took place in IGDs that impacted students' learning outcomes. One of the main psychological processes that studies suggested impacted students' learning is engaged listening. While the sharing of personal stories is a powerful communication process explained above, Zúñiga et al. explored engaged listening and the psychological processes that occur for dialogue participants and the impact that it can have on dialogue participants.

Engaged Listening

While research suggests that participants in IGD take in, reflect upon, and apply perspectives and information they gain from their dialogue group. Most studies have not looked at what IGD participants actually listen to, whom they listen to and why, and what, if anything, they gain from listening. Zúñiga et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative

analysis (n=248) of post-dialogue interviews that explored engaged listening in IGD. The authors distinguished between just hearing other people's words and engaged listening, which they described as "times when participants listened to something said in their dialogues that engaged them enough to be able to remember significant details about what had been said and describe them to an interviewer after the IGD course was over" (p. 84). The researchers utilized data gained during two separate and sequential analyses of post-dialogue interviews conducted with 248 participants in either a race/ethnicity or a gender IGD course at nine higher education institutions as part of the MIGR study. After initial analysis, the authors refined their analysis to a smaller sample of 40 interviews to examine engaged listening in IGD in greater detail.

When examining "When in Dialogue do participants recall listening," the authors found that many of the examples of engaged listening were associated with activities or sessions aimed at encouraging speaking and listening in the large group, specifically the Testimonials activity, the Caucus Groups/Fishbowls activity, and the Open Dialogue sessions that focused on "hot topics." To explore the question, "Whom do people recall listening to and why?" the authors worked to identify, whenever possible, the social identities (e.g. race/ethnicity and/or gender) of both the listener and the speaker(s) during the moments of engaged listening that participants discussed in their interviews. Zúñiga et al. (2012) found that participants who described something that someone in the other social identity group said often noted that this kind of listening helped them to think about things they had not thought about or that what they heard that challenged their stereotypes, beliefs, or assumptions about the other identity groups. Participants who

described something people in their own social identity group said often referred to the discovery of within-group differences between the participant and the speaker.

For their third research question, Zúñiga et al. (2012) explored the question of "What do people recall listening to?" The authors concluded that the topic of discussion may be a very important factor to consider when trying to understand what engages students in IGDs in engaged listening. Within their 40 interview sub-sample, they found over 250 times in which an interviewer mentioned a recalled story or conversation. After analyzing the topics of the recalled conversations and stories, Zúñiga et al. found that they quite easily clustered into the three main categories or topical areas: "race/ethnicity-related topics," "gender-related topics," and "other" topics.

Race/ethnicity-related topics were mentioned by nearly two-thirds of participants recalled stories and conversations. This included times when participants recalled sharing a personal experience of racism, about a discussion about racism as a system of inequality, or to a discussion about White privilege. The second most common topic that participants recalled in the area of race/ethnicity-focused stories and conversations were focused on how racial categories, identities and stereotypes were found to be confusing, problematic, or fluid.

When reviewing their findings on race/ethnicity focused conversation or story topics and reflection on the range of topics related to race/ethnicity described by interview participants, Zúñiga et al. (2012) suggest that the range "illustrates the complexity of issues participants in these dialogues grappled with and the role of listening in helping students to clarify their own viewpoints, understand the experiences and viewpoints of others, and begin to bridge across their differences" (p. 91).

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Zúñiga et al. (2012) also wanted to know "what are the consequences of listening?" Some participants had immediate reactions, shared something about it in the dialogue group and moved on. Other times, participants had emotional responses in the moment, then thought about the exchange afterward, and eventually arrived at a new understanding by the time of the post-dialogue interview. Immediate responses to engaged listening included emotional, verbal, and reflective responses that participants recalled having immediately after listening to something shared in their dialogue group. Emotional responses included feelings or gut level reactions and empathic responses that involved participants trying to understand the feelings of others. These emotional responses were often the direct result of hearing another participant share something new or experience a difficult moment in the dialogue. Verbal responses were those times when participants immediately decided to speak in response to something they listened to in the dialogue.

The Zúñiga et al. (2012) study sheds new insight into what IGD participants remember doing, thinking, feeling, and understanding while they were engaged in listening to others in the dialogue. The research illuminates the factors that influence participants' engagement, communication, and learning during IGD. The study demonstrates just how complex, multi-layered, and rich engaged listening is. Last, the study's findings point to the importance of engaged listening in fostering student learning outcomes through participating in IGD. Zúñiga et al.'s findings suggest that when participants actively listen to one another in the IGD, they will continue to reflect, grapple with, understand, and act upon what they heard—even long after the dialogue ends.

Conclusion

The studies included in this review demonstrated the impact of factors within IGDs on student participants' learning outcomes. The pedagogical model factors, communication factors, and psychological factors combine to create unique learning opportunities for students that do not take place in other, more traditional learning environments. Attending to the factors that can influence IGD's powerful learning outcomes can aid in the development of more impactful IGD courses. These unique factors help to demonstrate how IGDs differ from other courses, even from those designed to explore social justice topics. Understanding the unique pedagogical practices present within IGD, in addition to the powerful learning outcomes that students can experience, can aid in advocacy for the creation of more IGD courses.

Discussion

The 20 quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies included in this review of IGD outcomes confirm that IGD is a unique learning experience for college students that can result in many varied learning outcomes. These findings support the claim that dialogue can be a meaningful educational and developmental opportunity that supports meaning-making capacity for all participants across race and sexuality identity.

Outcomes and factors covered in this review also reaffirm unique possibilities of IGD in exploring students' multiple identities. Students in all types of dialogues reported gaining a better awareness and understanding of their social identities. Through dialogues, students were also able to reflect on how their social identities have shaped their own lived experiences and also impact the experiences of other students.

Findings on learning outcomes from the studies included in this review suggest that IGD is a practice that allows students to build cognitive and relational outcomes/skills necessary for meaning-making development. These outcomes and skills are helpful for their success at increasingly diverse colleges and universities and also necessary for navigating and shaping the rest of their lives. The outcomes and skills gained through dialogue participation can help to build and sustain meaningful relationships across difference. These relationships and bridge-building are needed on campuses, where fractures across lines of difference are ever present and in our increasingly polarized society.

The empirical literature on IGD reveals its unique learning and developmental outcomes; however, it has limitations that presently keep us from understanding the full potential of IGD in students' meaning-making process. For example, most studies included in this review focused on cognitive and relational outcomes and not on action or behavioral outcomes. This may be because behavioral outcomes are more challenging to measure. Changes in behavior may not be as readily apparent at the completion of the dialogue and more time would be needed to properly study the dialogues impact on participants' actions. However, it does demonstrate IGD's ability to support cognitive and relational learning experience that can become a unique catalyst for marginalized students' meaning-making. Last, most of the dialogues included in this review focus on a singular identity or manifestation of oppression (e.g. race or sexuality). More research is needed to better understand the challenges and opportunities that could emerge from the intentional creation and facilitation of intersectional-focused IGDs.

<u>**Conclusion and Implications**</u>

Even as IGD programs continue to grow, they remain a marginalized and underfunded practice on college campuses. Due to funding and support constraints, there exists limited opportunities for college and universities to expand current course offerings or conduct research studies on the impacts and outcomes of IGD praxis. Further development and exploration of IGD research is needed in order to explore the importance of these spaces for all students across social identity groups, including marginalized student populations. By attending more closely to the learning outcomes of IGDs, institutions can create stronger IGD programs that facilitate better outcomes and leave a lasting impact on the experiences of all students in college.

The findings presented in this review provide many implications for IGD practice, IGD scholarship, and for my own dissertation study. The studies reported on many factors that can influence students' learning outcomes. Honing IGD practices to increase and strengthen these factors could help in generating more learning outcomes. Understanding the unique pedagogical practices present within IGD, in addition to the powerful learning outcomes that students can experience, can aid in advocacy for the creation of more IGD course.

This review illustrates how learning outcomes are present across dialogue topics and for students of different social group memberships. It also demonstrates the dearth of research on the outcomes of sexuality IGDs and intragroup dialogues as well as studies that explore the learning outcomes of students of color in race-focused inter- and intra-group dialogues. IGD scholars in higher education should focus their attention on

understanding what learning outcomes occur in dialogues with these foci and on the experiences of students from marginalized populations in IGD courses.

This review of IGD empirical literature serves as my first sensitizing construct and conditions me to notice the specific developmental learning outcomes that are frequently realized within IGD and the factors that happen within IGD settings that support the development of these outcomes. Findings, outcomes, and factors reported in this review shaped why and how I conducted my dissertation study on a race-focused IGD for all queer- and trans-identified students. Findings on learning outcomes from the studies included in this review suggest that IGD is a practice that allows students to build necessary cognitive and relational outcomes/skills. Relationships with peers have been shown to impact students' sense of belonging. Therefore, I was curious to explore if and how IGD can shape queer and trans students' sense of belonging on campus. The differential outcomes that were reported for students of relative privilege (e.g. White students and heterosexual students) and for students of relative marginalization (e.g., students of color and LGB students) encourages me to explore the differential outcomes that may occur for White queer and trans participants in comparison to the queer and trans students of color in the dialogue.

Summary and Conclusion of Sensitizing Concepts

The literature review presented above detailed the three sensitizing constructs that I utilized when designing, conducting, and analyzing my research study. The first sensitizing construct began with higher education scholarship on intersectionality, identity development, meaning-making, and sense of belonging. In the second section, I covered a summary of some critical and queer theories that further a critical

understanding of queer and trans college student meaning-making process. The third

section defines IGD and continues with a detailed examination of empirical studies on

race- and sexuality-focused IGD courses. All of the literature reviewed helps locate this

study within traditions of inquiry and provides information about both the contexts I

worked within as well as the social constructionist frame I held as I analyze the data. My

review of other empirical studies on similar topics helps me to identify gaps in what is

known and demonstrates how integral the proposed study will be to build on existing

theory. The next chapter will offer details on the specific research methodology I utilized

as I engage in this research project.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

I pursued this study to understand, support, and uplift the voices of marginalized

college students. My own experiences as a White, genderqueer, queer person and my

professional experiences as a student affairs administrator, social justice educator, and

IGD facilitator helped me to recognize how queer and trans students are marginalized on

college campuses and more research was needed to understand the needs and experiences

of queer and trans college students. My commitment to uplifting the voices and

experiences of marginalized students makes me a qualitative researcher by nature.

Qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences of marginalized

people who are often left out of larger, quantitative studies in which people's experiences

get reduced to numbers. While this type of research serves an important purpose, I am

more interested in gaining a richer, individualized understanding of people's lived

experiences and be able to share their voices and experiences through using rich

narratives that are only possible through qualitative research. In addition to my natural

disposition to qualitative research, a qualitative approach was best fit to address the

purpose of this study.

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of queer and trans college student

who participated in a cross-race/ethnicity dialogue and how they made meaning of their

intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for

social change. I also examined the role that participating in a semester-long, cross-

race/ethnicity IGD course played in furthering participants' understanding of these four

concepts. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the following three

research questions:

1) How do queer and trans student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of their **intersecting identities** and **sense of belonging**?

2) How do queer and trans college student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of **cross-race relationships** and **taking action for social change**?

3) How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the intergroup dialogue experience** on understanding their intersectional identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change?

The qualitative underpinnings of these questions led me, as a qualitative researcher, to

seek out methods that would support me in gaining a complex understanding of the

individual lived experiences of participants. As I designed my study, I selected

qualitative, constructivist grounded theory methodology, as it would allow me to explore

these complex qualitative research questions as well as capture and preserve participants'

experiences and meaning-making processes. I explain in more detail my research

paradigm, methodologies, and reasons for selecting them for this study in the following

section.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Using a qualitative research approach allowed me to gain an in-depth

understanding of the experiences and meaning-making process of each of the 11

participants. Qualitative research involves the collecting of nonquantitative textual (e.g.,

interview transcripts, documents) and visual materials (e.g., artifacts, video recordings)

that document the human experience of others in social action or reflective states (J.

Saldaña, 2015a). Strauss and Corbin (1994) contended that the purpose of qualitative

research is to understand the perspectives of the participants. Qualitative inquiry is customized (J. Saldaña, 2015b), in that it is an inductive, emergent process that involves the researcher's personal understanding and approach to the study's design, implementation, and write up. J. Saldaña (2015b) stated, "It is unlikely that any two qualitative researchers independently exploring the same phenomenon will arrive at the same conclusions. We bring our personal signature to the inquire, from research design to write up" (p. 6).

Qualitative researchers approach their work differently based on their worldview or paradigm. A paradigm is a researcher's set of basic beliefs and assumptions about what knowledge is (ontology) and how we come to know what we know (epistemology). Accordingly, my paradigm as a constructivist qualitative researcher informs the way that I see my research problem, question, data, and analysis. My worldview and understanding of my research process may not be the same as the way that any other person would see the exact same problem, question, data, and analysis. The epistemology or the "theory of knowledge construction based on the researcher's world view" (J. Saldaña, 2015b, p. 5) that a qualitative research uses is uniquely their own, since each of us most likely think like no one else (J. Saldaña, 2015b). Constructivist qualitative research aligns with my own worldview for several reasons. I believe that there is not such thing as "neutral," "bias-free," or "objective" research (J. Saldaña, 2015b, p. 6). In qualitative research, "the researcher is the instrument" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 112), which means, as a qualitative researcher, I am asked to examine, understand, and articulate the lens, filters, and angles through which I view the world (J. Saldaña, 2015b). These lens, filters, and angles greatly influence the way we perceive and interpret life,

our research, and the understanding of "truths" in our world. J. Saldaña (2015b) described

a researcher's lens as "a significant attribute such as the researcher's gender, age,

ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic class, or occupation. A lens might also consist of

the particular research methodology employed for a study… or disciplinary approach" (p.

6). Our understanding of truths in the world is socially produced and influenced by the

way we see and experience the world.

 As a social justice educator, being aware of my lens, or the way I view and

approach the world, is a necessary part of my everyday work and feels even more

important in a research setting when I am seeking to better understand and share the

experiences of others, who may have very different lens or lived experiences than I.

Qualitative research allows for people to share their own stories, and I believe that it can

be a powerful way to share the voices of those who are marginalized, whose experiences

challenge the grand narratives that previously have been constructed by dominant

scholars.

 When I began this research study, I chose to approach the study using a case study

research design. Qualitative researchers often employ case study methodology to

understand one specific case, with the goal of making transferable observations that

might be applied in comparable cases. In this study, I had conceptualized the case as the

unique IGD course in which all my participants were enrolled. I chose case study

methodology because it would allow me to better understand "the particularity and

complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important

circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). However, after some initial data collection and

analysis, I realized that I had collected a lot of powerful data on students' individual

experiences. I was struck by the narratives that were shared by the students in the study

about their own lived experiences and meaning-making processes. I felt that the

experiences from the study' participants could help to offer valuable insights and

transformative lessons for scholarship and practice. J. Saldaña (2015b) advised,

> Ensure your methodology and methods harmonize with each other as you plan the
> study, but also be prepared to change those initial choices as fieldwork proceeds
> and you discover that another methodology or other methods may be more
> appropriate to secure the data and answers you need. (pp. 10-11)

As J. Saldaña (2015b) noted, sometimes a researcher's most important design decision

involves modifying their original plan. In my case, If I had chosen to continue to with a

case study design, I would have been limited in focusing on the IGD course as a whole,

rather than the individual student experiences. The same beliefs and views as a research

that brought me to do this qualitative study in the first place led me to want to follow the

individual emerging stories. I wanted to be able to explore, share, and bring to light the

unique experience of these marginalized students, whose experiences have been rarely

shared, especially within this particular setting and experience. With this new

understanding of my data and study goals, I redesigned my study as a constructivist

grounded theory study.

Constructivist Grounded Theory Research

Constructivist grounded theory follows the tradition of grounded theory.

Grounded theory methods consist of flexible and eclectic methods for collecting and

analyzing qualitative data and allows researchers to construct explanatory theories about

the specific context they are studying (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory has become a

common choice of researchers across many social science and education fields since the

late 1960s. Grounded theory is a process rather than a technique. It serves both as "a way

to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 17). Grounded theory begins with inductive data and uses constant comparative methods to encourage researchers to go back and forth between data and analysis until saturation is reached (Charmaz, 2014). The process of constant comparative analysis starts with comparing data with other data to generate initial codes, then it progresses to comparing the researcher's interpretations of the data in their codes and categories, with more data. This comparison process continues through focused coding and the creation of categorization during which time the researcher can recognize any incomplete understanding they have of the data and raise questions to better fill the properties of existing categories and develop new conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, the researcher utilizes the final codes for theory-building. The constant comparative analysis in grounded theory allows the researcher to ground their final theorizing in the experiences and words of their participants (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

The goal of grounded theory is to produce new understanding of a pressing problem in the world that we do not yet know how to approach because we currently know too little about the problem. Little is known about the lived experiences of the participants in my study and how they make meaning of the concepts that I explore through this study. Not having enough information to truly understand the experiences of these students creates real problems in their lives and has real consequences for these students and the colleges and universities they attend. Rossman and Merriam (1998) note that when limited literature is available about a particular topic, an exploratory study is warranted and that grounded theory is often the best choice when doing exploratory

research. In particular, a constructivist approach to grounded theory fits well with the goal of my study since "Constructivists study *how*—and sometimes *why*—participants construct meaning and actions in specific situations (Charmaz, 2014). A constructivist grounded theory approach challenges assumptions of traditional grounded theory, which created general abstract theories and leads to the production of contextualized and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991).

A constructivist approach to grounded theory research is also in line with my worldview as a qualitative researcher. Constructivist grounded theory operates under the assumption that both the data and analyses are social constructions that reflect the conditions of their production and that both the researcher and participants interpret meaning and actions (Charmaz, 2014). It acknowledges that a study's data and analysis are co-created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other data sources (Charmaz, 2014). "A constructivist approach means more than looking at how individuals view their situations…also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation. The theory depends on the researcher's view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it" (p. 239).

Since so much of the research is reliant on my point of view as a researcher, it is important to become aware of my "presuppositions and grapple with how they affect the research" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 240). Researcher reflexivity is a key part of constructivist grounded theory since our research analysis may also reproduce the current ideologies if we are not keenly reflexive. I describe the methods I used to remain reflexive throughout the study in the following section.

Constructivist grounded theory methods also focus on how the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often hidden structures, networks, situations, and relationships (Charmaz, 2014). This approach allows for "differences and distinctions between people [to] become visible as well as the hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity that maintain and perpetuate such differences and distinction" (p. 240). Given that there are 11 participants in this study, each with their own intersecting identities and lived experiences, it was important for me to be able to explore the differences and distinctions between their experiences. A constructivist grounded theory approach enables the researcher to understand more fully how the narratives of the individual participants are situated in a larger context—whether that be the IGD course, the college or university system, or systems of oppression more broadly. I shared in my review of literature (Chapter 2) some of the sensitizing concepts that help me to be attuned to differences of power and larger social structures (Charmaz, 2014).

The Context: Cross-race Dialogue for Queer and Trans (LGBTQ+) Students

This study explored the experiences of student participants in a specific race/ethnicity section of a multi-section IGD course at Large NE Public. The participants in this section were all queer- and trans (LGBTQ+)- identified students from diverse racial and ethnic identities. The course focused on race, ethnicity, and the individual, cultural, and institutional manifestations of racism as well as on building capacities to promote racial justice. The course was co-facilitated by two graduate-level students who held similar identities to the participants of the dialogue. One facilitator, Grey, identified as a White non-binary queer person. The second facilitator, George, identified as a Black Jamaican queer male. The dialogue facilitators were enrolled in a practicum course and

also participated in weekly individualized coaching session during the semester of their dialogue course facilitation.

Course Composition

While the course followed the typical sustained, critical IGD curriculum used in many other cross-race dialogues at a Large NE Public, it was unique in its composition of students. This course was the first time that this institution offered a section of the course that was a cross-race dialogue for only LGBTQ+ people. The course's unique focus was designed and implemented specifically for this research study. I was interested in studying a course with this focus and composition so that it could explore race, racism, and racial justice within queer and trans communities as well as students' intersecting race, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities.

As described in more detail in the following section on participants, the 11 students who participated in this study hold diverse racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. This section of the course was open to students of all races and ethnicities. Although the goal of IGD is to have an equal number of participants across racial categories, the predominantly White institution at which I collected my data has so few students of color that it historically has not been possible to balance participation rates amongst White students and students of color. For example, cross-race dialogue courses at Large NE Public are typically composed of 60%-70% White students and 30-40% students of color. However, the IGD enrollment for this semester was unique in that it had an exceptionally high enrollment of students of color. Seven participants identified as students of color, one student as multi-racial/mixed, and 3 participants identified as White.

IGD Curriculum

All students in the study were enrolled in a four-credit diversity course at a Large NE Public and earned academic credit for completing the course. As noted earlier, the course followed the common, critical IGD four-stage model. This model is reviewed in detail in Chapter 2. Throughout the course, participants engaged in a variety of experiential and interactive activities and class dialogues as well as course readings and reflective assignments that are intentionally designed and scaffolded to allow for participants' personal reflection, storytelling, and consciousness raising. Over the course of the semester, students completed a range of assignments meant to support students' reflection and learning. In this particular section, students completed a pre-dialogue paper before the course began. Then, during the course, students submitted weekly reflection logs about their experiences in the previous course and the assigned readings/videos. Last, students completed a final paper after they completed the dialogue course. Each of these assignments was completed by every student as part of their graded course requirements. I also received consent (consent process is described below) to collect, store, and analyze these assignments as data sources for my research study. This study focuses on the findings from my analysis of the pre-dialogue and post-dialogue papers. Each assignment is described in more detail below.

Site Access and Recruitment Procedures

I was able to gain access to the research site through the course director of the IGD course at Large NE Public. I knew the course director from previous collaborative projects. My request to conduct the proposed study was built upon a foundation of this pre-existing relationship. After an informal request, the course director agreed to support

my dissertation research project through the creation of a unique section of the dialogue course. The course director runs multiple sections of the IGD course each Spring semester. For the purposes of this study, the course director created a section of the Spring 2019 course that was a cross-race dialogue for all queer and trans (LGBTQ+) identified students.

Recruitment

To gather interest in the special section of the IGD and the case study, I employed indirect and direct recruitment. I detail the processes I utilized for each recruitment type in the paragraphs below.

Indirect Recruitment

Any undergraduate student from the Large NE Public and a nearby Small NE Private could enroll in the IGD course. Once enrolled, all students were sent a placement form by the course director that asked for some demographic information and first and second choice of dialogue sections in which they would like to participate. The course director sent me a list of all students (with names and email contact information) who completed the placement form and expressed interest in the study's section of the IGD course and who meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria. I then contacted all students on the list via email to notify them of the study and provided study information. A copy of the email invitation script is included in Appendix A. If the student consented to be part of the study, they were then enrolled in the study's section of the IGD course. If the student did not meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria or chose to not be a part of the study, the student was enrolled in another section of the IGD course.

Direct Recruitment

Once I gained IRB approval, I was able to directly recruit students for study participants. I worked with staff leaders of campus LGBTQ+ organizations, support services, and resource centers to inform LGBTQ+ identified students about this section of the IGD course. The teaching team and I also utilized flyers, emails over list serves, and verbal announcement at meetings and classes to spread the word about the study and recruit interested students. If students were interested, they could enroll in the IGD course and then will complete the placement form process as described above in the indirect recruitment section above.

Consent

I gained consent from participants through a printed consent form given out to students before they enrolled in the study's section of the IGD course. A copy of this initial consent form is included in Appendix A. In the initial consent form, participants were asked to consent to section assignments being utilized separately as study data. This included giving permission for me to analyze participants' pre-course paper, weekly reflection logs, testimonial assignment, and post-dialogue paper. Participants were informed that the course was graded by the course co-facilitators and course director, and that I was, at no time, a part of their grading procedures and that co-facilitators and course directors did, at no time, have access to the research study data.

Separate consent was obtained, through a different consent document for participation in the post-dialogue interview. The interview email invitation (Appendix E) and Consent forms (Appendix F and Appendix G) are included in the Appendices. Since the interviews are not associated with their required course assignments, compensation in

the form of $40 Target gift cards was given to the 9 participants who chose to participate in the post-dialogue interviews.

Participants

Ten participants in this study were undergraduate students at Large NE Public and one participant was an undergraduate student at a neighboring small private college, Small NE Private. All students enrolled in the IGD course at Large NE Public and consented to be a part of the study. I employed specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the make-up of the study was comprised of students with a range of racial, gender, and sexual identities. This is the same type of demographic sorting and placement that is typically done in IGD courses. To be included in the course and the study, students had to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) or other marginalized gender or sexual identities. Participants must have enrolled in this specific section of the IGD course and completed the voluntary informed consent.

To allow for students to name their identities with the words that they felt best suited their identities, on the course enrollment demographic form, students were provided some examples of each social identity but had an open answer response for each of the social identities. This meant that students could self-identify their social identities with any word(s) they wanted. For example, the form asked, "Race (for example, Asian, bi/multiracial, Black, Latino/a/x, Native American, Pacific Islander, White, etc.)" and students then had a blank line to fill in any word or words they desired. The 11 participants held a wide variety of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, ability, and other social identities. Table 1 shows some demographics of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Table

Pseudonym	Pronoun	Year	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality
Priya	all pronouns*	3rd	South Asian	[Indian]	nonbinary/ genderfluid	Lesbian
Jessica	they/them	3rd	White	Caucasian	Genderqueer	Bisexual/ queer
Jericho	he/him	3rd	Biracial	African American & Puerto Rican	Man	Gay
Eris	they/them	4th	Black	African American & Puerto Rican	genderfluid	Queer
Tracy-Ann	they/them	3rd	Black	Jamaican American	Genderfluid (mostly female)	Bisexual
Matthew	he/him	4th	White	Irish, Portuguese	Man	Gay
Seena	they/them	4th	Black	[majoritarian east-African ethnic identity] American	genderqueer	queer
Liezel	She/her	3rd	Asian	Filipino	Cisgender woman	Bisexual
Zander	He/him	5th	Multiracial	[East-Asian ethnic identity] & Irish	trans masculine/male	queer
Devanshi	She/her	4th	Asian	Indian	Woman, cisgender	Bisexual
Cara	They/them	3rd	white	Irish, polish	nonbinary woman	Queer

*Throughout the dissertation, I refer to Priya with "they/them" pronouns for the purposes of consistency and clarity only.

In the pre-course enrollment demographic form, students were also asked about their sexual identity. Just as with their racial and ethnic identities, students were able to write in any identity(ies) that they wanted. Ten of the 11 participants listed one term to describe their sexuality and the 11th participant listed two terms. Of the listed identities, 5 students identified as queer, 4 as bisexual, 2 as gay, and 1 student identified as a lesbian.

Like race, ethnicity, and sexuality, participants were also asked about how they identify their gender on the pre-course enrollment demographic form. Students were able to enter any identity they wanted. Six students chose more than one term to describe their gender identity. For example, one participant said she identifies as a "woman, cis-gender" and another participant said they identify as "nonbinary/genderfluid." Students used a wide variety of terms to describe their gender identity. Three students identified as genderfluid, 3 as women, 2 as genderqueer, 2 as men, 2 as cisgender/cis-gender, 2 as nonbinary, 1 as male, and 1 as trans masculine.

In addition to the four social identities I was most interested in learning about (race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality), students also shared about some other social identities that were meaningful or salient to them. For example, on the pre-course enrollment demographic form, 8 of the 11 participants identified as having a disability. Students described their disabilities in a variety of ways, including "mentally ill," "psychiatric disabilities," "audio processing delay," "anxiety."

Throughout the remainder of my dissertation, I use participants' own words to describe their identities. This means that, for some participants, I use multiple words to describe their gender—like "cisgender woman" where for other participants, I simply refer to them as a "man." I do so to honor participants' own words for their identities and not to make any assumptions about how they or other participants may or may not identify. The only exception to this is in cases where sharing the words that participants used to describe their identities could possibly compromise a participant's anonymity. For example, one participant identified their particular ethnicity within their larger ethnic origin. While this ethnicity was a big part of the participant's identity, it was such a

specific identity that sharing it in my dissertation, along with their other identities, could possibly allow certain readers to determine the identity of the student, given the small number of students with the same ethnic and other social identities in attendance at universities within the northeastern region of the United States. There are a few times in my findings chapter where I refer to a single participant who attended a neighboring private institution. However, I do not share the pseudonym or demographic information for the student since doing so could possibly allow certain readers to determine the identity of the student.

Data Collection Modalities

Once initial consent was obtained, study participants were enrolled in the dialogue course. The study consisted of three phases. Phase I or Pre-Dialogue, Phase II or The Dialogue Course, and Phase III or Post-Dialogue. Data collection methods (document analysis and semi-structured interviews) took place throughout the study and are explained in detail below. Utilizing different data collection methods provided a rich and comprehensive data set, which allowed for data analysis triangulation.

Collection of Documents for Constant Comparative Analysis

One of the data collection methods that I used through many phases of the study was document collection for constant comparative analysis, sometimes referred to as document analysis. Document analysis is "a systemic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). I analyzed two course assignments as part of this research study (the pre-dialogue paper and the post-dialogue paper), which are described in detail below. Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative data collect methods, as it can support triangulation (Bowen, 2009). As a

qualitative researcher, it is important that I draw upon more than one data source so that I can seek "convergence and corroboration" (p. 28) through the use of the different methods. Document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case study research in that it helps to provide data on the context in which the participant lives. (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Analyzing course assignment documents will allow me to better understand the context of the students' experiences.

Bowen (2009) suggested that document analysis can be used in a few ways that are well suited for my particular case study. First, the information in the documents can suggest questions that need to be asked (Bowen, 2009). This information was used in my study to generate and fine-tune questions for the post-dialogue interviews. Second, documents provided supplementary research data from which I gained additional insights and knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Third, documents served as a means to track changes and development (Bowen, 2009). Since students in the dialogue course completed written assignments at different points (before, during, and after the course), I was able to utilize document analysis to compare the papers and identify any changes that occurred in the ways that students reflected on and described their learning and experiences. Last, Bowen (2009) suggested that document analysis can be used as a way to verify findings and cooperate evidence from other sources. Together with the data I gained through semi-structured interviews, document analysis allowed for triangulation and development of clear, well supported findings. Included in this dissertation are data that I collected by completing constant comparative analysis of the pre-dialogue paper and the post-dialogue paper.

Pre-dialogue Paper

The pre-dialogue paper was assigned after students enrolled in the IGD course but before the first dialogue class meeting took place. The purpose of the paper was to have students "reflect back on your lived experiences and your relationships up until this point and how they may have been shaped by your social identities. This paper will help you prepare for your conversations and readings in this Race/Ethnicity dialogue" (Guidelines for Pre-dialogue Paper, Appendix C). Students were asked to write 3-4 double-spaced pages about their experiences, thoughts, and reflections as they related to the paper prompts. The paper provides prompts regarding two topics: 1) The forthcoming dialogue course and 2) social identities and relationships. For the full paper requirements and guidelines, please see Appendix C.

Post-dialogue Paper

After completing the 11-week dialogue course, all participants also wrote a post-dialogue paper. The full guidelines for the final paper can be found in Appendix D. The goal of the post-dialogue paper was to have participants reflect on their experiences in the IGD course and "integrate [their] learning from all aspects of the course, including the assigned readings, testimonial, log assignments, class activities, Intergroup Collaboration Project (ICP), and dialogue sessions" (Post-dialogue paper guidelines, Appendix D). The post-dialogue paper also supported students' "reflection on [their] lived experiences and relationships up until this point and how these may have been shaped by [their] social identities and experience in this IGD course" (Post-dialogue paper guidelines, Appendix D). Students were asked to write a 7- to 9-page double-spaced paper on prompts related to four topics: 1) You and the race/ethnicity IGD for all Queer and Trans (LGBTQ+)

People, 2) Learning about social identities and systems of power, 3) Intergroup relations, and 4) Looking back, moving forward. The complete post-dialogue paper prompts are included in Appendix D.

Semi-structured Interviews

The second method of data collection I utilized in this study was semi-structured interviews. Since the dialogue course was not seen the same by everyone, it was important that I gain an understanding of the multiple views and experiences (Charmaz, 2014). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to obtain this nuanced understanding that would not be available to me through observations or document analysis alone. In qualitative studies, interviews can be used for a variety of reasons, including to understand individual perspectives, to deepen understanding, to generate rich descriptive data, to gather insights into participants thinking, and to learn more about the context (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). I conducted semi-structured interviews as a part of my research study for all of these reasons. Interview questions that ask for elaborate and concrete examples can elicit detailed narratives that enabled me to conduct rich inquiry into the experiences of participants in the case study (Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

The post-dialogue interviews were conducted after the IGD course was completed. The semi-structured interview focused on students' sense of belonging and if and how IGD supports their capacity to build relationships across difference for the purpose of coalition building to take action for social change. Complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix G. For each interview, I contacted students via email (Appendix E) to invite them to participate in post-dialogue interview, to ask for consent (Appendices F and G) and arrange the date and time of the interviews. Nine students

replied to my first invitation to participate in a post-dialogue interview. I sent two reminder emails to participants from whom I had not received a reply. No other participants expressed interest in being interviewed. The interviews took place in a mutually agreed upon campus location. Only the participants and I were present at this location. The interviews took approximately 60 minutes and were digitally recorded. In the beginning of the interview, I went over the informed consent with the participant and asked participants to complete the consent form. For participating in the interview, participants received a $40 gift card for Target as compensation.

<div align="center">**<u>Data Management</u>**</div>

Since I collected data on participants' lived experiences, identities, and other personal information, keeping my study data safe, secure, and well organized was of utmost importance. Throughout the study, I sought to ensure participant confidentiality and privacy. First, I stored all digital audio files, interview notes, interview transcripts, course assignments, and all codes in a password protected UMass Box account. I was the only one who knew this password and had access to the Box folder. Signed consent forms were stored in a locked file cabinet. I was the only person with a key to this file cabinet.

After conducting the interviews, I uploaded the taped interview as an audio file onto UMass Box. All identifiable information (such as names, ID numbers, emails, etc.) were stripped from any document in the study so that participants would not be identifiable. All participants have a pseudonym that is used on the study's documents and final report. The interviews were transcribed using a digital computer-transcription service, Temi, and then corrected for errors by me. Only I had access to the audio files. I will destroy the master key and audio tapes 6-months after the study closes.

Data Analysis Strategies

In order to gain a thorough understanding of how participants experience and make meaning out of the dialogue experience, I engaged in multiple data analysis processes, including informal analysis, constant comparative analysis, and four different coding processes. Since there are many stages to my data collection process and it spans the course of eight months, I was able to engage in an ongoing informal analysis of the data, which enabled me to fine-tune my data collection moving forward, such as my final paper guidelines and post-dialogue interview protocol. For example, I conducted initial informal analysis of participant's pre-dialogue papers early in the semester to inform any necessary changes to my post-dialogue interviews. If I began to notice themes during my informal analysis, I completed memos that detailed recurring concepts or themes before beginning open coding.

Once all the initial data collection was complete, I engaged in constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Throughout the coding process I completed many descriptive and analytical memos that helped me identify patterns in the data. My coding process began with initial open coding then proceeded to focused coding and then to axial and final coding. Each of these stages of my coding process are described in detail below, as well as times when I utilized memoing in my processes. I end this section by sharing an example of my coding process, using an excerpt of text and demonstrating the three levels of coding that I conducted.

Open Coding

Open coding is the first step in the coding process for grounded theorists. I utilized line-by-line coding methods for my open coding. "Line by line coding means naming each line of your written data" (Glaser, 1978 as cited in Charmaz, 2014, p. 124). This process works particularly well with detailed data about fundamental empirical problems (Charmaz, 2014). Coding my data line-by-line allowed me to see otherwise undetected patterns and remain open to the data and nuances in them (Charmaz, 2014). Conducting initial line-by-line coding allowed me to begin distilling and separating data in categories and to see processes. Initial codes also illuminated possible paths to take in my future analysis (Charmaz, 2014). I conducted line-by-line coding on both the pre-dialogue paper and post-dialogue paper from all 11 participants as well as the interview transcripts from 9 participants.

An example of my initial line-by-line coding can be seen in an excerpt from a participant's pre-dialogue paper in the table below. The left side of the table has the paper excerpt written by the student, and the right column contains the initial codes I listed when conducting line-by-line coding.

Table 2

Example of Initial Line-by-Line Coding

Participant Quote	Initial Line by Line Codes
"More than the hardships, the joy of being a nonbinary South Asian lesbian, and being able to be with QTPOC, is a unique type of joy and belonging that I have not found replicated anywhere else. There is a certain freedom in existing in the margins or outside multiples sets of norms, because you can envision many creative possibilities for what more just and equitable society would look like. Our lives are already blurring the lines and pushing the boundaries in a lot of ways. There is something about that is exciting to me. And there are plenty of opportunities to turn these possibilities into material reality." (Priya, post-dialogue paper)	[Hardships], [Joy] [Identity] [Community], [QTPOC] [Joy], [Belonging] [Freedom], [Existing in margins], [Outside norms] [Possibilities] [Justice], [equity] [Blurring lines] [Pushing boundaries] [Exciting] [Opportunities] [Possibilities], [Reality]

As you can see in the example provided above, I tried, where possible to use in vivo codes in my line-by-line coding. Using in vivo codes helps to preserve participants' meaning of their views and actions in the coding itself (Charmaz, 2014). After completing the line-by-line coding for each participant's paper, I memoed about the coding process for that paper and about the initial codes that stuck out to me or reemerged throughout the paper. Doing this for each paper from each participant challenged me to stop coding and capture, in the moment, my conceptual ideas about the codes I found and describe patterns that began to emerge. Memoing functioned as a site for constant comparative method of data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Memoing provided a location to reflect on and articulate the complexity of my role as a researcher. Memoing helped me to move to the second stage of coding, focused coding.

Focused Coding

The second stage in my coding process was focused coding. This stage of coding involved attending to how your initial codes account for your data. These codes are the ones that have appeared more frequently in initial coding or have more significance than other codes (Charmaz, 2014). I used focused coding to engage with my initial codes and memos about my initial coding process to sift, sort, synthesize, and analyze the large amount of data I had collected. Charmaz (2014) stated, "[A]ssessing your initial codes involves comparing them with data and distinguishing those codes that have greater analytic power" (p. 140). This process helped me to advance the theoretical direction of my study (Charmaz, 2014). I also compared my initial codes with each other to see which codes could be promising tentative categories. In this process, focus coding codes became more conceptual than my initial line-by-line coding. I was then able to synthesize and analyze larger segments of data, trim away excess data, and begin to make a skeleton of my analysis using the focused codes and categories I generated. For each category, I also utilized memoing to begin to write operational descriptions—rich descriptions of what the category means and which data relate to the category and which data do not.

An example of my focused coding process is shown in the table below. The same post-dialogue paper excerpt is shown again above the table, with the line-by-line coding in the left column, and my focused coding in the right column.

More than the hardships, the joy of being a nonbinary South Asian lesbian, and being able to be with QTPOC, is a unique type of joy and belonging that I have not found replicated anywhere else. There is a certain freedom in existing in the margins or outside multiples sets of norms, because you can envision many creative possibilities for what more just and equitable society would look like. Our lives are already blurring the lines and pushing the boundaries in a lot of ways. There is something about that is exciting to me. And there are plenty of opportunities to turn these possibilities into material reality. (Priya, post-dialogue paper)

Table 3

Example of Focused Coding

Initial Line by line Codes	Focus Coding
[Hardships], [Joy] [Identity] [Community], [QTPOC] [Joy], [Belonging]	[Struggling], [Finding Joy] [Making meaning of marginalized ID] [Seeking out similar identities] [Finding Joy], [Belonging]
[Freedom], [Existing in margins], [Outside norms]	[Understanding self as "other"], [Existing outside norms]
[Possibilities] [Justice], [equity] [Blurring lines] [Pushing boundaries] [Exciting] [Opportunities] [Possibilities], [Reality]	[Imagining more just world] [Making meaning of marginalized ID] [Existing outside norms] [Pride] [Imagining more just world]

I continued to try and use in vivo codes where possible. As the codes became more complex, I also tried to use gerunds. Coding with gerunds helps grounded theorists detect processes and stick to the data (Charmaz, 2014). Using participants' words and actions "preserves the fluidity of [participant's] experience and gives you new ways of looking at it" (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 120-121).

Axial and Final Coding

Some grounded theorists use a third type of coding called axial coding. This process allows the researcher to relate categories to subcategories and to make specific the properties and dimensions of a category (Charmaz, 2014). Conducting axial coding allows researchers to reassemble and reorganize data that has been fractured or separated during the initial coding. This reorganizing can give coherences to the emerging analysis

(Charmaz, 2014). Through utilizing axial coding processes, I was able to develop subcategories and better show the links between them. For example, using the participant quote from the coding sample above, when conducting axial coding of participants' post-dialogue papers, I was able to see connection through the subcategories "Existing outside the norms" and "understanding self as othered" and how they related to one another in how students making meaning of themselves and their marginalized identities. These subcategories fit into the larger theme of "Self as othered."

Last, I conducted a final round of coding. During this process, I reexamined the data I had coded during my initial line-by-line coding, the memos I generated throughout my coding process, and the list of emerging codes to see if there was anything that I was missing. By doing this final coding process, I was able to take a step back from my coding process and conduct an audit of my coding process. While I did not find any major codes or categories that I had missed during my stages of coding, I was able to refine some of the categories I generated and gain greater clarity into how the categories I generated related to the research questions I sought out to explore. I was also able to identify the main themes of the findings and how they related to each other.

Saturation

Achieving saturation of categories is a criterion for stopping grounded theory research. However, there are many understandings of what saturation means, and it can often be difficult for a researcher to determine if and when they have achieved saturation during their theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser (2001, as cited in Charmaz, 2014) stated:

> Saturation is not seeing the same pattern over and over again. It is the
> conceptualization of comparisons to these incidents which yield different

properties of the pattern, until no new properties of the pattern emerge. This yields the conceptual density that when integrated into hypotheses make up the body of the generated grounded theory with theoretical completeness. (p. 213)

Saturation is typically achieved through continuing to "sample" new participants until no new properties of the pattern emerge. However, since my study was limited to the 11 students who participated in this particular IGD course, I could not go and gather additional participants once I completed my initial analysis. However, I was able to achieve saturation through the large amount of data that I collected. I collected 13 written assignments (pre-dialogue paper, post-dialogue paper, testimonials, and 9 weekly reflection logs) from each of the 11 participants. I also conducted individual interviews with 9 participants. After completing initial coding, I selected key topics to code and continued to do so until the process no longer revealed new patterns. While the data shared in this study are only from the pre-dialogue paper, post-dialogue paper, and post dialogue interview, they are representative of the over-arching categories and patterns I observed during my initial analysis of all the other data sources.

Researcher Role and Positionality

As I mentioned previously, in qualitative research, "the researcher is the instrument" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 112). Hence, it was essential for me to be keenly aware of how my own social identities, experiences, points of view, and assumptions were shaping my decisions and interpretations. It was important that I was transparent about the ways these impact the meaning I made from the data (Creswell, 1994).

The reasons I arrived at this research project, how I went about conducting the research, and how I made meaning of the data were all influenced by my own social

identities. As a White, queer, genderqueer, middle-class, able-bodied, formally educated (among many other social identities I hold), the questions guiding this study, data collect, and data analysis were all shaped through my own social location and lived experiences. It is important to recognize the privilege and oppression I have experienced as a result of my multiple, intersecting, identities and how they shape my interest in and view of the research study as well as my relative positions of status and power.

My approach to this study was shaped by the many roles and positions I have held as an undergraduate student, graduate student, student affairs professional, emerging scholar, and social justice educator. I work to be aware of and manage my subjectivity and positionality through the use of reflection, memoing, triangulation, and data checking techniques. This reflective praxis as a researcher helped me to understand how my assumptions and own experience impact the way I approach, read, interpret, and make meaning of the data. Finally, I am very familiar with IGD praxis. In addition to researching IGD theories and practices, I have served as an IGD facilitator, coach, and teaching assistant. My in-depth experience working with an IGD program and my passion for IGD impact my view of this study and the experiences of participants within the IGD course. However, my close proximity, experience, and perspective also allow for deep understanding of the IGD experience.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Within qualitative research, it is important to ensure "credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 40). I engaged in many methods to increase trustworthiness and remain self-reflective throughout my study, including prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation, peer debriefing, and

the inclusion of thick descriptive data in my findings reports (Creswell, 2009). This helped me to be aware of the lenses and potential biases I may bring to the study.

Prolonged Engagement

The data collection for this study lasted over the course of five months. Initial consent forms and pre-course enrollment demographic forms were completed in January, Pre-dialogue papers were written and collected in late January; post-dialogue papers were written and collected in April; and post-dialogue interviews were conducted in May. This prolonged time spent engaging with participants provided me with an opportunity to better understand the experiences of participants throughout the IGD experience. This allowed me to conduct a deeper and more complex analysis of the ways participants described and made meaning of the concepts I was exploring in this study. Such deep analysis and understanding would not have been possible if I had just chosen to engage with participants during a single, brief, time period or with one form of data collection.

Triangulation

As I described above in my methodology, data for this study were collected in three different ways (pre-dialogue paper, post-dialogue paper, and post-dialogue interviews) at three different stages of the 11-week IGD experience. This provided an opportunity for me to note instances in which themes converged across the three different types of data and points in time. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that triangulation allows for "findings the multiple perspectives for knowing the social world" (p. 254). While I was able to collect data about different topics or experiences during the three different data collection methods, I was also able to develop a more holistic and complex

understanding of the main concepts I was exploring in my research questions through the variety of data collection points and methods I utilized.

Peer Debriefing

As part of my data analysis process, I engaged in peer debriefing meetings with a critical peer from my doctoral program who held different identities, experiences, and perspectives from me but who also had an in-depth understanding of qualitative research methods, IGD, college student development, and critical theory. Since I was working as a solo qualitative researcher, I held several peer debriefing meetings throughout my analysis process as a way to have my data analysis choices "checked" and sometimes challenged by someone outside of the project. A peer debriefer or "critical friend" can "serve as an intellectual watchdog for you as you modify design decisions, develop possible analytic categories, and build an explanation for the phenomenon itself (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 69). During meetings with my peer debriefer, I shared updates and examples of what I was working on during a particular stage of analysis, such as my coding process, writing my findings, and developing my conceptual model. I would share the process that I went through to develop the work based on the data I collected, what the work meant to me, and lingering questions I had. At that time, my peer debriefer would ask critical questions and help to identify any areas of confusion, points of concern, or where I was not being clear enough. After each of our meetings, I was able to adjust my coding, findings, and model based on her critical feedback.

Thick Descriptive Data

I also utilized thick descriptive data from participants to bring through participants' voices. The findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are mostly composed

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of participants' own words from their papers and interviews. I share many quotes from participants for each findings theme and sub-theme. This allowed for participants' voices to "speak for themselves" and not just share my interpretation or understanding of their experiences. The quotes from different participants illustrate the points of congruence around a particular theme as well as points of divergence that complicate and demonstrate the complexity of a theme and differences amongst students' experiences.

Limitations

In addition to the rich information that this study will provide, a number of limitations must also be noted. First, as previously mentioned, I worked with a single course that had a small population (11 students). The findings from this study are not intended to be generalized to a larger population of college students and are also limited to students who chose to enroll in the IGD course at Large NE Public. Large NE public is a predominately White public institution in the northeastern region of the US. The demographics, geographical location, and institution type likely influenced who was able to and interested in participating in this study. Since participants chose to enroll in the dialogue course and participate in the study, there is a chance that their skills and motivation may be different from those of general college students.

Another limitation is that all the data gathered in this study were self-reported by participants. Even in document analysis, participants will know that their papers are being read as part of a research study. This study also took place as part of a graded academic course. These two factors combined means it was likely that student responses could have been influenced by social desirability, especially during the face-to-face interviews. I did not engage in control or course comparison measures, and, therefore, I was not able to

compare participants' experiences with other students who were not enrolled in the dialogue course.

Last, this study is limited by my social and positional identities and role as the researcher. I am a White, genderqueer, queer, formally educated, able-bodied, agnostic person in my early 30s. I met all participants at the beginning of the study when they reviewed and signed consent forms to participate in the study. This allowed students to meet me and see/know some of my social identities. I personally conducted all nine of the individual interviews in person with students. Given the intimate nature of this type of qualitative research and data collection, I have no doubt that what participants chose to disclose to me and how they chose to share parts of their experiences were influenced by social identities. While I am an active part of queer and trans communities, I am an outsider in many ways to participants in this study. Through my roles and positionality as a researcher, as an older person, and as a White person (among other roles and identities), I have certain types of power and "outsider" statuses that make it so that participants may have limited or shifted what they chose to share with me. My positionality and social identities shaped how I chose to collect, analysis, and make meaning of data and participants lived experiences in this study. Last, I am highly involved and familiar with IGD and have a great deal of passion for the IGD practice. This experience with and enthusiasm for IGD could have impacted the way I conducted and understand the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS ON INTERSECTING IDENTITIES AND BELONGING

Research question one explored how the queer and trans participants in this study described and made meaning of their intersecting identities and sense of belonging. In this chapter, I explore the findings related to these two, interrelated meaning-making processes—intersecting identities and sense of belonging, in detail, utilizing rich narratives to give an in-depth understanding of the experiences and understanding of the student participants.

Since one's identities greatly impact their sense of belonging and a person's relationships greatly influence their understanding of their identities, it can be difficult to tease out these two meaning-making processes and related experiences. In the first section on intersecting identities, I focus on how students describe and make meaning of their identities, including the processes that support their understanding of their identities. In the second section on sense of belonging, I describe how students make meaning of their experiences on campus and where and how they developed a sense of belonging, including how their identities have impacted their experiences on campus. These meaning-making processes, individually, are important and worthy of exploration to better understand the lived experiences of the student participants. I will also note throughout this chapter and the following chapters, how these meaning-making processes are interrelated and impact one another in the lives of the participants.

Intersecting Identities

As students described their meaning-making processes, they used many different social identities to explain how they presently understood themselves and how those

understandings had changed over time. Although most participants expressed their

present social identities with certainty, some students did describe their current struggles

to label their present self-understanding via available social identity categories. As shown

in this section, participants used their thinking about their own social identities as well as

those of others to refine their understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—

ultimately producing intersectional meaning-making wherein they integrated their

thinking about social identities and systems of oppression into a more critical worldview.

This intersectional understanding served as an anchor to participants' understandings of

the roles their social identities played in their lives as college students and beyond.

Consistent with this framing, I begin this section by exploring how participants were

describing their social identities in varying and complex ways, then move to how the

process of how they make meaning of their identities, and then lastly, how students have a

complex understanding of their identities.

    Q1: How do queer and trans student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity

intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of their **intersecting identities** and **sense**

of belonging?

Findings Themes:

Intersecting Identities

- *Describing social identities in varying and complex ways*
  - *Race*
  - *Sexuality*
  - *Gender*
  - *Other Salient IDs*
- *Identity Meaning-making Processes*
  - *Early socialization*
  - *Identities erased and questioned*
  - *Relationships to define and affirm identities*
- *Complex Understanding of Identities*
  - *Identities as intersecting*
  - *Integrating marginalization and privilege*
  - *Understanding self as "othered"*
  - *Pride and joy*

Figure 1. Finding themes related to intersecting identities

Describing Identities in Varying and Complex Ways

My study produced many different forms of data about participants' social identities. The pre-course enrollment demographic form provided spaces for participants to describe their salient social identities in terms meaningful to them. Participants also reflected on their social identities and positionalities in course response papers. Finally, and most importantly for this section, I requested that participants discuss their social identities in post-dialogue interviews. Taken as a whole, my findings related to social identities show that participants identified their social identities in varying and complex ways—even as a few participants indicated their ongoing efforts of meaning-making in this area. Consistent with emphasis of the course wherein I collected data, participants expressed their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality most fully. I both asked about other social identities that may be important in participants' lives and sought to understand the salience of these social identities in the context of participant meaning-making

Race and Ethnicity

Although asked about separately on the pre-course enrollment demographic form, participants most frequently described race and ethnicity in intertwined ways in their spoken and written responses to data collection. For example, when I asked Zander, a multi-racial student to share how the terms he used to describe his racial and ethnic identities had shifted over time, he noted:

> Um, racially I think it depends on the context. Sometimes I might say East Asian, sometimes I might say like mixed or multiracial depending on the context. Um, ethnically, um, like Korean and Irish… I'm in like a weird moment where like my racial identity is like not super clear to me, which is fine. That happens every couple of years. It's just like part of the whatever of life for me. Um, yeah, I dunno. I think I've been reflecting on like what it means to have like identified so strongly as like a person of color for a really long time and then getting to a point where I don't necessarily know if that's like a useful identifier for me or like a useful like framework for thinking about my life and how I like navigate the world, especially compared to like, like darker skin folks and like black folks that I like shared community with. (Zander, post-dialogue interview)

In this brief excerpt of a much longer conversation, Zander revealed how his racial identity shifted not only depending on context but also over time. Notably, Zander's description of his racial identity immediately gave way to a description of ethnic identities, which in turn prompted a reflection on how certain labels serve or do not serve as "useful identifiers" for him or a "useful framework" for navigating the world. He particularly thought about the labels he used for his identity in comparison to the identities of other people of color in his community. He wondered how his experiences navigating with certain labels like "person of color" compared to those with darker skin. This quote demonstrates the complexity and intentionality that Zander faced when deciding how to describe their racial and/or ethnic identities.

While all participants revealed race and ethnicity to be connected in meaningful ways—both in their lives and thinking—some participants offered more compartmentalized descriptions than did Zander. For example, Seena explained their ethnicity in detail and the importance of it. They said, "So ethnicity wise, um, my family is from Ethiopia, so like our specific ethnic group holds a lot of meaning to me. We're [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity]" (Seena, post-dialogue interview). The interview allowed space for them to elaborate and express the importance of their specific ethnic group in a way that the initial demographic form did not. Seena's specific [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity] was an important part of their identity, that was initially not mentioned on their demographic form. Taken together, participant accounts of racial and ethnic identities reveal them to be deeply fundamental their meaning-making processes as well as key ways that they thought about themselves and others.

Sexuality and Gender

During the post-dialogue interviews, I also asked students about how they identify their sexuality and gender. This allowed for students to share more nuanced information about their identities, the way they made meaning of their identities and the labels with which they chose to identify. For example, Devanshi described her identity as bisexual, the assumptions that some may make about that identity and what it actual means to her. When I asked about her sexuality, Devanshi said,

> For sexuality, I would say bisexual. But that's a very like weird line. I guess because I don't know. I feel like people assume bisexual as like, you like every gender equally, which is not how I feel. Like I definitely prefer men, but I like some women. (Devanshi, Post-dialogue interview)

Devanshi understood the complexities of identifying as bisexual. She knew some assume that she likes men and women equally, which she did not. However, she still chose this

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identity because she understood what it meant for herself and felt like it most aligned with her sexuality.

Students, like Zander, also elaborated on their gender identities during their post-dialogue interviews. When asked about his gender identity, Zander replied, "Yeah, sometimes I'll just say trans or like a trans man. Although that doesn't feel necessarily like a hundred, like a hundred percent accurate but it's just like the easiest thing to tell people. So, I just say that" (Zander, Post-dialogue interview). In this, Zander shared the challenges of making-meaning of his gender and also to find terms that align well with his understanding. While trans or trans man may feel most closely aligned with his gender identity, they still don't fully fit his identity. He just chooses these terms because they are terms that others may easily understand.

The words a person uses to describe their social identities can sometimes be labels that are put upon them starting at birth by family, friends, or culture. For others, choosing identity labels can be a complex, meaningful, personal, and/or political process. As the sections above on race, sexuality, and gender exemplify, the participants in this study were intentional about the labels they chose for their identities. While they had a strong understanding of their identities, many participants, like Zander described above, struggled to figure out what labels fit best for them and, for some, the labels shifted over time or in different context.

<u>Other Meaningful Identities</u>

In trying to understand how students made meaning of their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual identities, they also shared about other social identities that were meaningful or salient to them. Not every participant in this study felt that every one of

their social identities was salient to them, but what I found in this study and am showing through this section is that, even though race, gender, and sexuality were centered in this study, participants brought in their other identities that were inextricably linked to race, gender, and sexuality. These other salient social identities further complicated the students' lived experiences and their other social identities. If I really wanted to research how these students "describe and make meaning of their intersecting identities," as I set out to do in my research question one, then understanding *all* of the salient identities of participants and how they made meaning of all of them in their lives became an important piece of my study. The other intersecting, salient social identities of participants included their (dis)ability identity, socioeconomic status, citizenship, and religion.

On the pre-course enrollment demographic form, 8 of the 11 participants identified as having a disability. However, despite the frequency with which students revealed they had a disability, they actually identified in startlingly different ways. Students described their disabilities as "mentally ill," "psychiatric disabilities," "audio processing delay," and "anxiety." Students elaborated on their (dis)ability identities during the post-dialogue interviews when I asked students about "other social identities you feel are a big part of your life" (Appendix G, post-dialogue interview protocol). For example, Jessica's disability is something that they are frequently forced to think about.

> I do think about disability a lot because I am mentally ill, and I deal with that quite often. And I also have a lot of chronic pain in my life. Um, but that's something that I kind of forget about because it's an invisible disability, and a lot of people have kind of brushed it aside because especially with like chronic pain, people are like, "But you handle it really well! I can't tell you're in pain." And I'm just like, "It's cause I've been dealing with it for 15 years, thank you."

While their disability was something that they thought about a lot, Jessica also "forgot" about it because they have grown used to dealing with it and because it often is not taken

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seriously by other people since it is invisible, and they handle it well. This shows the impact that other people's perceptions of Jessica's identity has on the way Jessica makes meaning of their own disability identity.

Similarly, Seena shared how it can be difficult to communicate with others about their mental illness, even though it had a big impact on their lives. They shared, "I also, like, have various mental illnesses so that like also affects me…. I think sometimes I have trouble, um, explaining to people...like, why I have trouble having certain conversations" (Seena, post-dialogue interview). Seena had trouble explaining their mental illness to people in their lives because they "don't wanna, like, bring that in and then have the person, like, view me in a weird way" (Seena, post-dialogue interview). Seena was worried about being judged by other people in their lives if they disclosed their mental illness as a reason for why they are unable to do certain things. However, this was in tension with the fact that Seena also did not want to hide their mental illness. They shared, "I also don't want to, like, hide that and then have them, like, assume that I am just, like, being lazy or, like, all those things when it's just, like, sometimes I genuinely cannot get out of bed and, like, that's a thing" (Seena, post-dialogue interview). Seena felt conflicted about if they should disclose their mental illness to others even though it had a large impact on their everyday life. While disability was a very salient part of Jessica's and Seena's lives, their understanding and disclosing of their disability was largely impacted by other people's perceptions of them. The silencing, questioning, or ignoring that Seena and Jessica experienced with their chronic pain disability was similar to the way that other students described their other social identities, such as their sexuality and gender, being treated in the world. While their disability and other social identities had a

big impact on participants' lives, others around them did not fully understand or support

the expression of identities and this caused conflict for participants in how they made

meaning of their identities and how they chose to share their identities with others.

In addition to disability, many participant's socioeconomic status or class identity

was very salient. It was so prevalent for Cara that they shared it in response to my first

interview question, "Can you tell me a little about yourself?" Cara replied, "I am 20. Um,

I am queer and non-binary. I go to school here at [Large NE Public]. Um, aside from that,

I'm a low-income student. I work on campus. Um, I'm going to be an RA next year."

Further in the interview, Cara elaborated about their low-income identity.

> Um, I would say being low-income is a pretty big part of who I am just because it
> has shaped quite literally all of my life experiences from, um, birth to right now…
> Being low-income means that you don't get to do a lot of things, and you get a
> very drastically different life experience than a lot of people consider to be
> normal. It's just something that was very, very present and still continues to be.
> Um, even though like my understanding of it has evolved, it's always been there.
> (Cara, post-dialogue interview)

Cara explained that their low-income identity has been a part of their whole life. They

shared very vivid memories of the impact of their class status on their life and the role it

has played in shaping their life experiences.

Participants with class privilege, like Devanshi, also included their socioeconomic

status as a salient identity. Devanshi's class privilege intersected with other identities,

such as her ability to immigrate and get citizenship.

> The other one I always think about is socioeconomic status for multiple reasons.
> Like one in terms of like immigration, like it's so much easier for someone. My
> family, I would say, is upper-middle-class. So, it's a lot easier for us to immigrate
> and get our citizenship than other people who can't afford it. And…I really love
> school, and I really know that's such a privilege. Um, and I've seen firsthand, like,
> whenever I go back to India, people who haven't, like, people in my own family
> who don't have the opportunities. So, I think about, I probably think about my,
> like, class every day. (Devanshi, Post-dialogue interview)

Devanshi thought often about her social class because of the opportunities she knew it gave her. Because of her social class, Devanshi was not only able to immigrate and gain citizenship in the US but was also able to attend college. Devanshi was aware that these are privileges that not everyone had access to, especially family members back in her home country. Devanshi made meaning of her privileged statuses of being middle-class, immigrating to the US, and gaining citizenship in an intersectional way. She made meaning of her identities as intersecting. This resulted in Devanshi being able to make meaning of her specific experience from a point of privilege. She understood that she had access and opportunity that other people, including those in her own family, could not have.

Lastly, religion was another social identity that was salient for some participants. Participants used many different terms to describe their religion, or lack thereof. Two students identified as "spiritually Wiccan," two as "agnostic," one as "Catholic," another as "Christian adjacent," and three wrote "none" or "non-religious." For Priya, who identified their religion as "raised Hindu, not very religious now," religion was still a salient identity, even though they currently do not follow a certain faith.

> I'm Hindu and that, that religion is a very important part, like part of the culture in India and stuff like that. So, it kind of, it kind of is a foundation for so many political relationships. So, I think even though I'm not living there right now, you never really leave that…Because it's like effected the way I've been raised and brought up and things like that. And also, my, like my positionality in terms of like, you know, having more privilege than like someone of a different religion and that. (Priya, post-dialogue interview)

Even though Priya was "not very religious," having lived in India and being raised in the Hindu faith still impacted Priya. Because of the large role religion plays in India, and the way it impacted how they were brought up, Priya felt they could not leave that faith

behind. This exemplifies the way that Priya made meaning of their identities in an intersectional manner; their Indian identity was fundamentally intertwined with being Hindu, to the point of Priya being culturally Hindu as part of their ongoing cultural and ethnic identities. Priya made meaning of their families' Hindu faith as a privileged identity in India. Even though Priya had lived in the US for the majority of their life, they still experienced their Hindu faith as a privileged identity and shaped their positionality accordingly.

The salient identities of participants in this study extended beyond the original focus of the dialogue and scope. Participants focused on these other salient identities, such as disability and social class, helped shed light onto the complexity of these students' experiences being shaped by so many salient, intersecting identities. Students ultimately produced an intersectional meaning-making that allowed for integration of thinking about their social identities in connection to larger systems of privilege and oppression. These findings also illuminate the struggle that students face when trying to decide if and/or how to share their marginalized identities with people with whom they are close.

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Identity Meaning-making Processes

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In addition to describing the ways they have chosen to name their many salient social identities, students shared about the processes that shaped the way that they made meaning of their social identities. These processes included their *early socialization,* experiencing their *identities erased and questioned*, and their *relationships to define and affirm identities.* Each of these meaning-making processes is discussed below.

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Early Socialization

Participants shared how they learned from a young age about social identities, privilege, oppression, how to be or interact in the world, and how systems of advantage/disadvantage work. These early messages came from similar sources and have had a lasting impact on the students and the way they make meaning of their own identities and the identities of others. Participants received their early messages about social identities (race, sexuality, gender) from family, church, and school. These messages were mostly negative (e.g., homosexuality is a sin) or prescriptive (e.g., Black women should not ask questions). Students recalled the messages and how they made meaning of them by internalizing them. Other students made meaning of them and chose to actively work to be and understand differently than the messages they received. These findings demonstrate the way external forces play a large role in students' early meaning-making processes.

Matthew, a White gay man, received a lot of early information and feedback that greatly impacted his understanding of his sexual identity from his Christian church. Matthew shared about the disheartening messages he first received about being gay:

> Growing up, attending a church of a Christian faith every Sunday, I learned that homosexuality was a sin and was unacceptable in the eyes of the Lord. This knowledge made me reject my true feelings, hoping that I was just confused and it was a phase that I would soon out-grow. I spent years trying to figure out who I was and who I wanted to be. I felt lonely and isolated with all of my emotions and feelings rushing through my head with no one to confide in. With no one to talk to, I cried almost daily, asking God "What should I do?" I sat in front of a mirror, looking myself in the eyes, saying "I am gay" out loud. Although it was difficult at first, the more I said it, the more I realized it was true, however, that did not make it any easier to accept. I never felt any discomfort or negative feelings towards homosexuality, but I did not want to be gay. I always hoped that one day I would realize this was a mistake and that I truly was attracted to girls. I even tried to force myself to ignore my feelings and go on dates with girls, but it never felt right. (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper)

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Matthew learned from his Christian church that homosexuality was viewed as a sin. This oppressive socialization made him try to deny his feelings and true identity as a gay man. Even though he knew how he felt, Matthew tried to reject his identities due to the external forces of his church. It was painful for Matthew to work through his understanding of his sexuality and what it may mean in relation to his religious community, resulting in feelings of loneliness and isolation. Having this be his first external messaging of what it means to be gay had a lasting impact on Matthew and took a lot of effort on his part to work though. Matthew struggled to make meaning of the conflicting external forces and his own internal voice, all while feeling that he had no one he could rely on or with whom to share his true identity.

Similarly, Jessica, a White, genderqueer, bisexual/queer person shared about the oppressive messages that they received from their family after coming out to them about their gender identity. In addition to the "roller coaster" they experienced while trying to come to terms with their gender identity, the external negative messaging they received when they finally decided to share their identity with their family had a huge impact on Jessica.

For most of their life, Jessica did not want to label themselves, but eventually decided they wanted to tell their mom about their gender identity. Jessica's mom reacted negatively to Jessica's coming out and so did their uncle when he found out about Jessica's gender a few years later.

> My relationship with my own gender identity has always been a roller coaster. Previous to coming out, I had been very into the "don't label yourself" theme, but then I turned 16 and did some deep self-reflection and digging into myself, and I found my gender identity. I came out to my mom while we were at the beach. She started yelling at me, telling me this wasn't the future she had planned for me, and that I was and always will be her daughter, a girl. A few years later, on Twitter

(and in school), I was going by a different name than [Jessica]. My uncle followed me on Twitter, and he took it upon himself to notify my mom. She got so angry and yelled at me once more, and then I overheard her using "it" pronouns for me. (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper)

Jessica struggled to come to (literal) terms with their identity and after doing some deep self-reflection, they decided to share their gender identity with their family. Jessica's first time coming out their mom was a heartbreaking experience as was how her uncle reacted a few years later when he learned of Jessica's gender identity online. The impact of these external forces left strong messages about how her mom felt about Jessica's gender identity and, more generally, about what it meant to be non-binary in this world.

Liezel, a Filipino bisexual woman, also shared about the role society played in her journey to realize her sexuality. While Matthew got messages from his church about his sexuality and Jessica got messages from family about their gender identity, Liezel believed broader society's heteronormativity and her Filipino ethnic identity were strong external forces that contributed to her understanding of her bisexual identity. Liezel shared:

> It took me longer to figure my sexuality out. Naturally, the deeply heteronormative society I live in deterred this journey and realization. I also had equally negative messages coming from my family and those of the same ethnic identity. Filipino culture is unfortunately marred with homophobia and transphobia. In addition, being LGBT is thought of a white western experience. All these factors combined made it hard for me to recognize that someone like me could even [have] same gender attraction. Nonetheless, two to three years after I started learning about social issues and LGBT identities, I finally recognized that I am bisexual. (Liezel, post-dialogue paper)

It took longer for Liezel to come to terms with her sexuality due to her intersecting Filipino identity and the way she experienced general society as heteronormative. Within the Filipino community within which she was raised, being LGBT was seemingly limited to White Westerners. The strong messages from her culture and making meaning of her

sexuality through a lens of whiteness, delayed Liezel's ability to see herself as a part of the queer community. It was only after she learned more about the LGBT community that she realized that she was bisexual.

Liezel's recounting of the impact society and her culture played on her understanding of her bisexual identity, Matthews sharing about the impact of his Christian church on his impression of what it meant to be gay, and the overtly negative way that Jessica's family when they shared their gender identity show how early socializations, from key people and places, played a large role in participants' understanding of their identities as not fitting into cultural, religious, or family norms.

Identities Questioned, Erased, and Assumed

When reflecting on their social identities participants also shared that they sometimes felt that their identities (gender, sexuality) were not taken seriously or were questioned. Others described them being "erased." For example, Jessica shared about their gender and bisexuality getting ignored on campus.

> It is also super frustrating to have my gender completely ignored in many spaces on campus. As well as my gender identity, my sexuality also gets ignored quite often. I am bisexual but in a relationship, currently, with a guy. So, as a female-bodied femme-presenting human, we look straight. And people don't think to look deeper into it, and acknowledge that I am not a woman and I am not straight. (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper)

Jessica, like other participants, wanted to be seen and understood by others on campus as their true gender and sexual identities. Instead, Jessica described the ways that they felt their identities were ignored or assumed by others because of the way they appear or because of who they are currently in a relationship with. Not only do these assumptions wrongly place Jessica within stereotypical gender and sexuality boxes, having their identities assumed by others also limited Jessica's ability to feel fully understood as the

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genderqueer and bisexual/queer person that they are. Even though Jessica was clear about their identities, these external forces and strong messages from trusted adults were still impactful on their meaning-making process.

Another way that some participants felt limited and not able to be their full selves was in the ways external forces made them question their own identities and feel as if they are not "queer enough" or "Asian enough." For example, Devanshi shared about questioning if she was "queer enough" to be included in the IGD course for all LGBTQ+ students.

> Part of me feels like I am not "queer enough" to be in the [IGD course]. I know this sounds odd, and I will explain a bit--looking around the room, I was thinking about how I have never really faced discrimination for being bisexual as a person of color. The worst thing that has happened to me for being bisexual is a passerby rudely shouting, "That's gay!" when I was holding hands with a girl (and to be honest, they're not wrong). It sounds silly, but I feel as if I haven't experienced enough trauma for being a queer person of color to be in the room. I inherently feel as if my opinions will be less valid than those who have had rougher experiences than me…I even remind myself how ridiculous it sounds to say that I'm not "gay enough" to be in this section, or that I haven't faced enough trauma for my thoughts to be validated. Yet, despite this, I can't help feeling it anyway. People in this section definitely have had it way rougher than I have. (Devanshi, pre-dialogue paper).

In her response, it is clear that in her meaning-making process, she has come to associate experiencing trauma and oppression with indicators of being queer. However, Devanshi had not experienced discrimination, beyond a minor microaggression, from being bisexual. Therefore, not having experienced "trauma" made her feel that she was not "queer enough" to be included in the IGD course for all queer and trans (LGBTQ+) students. As a result of not feeling "queer enough," Devanshi felt that their opinions would be less valuable than other queer people in the space who had experienced more trauma and discrimination. Devanshi had internalized the understanding that she was not

"queer enough." Even though she felt that it was ridiculous, the feelings of being not enough impacted her sense of belonging in the IGD course.

Liezel also experienced similar feelings of being "not enough" of her identities. Liezel recalled feeling as though she was not being "Asian enough" when she was in middle school. Liezel shared about her process of coming to understand her Asian identity in middle school. She recalls, "During this time, I racialized myself through the perspective of whiteness. I constructed a racial identity and way of being that was centered around being understood and seen by whites" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper). Liezel wanted to "be seen as Asian, feel connected to Asianness. But my only concept of being an acceptable Asian was how white people perceived us" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper). Liezel described the many ways she tried to match this version of an "acceptable Asian" that she received from external forces and to feel like she was "Asian enough" through the perspective of White people. She then went on to say, "It wasn't until later that I realized simply being me is Asian enough and there is no one right way to be Asian" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper). It took Liezel time to realize that there are many ways to be "Asian" and that the limited way that was put on her, externally by the White people in her life did not allow her to see that just by being herself she was Asian enough. As her meaning-making progressed, Liezl began to understand her Asian-ness differently and listened more to her own internal voice.

Relationships to Define and Affirm Identities

Participants described relationships that negatively and positively impacted their ability to make meaning of single and intersecting identities. Participants, like Liezel, Matthew, and Jessica above, shared about how family, church, and society had a negative

impact on them understanding their gender or sexual identity and other participants, like Jessica, Devanshi, and Liezel described the way they felt their identities were ignored or questioned by others. These were two processes through which participants made meaning of their identities and showed how some of their relationships with others had a negative impact on their understanding of their identities, which led to some participants understanding their identities as fitting outside of social norms.

A third meaning-making process, that participants described as having a *positive* or *affirming* impact on their understanding of their social identities, was the importance of developing supportive relationships with people they trusted as a way to affirm their understandings of their own identities and also to have support in their identities. For example, after sharing about battling with the negative messages he received about being gay from his church, Matthew went on to share in great detail about how supportive his best friend was when Matthew came out to her.

> In the beginning of my senior year, I felt the need to tell someone the truth. I spent hours on the phone with my best friend, with trembling hands, a racing heart, and a flushed face, before I finally admitted to her that I am gay. The second the words escaped my lips I felt an immediate surge of relief and I finally knew; I am not confused, this is who I am. My previous feelings of shame and doubt transformed into ones of pride and confidence. (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper)

As I shared in the previous section, *early socialization*, Matthew had received his earliest messages about being gay from the Catholic church and understood being gay as a sin. This resulted in Matthew trying to deny and suppress his identity as a gay man. However, Matthew finally worked through these negative external messages and his own internal understandings around his indemnities emerged. When he told his friend, he instantly felt relief by speaking his true identity outload and having it received in a supportive manner

by his best friend. The conversation with his best friend gave him the confidence to also come out to his mother.

> After that night, it became very easy for me to tell those close to me and I was happy, but this care-free attitude only lasted until I realized that it was time to tell my mother. I knew that she would still love me either way, however, I did not want to disappoint her. I did not want her to be ashamed that her Catholic son is gay, but I knew that she deserved to know the truth. As I stood before her I could feel my legs shaking and I instantly blurted the words at her "Mom, I am gay." She immediately knew that what I said was true and before I could even cry, she wrapped me in a warm embrace that let me know, everything was going to be alright. She looked me in the eyes and told me, "It does not matter what you are, as long as you are my son. I will love you on earth and beyond." The feeling that this one sentence brought me is indescribable; the feeling of finally having an empty closet. (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper)

After receiving such a positive reaction when he told his best friend that he was gay, Matthew felt more confident and care-free when telling others in his life. However, he did not feel the same way when thinking about telling his mother about his sexuality. Matthew was afraid letting down his Catholic mother and that she would be ashamed of him. However, to Matthew's surprise, his mom was overwhelmingly supportive.

Coming out to his mom and receiving her unconditional love was very freeing for Matthew. Matthew's coming out experience was not very common among other participants and is quite a contrast to Jessica's experiences with their mother, which I discussed in the above section on early socialization. However, Matthew's experience does show the value and importance of the participants finding people in their lives that they felt supported by in all of their identities.

For Eris, finding others with similar gender and sexual identities eased their confusion and allowed them to develop more understanding of their own identities. They shared:

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Having discovered my gender while in college, a lot had been confusing to me, having to figure a lot of it myself, because I did not have a lot of friends who were trans. I did have some friends who were queer, but it wasn't until I moved into…a [residential community] specifically for LGBTQIA+ folks, that I met more queers, and other trans people, especially those who were non-binary, which was very helpful for me while I really started to solidify my gender and how my sexuality fit in relation to that. (Eris, pre-dialogue paper)

Moving to a LGBTQIA+ residential learning community allowed Eris to meet more queer, trans, and non-binary people. This helped them to see the spectrum of gender identities and what possible gender identities existed in the world, for the first time. Through joining the LGBTQIA+ residential learning community and meeting people with a range of gender identities, Eris started to understand their gender identity and intersecting sexual identities in ways they were previously unable. These findings highlight the important role that affirming and supportive relationships can play in supporting students meaning-making processes and understanding of identities.

<u>**Complex Understanding of Identities**</u>

Through their meaning-making processes, participants began to understand the complexities of their social identities in new ways. Participants also shared that their many, salient social identities intersected and had a compounded impact on their lived experiences. Students were asked to reflect on their intersecting identities in the pre-course paper, the post-dialogue paper, and the post-dialogue interview. Participants described their social identities as intersecting or "intertwined," meaning they inseparable from one another. These intersecting identities resulted in many participants feeling that they are "multiply marginalized." Students described the impact this had on their lived experience and the way they are seen and treated in the world. For other students, they described how their intersecting social identities allow them to understand how they

receive privilege, even within a marginalized community. Some participants' multiple

marginalized identities resulted in an understanding of themselves as "othered."

Participants also shared that that their intersecting marginalized identities led to feelings

of pride and joy. Each of the themes, *identities as intersecting*, *Integrating*

Marginalization and Privilege, *understanding self as "othered*" and *pride and joy in the*

margins are described in more detail in the following section.

Identities as Intersecting

Many of the participants described their intersecting social identities as

intertwined and inseparable, and these intersecting identities resulted in a specific, unique

lived experience. Students shared that their intersecting identities impacted the way they

experienced the world in college and beyond. For example, Seena shared "my life as a

college student has been affected quite distinctly by my racial, sexual, and gender

identities. These three identities cannot be separated from one another" (Seena, pre-

dialogue paper). Seena's individual social identities, like race, sexuality, and gender,

impacted their lived experiences and Seena understood the way that their social identities

combined in inseparable ways. These inseparable identities created a compounded and

more specific experience in college for Seena.

Priya also wrote about their identities as intersected and provided specific

examples for how these intersections played out in their social identities.

> The way I have come to conceptualize my identities is that they cannot be
> separated from one another. My understanding of my own race is intertwined with
> my understanding of sexuality, which is intertwined with my understanding of my
> gender, which is intertwined with my understanding of my disability, and so on…
> I understand my racial/ethnic identity as intertwined with my sexual/gender
> identity. Both are foundational to the way I interact with my environment and
> peers, and vice versa. This is true whether in terms of my experiences at college
> or elsewhere. For instance, what I have [been] taught are the proper roles for a

woman are distinctly racialized, and not being able to fit into these norms has led me to navigate what it means to be a queer person of color. It has meant contending with legacies of colonialism that lead [sic] to people of my own race claiming my queerness as foreign or western. (Priya, pre-dialogue paper)

Priya had a clear understanding of their social identities as being intertwined and inseparable. The understanding of each of their social identities could not be separated from another. Priya shared that ways that they were taught about gender were shaped by their race and that their queerness was viewed differently because of their race. Seena and Priya's quotes both speak to the ways that participants in this study understood their identities as intersecting and that all of their social identities combined to force a unique lived experience for each of the participants. Priya's quote also illuminates how they do not fit into racialized social norms around gender and sexuality, and that forced them to learn how to navigate the world as a queer person of color.

Students learning how to navigate their intersecting identities resulted in feeling "in-between" identities and social identity communities. Participants felt stuck "in-between" community spaces or pushed outside of them. For some, this resulted in never feeling supported as their full selves. For example, Eris shared about being both Black and queer. They wrote, "Especially being a minority within a minority, I have often found myself vilified for being queer within the black community, and also being black within the queer community." (Eris, pre-dialogue paper). Eris describing his feelings as being vilified within communities based around a social identity they hold vividly conveys the way they felt outcasted and unwelcome in these communities. Eris did not feel that they could fully belong in either the Black community or queer community because of intersecting, marginalized identities. Similarly, Jericho, a biracial African

American and Puerto Rican gay man shared about his struggles in navigating his intersecting marginalized identities.

> My intersectional identities as a gay man of color have also affected throughout my life. I was always too soft, too effeminate to hang out with kids of color, who often use performative masculinity and excessive toughness as a means of social hierarchy. And so when I became friends with white kids, I still felt othered all the time. That is the fate of every person who holds intersectional identities in this country: Constant othering in almost every place, with almost every person. (Jericho, pre-dialogue paper)

Jericho described his struggles with finding a place to fit in due to his multiple marginalized identities as a gay man of color. It is evident that Jericho has a very sophisticated analysis of his lived environment, beyond typical for a person his age. This has helped him reflect on his experiences and is the reason that he felt constantly othered in almost every place in his life, despite trying to fit in with different groups of people.

Tracy-Ann shared a similar struggle in how to manage their intersecting identities. They were fearful of coming out to members of the Black community because they were afraid of experiencing rejection or microaggressions. Tracy-Ann struggled between valuing Black people's opinions and not being able to change the fact that they are queer. Tracy-Ann shared that they now are "gravitating to other queer people of color where in the past I mostly hung out with white gays" (Tracy-Ann, post-dialogue paper). For Eris, Jericho, and Tracy-Ann these experiences of "in betweenness," or not feeling that they truly fit in, left them without a space to belong and be held in their intersecting identities.

Integrating Marginalization and Privilege

Participants understanding their identities as intersecting also helped them understand how their multiple social identities allowed them to experience intersecting forms of marginalization and privilege. Participants were able to understand that they

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simultaneously could experience multiple forms of marginalization and could hold

privilege, even in the margins. For many of the participants of color, understanding their

intersecting social identities also came with an awareness of being multiply marginalized

or feeling like a "minority within a minority" due to their marginalized racial/ethnic

identities *and* their marginalized gender and/or sexual identity. Eris, a Black, Jamaican-

American, genderfluid queer person shared:

> I feel like, having been at a crossroads of gender, sexuality, and also race, I have
> one of the biggest challenges when it comes to navigating society, being a
> minority in all of them, and identities being a minority within other minorities.
> (Eris, pre-dialogue paper)

Eris described their intersecting identities as a crossroad and that having so many

marginalized identities created significant challenges in their life, including feeling "in

between" as described in the previous section. While Eris described the ways their

multiple intersecting identities made them feel further marginalized, other participants

shared an awareness of the privilege(s) they hold, even as marginalized or multiply

marginalized people. Students shared about the impact of this privilege on their

socialization. Students expressed how racism and White privilege were prevalent in their

queer and trans community. Some participants just pointed to this as a reality, while

others talked about how this personally impacted them and their ability to find

community and support in queer and trans spaces.

Cara, a White, queer, nonbinary woman wrote about the privilege that they have

within the queer community as a White person in their pre-dialogue paper.

> My intersecting identities have had an impact on all of my relationships on
> campus. White queer communities can be oddly racist at times (surprising, I
> know), and it can be easier for me at times to occupy white queer spaces. In
> addition, I have an easier time navigating new spaces as openly queer. I have a

lesser fear of retaliation or violence from strangers in any given situation, making it easier for me to be open about who I am. (Cara, pre-dialogue paper)

Cara expressed the ease by which they are able to occupy White queer spaces and be open about their queerness in new spaces. Because of their whiteness, they worried less about any retaliation they may face by being out. Cara also talked about the privilege they have as a White queer person during their post-dialogue interview. They shared:

It's a little bit easier for me to find queer spaces that are comfortable for me. Um, there's a lot of just queer and trans spaces and not too many spaces for queer trans people of color. Um, yeah, I think particularly my, my whiteness has just, it isn't always as salient at [Large NE Public] because [Large NE Public] is as a very white school, but you can tell like it makes things a bit easier sometimes- it like softens other stuff… I have other friends who are queer and non-binary, um, who are people of color…and I can visibly notice them if like we're both dressed very androgynously or in a way that's like visibly non-binary. Um, like people react kind of softer to me than they do to my friends. (Cara, post-dialogue interview)

Cara explained that while their whiteness is not very salient at Large NE Public because it is a predominantly White institution (PWI), they are aware that their whiteness allows for them to find more queer and trans spaces. They felt their whiteness "softens" their other identities, such as being non-binary. Zander, an east Asian, multiracial, trans masculine student also expressed their awareness of the privileges they hold in comparison to other students of color on campus.

My race and the system of racism have profoundly shaped my experiences as a college student. However, I think I would have answered this question very differently a few years ago. While I certainly experience racial microaggressions on a semi-regular basis, this is generally the worst of my experiences. As an East Asian student, I am relatively safe. Even when I was more involved in student activism on-campus, there was very little risk for me. I never had to seriously worry about being arrested or being violently attacked by the police if protests escalated—things that are very real dangers for Black trans activists…While the growing presence of white nationalists on-campus certainly feels scary, for the most part I am not worried about my safety on campus, nor do I experience race-based harassment beyond the occasional microaggression…this is very much not true for Black students at [Large NE Public]. (Zander, post-dialogue paper)

While Zander has regularly experienced microaggressions as a multi-racial East Asian trans masculine person, they felt "relatively safe" in comparison to their peers, especially those who were Black trans activists. They felt they did not have to worry about their safety on campus but knew this was not the case for all students of color.

Understanding Self as "Othered"

As I began to describe in previous sections on identity, socialization, and intersecting identities, for many students, part of making meaning of their intersecting social identities was coming to the understanding that they did not fit into society's norms. Recognizing that they did not meet these norms and were "othered" in society was a significant part of how participants made meaning of their identities. Participants described how society defines normal as White, straight, cis, and able-bodied. Because of their multiple marginalized identities, students do not fit into these categories and often experienced feelings of alterity, or otherness, as a result. Some participants described things they did to try to fit into societal norms, including hiding identities or denying parts of themselves. Other students described ways they experienced not fitting in and the consequences of this. Students described how fitting in was often rewarded and being outside of norms was inferior and worthy of punishment. For example, Jericho, a Black gay man, described his feelings of alterity in his pre-dialogue paper.

> Every person who belongs to a minority group, especially in the western white world, knows how it feels to be erased. The American narrative often does not include all, or even most; the narrative builds itself around an illusion of normalcy, wholesomeness, and righteousness that is unrelentingly white, straight, cis, and abled. For some, this illusion fits over them, snugly, like an unseen second skin. And all those that cannot fit within these constraints are seen as a lesson to those who can; a lesson on inferiority of others, or the inspiration porn of triumph over systems that the inspired benefit from, and even uphold… Growing up as a black person in America makes it all too clear that racism oozes itself into all the many cracks of society, infusing otherwise "fair' situations with

a sort of poison that twists the minds of those drunk on power to commit atrocities, either in one fell swoop or through a million tiny cuts. To be black and to be brown in America, especially whilst simultaneously holding a queer identity makes it obvious that you are a deviation from the norm, and that these deviations are seldom appreciated and often scorned. (Jericho, pre-dialogue paper)

Jericho described the illusion of normalcy and the impact that it has on those who do not fit that mold. He specifically zoomed in on the experiences of Black and Brown people who hold a queer identity. Noting that these identities make him (and others) a deviation from the norm. This deviation is not welcomed in society and are either used for "inspiration porn" or they are "scorned."

Similarly, Seena, a Black, [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity], first-generation American, shared that they realized at a very young age that they were different from other students in their class, and this came with unique struggles and many disadvantages.

I remember being in second grade and already understanding that I looked different from everyone else in the class. My friends all were white with either brown or blonde straight hair and I was exactly the opposite. While I wasn't consciously thinking about my blackness in the same ways that I do now, there was still that inkling of difference. This awareness was made even more acute by being the child of immigrants. Whether it was food, clothes, language or even the perceived difficulty of my name, I always seemed to have some degree of difference from most of the people I met. I had teachers tell me they never would be able to pronounce my name, so I went by [Seena] beginning in kindergarten. My pre-K teachers told my parents to stop speaking any language except English in the house so that I could catch up to the other kids. I straightened my hair for beauty pageants and special events so that I could fit in. Every part of me was in opposition to the dominant American narrative, so my family and I adapted in necessary ways. As I grew older, I began to understand my blackness and my [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity] ethnicity as important parts of myself but I also began to understand the ways that black folks have, and continue to be, disadvantaged. (Seena, post-dialogue paper)

Seena detailed their complex understanding of their intersecting identities and the impact this had on their schooling and childhood experience. They realized they did not look like

other students in school, and this was compounded with their experiences as being a child of immigrants. Seena shared about the ways they and their parents tried to meet the requests of teachers and fit into dominant culture.

Liezel, a Filipino bisexual woman also wrote that growing up in predominately White spaces, "forced me to understand how being Asian puts me at a disadvantage" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper). Both Seena and Liezel not only understood that they did not fit within societal norms, but they also understood that their non-normative identities put them at a disadvantage in comparison to their White peers.

Pride and Joy in the Margins

In addition to sharing the ways their identities were punished, marginalized, and questioned by society, many participants also shared about the pride and joy they experience in their marginalized identities. Even as Seena, understood themselves as "othered" and not fitting into societies norms (as they describe above), they also shared about the pride they experienced in their marginalized identities. Seena clearly understood that their marginalized identities distanced themselves from "the image of success" but that they overcame this and now understand their communities and identities with joy and pride.

> As a first-generation American, I was explicitly taught that my ticket to success is to align myself with whiteness as much as possible. For decades, I denied myself the ability to feel joy and pride in my blackness, my queerness, my Muslim identity and so many other parts of myself because I believed that all these things distanced me from the image of success…Now, when I go home to my black ass city, I am humbled, taken aback, and sometimes brought to tears by the sheer beauty, joy, and intellect in the black community. Clearly, I have learned invaluable lessons and had great times with white folks, but it is rare that their intelligence stems from their whiteness. In communities of color, our joy and love is not in spite of our racial identities, but because of our racial identities. We have fought, persevered, held one another and lived on in the face of systematic and

interpersonal oppression. I love us more than life itself. (Seena, pre-dialogue paper)

Seena found pride and joy in communities and identities that they once distanced them self from. Instead of working to align themselves with whiteness, they were able to find love in all of their intersecting and marginalized identities. They now understand that joy, love, and pride is possible *because* of their racial identity. They now hold an immense love for the communities they are a part of.

Similarly, Priya, a south Indian, non-binary lesbian, shared that while they knew that their nonbinary and lesbian identities distanced themselves from how they are "supposed to behave," they have also given them a sense of freedom.

> For me, (being non-binary and lesbian) have shaped the way I think about relationships for one thing. Or how I view the way people are supposed to behave in society or what is considered like acceptable behavior. Um, but for me, it's given me like a lot of freedom I think to call myself nonbinary or lesbian to like understand that I don't need to follow these prescriptive paths that people give to me and that there are so many ways of existing that you can decide which one to do. Um, and you don't need to keep falling the other people say. So I would say in that sense it's, it has been like very liberatory for me. (Priya, post-dialogue interview)

Priya's lesbian and non-binary identities allowed them to exist outside of society's expectation and to understand that there are many other ways of living their life that they could choose. This ability to choose their own path and ways of being in the world, versus the one that were prescribed to them through societies expectations was liberating.

Summary of Findings on Intersecting Identities

Participants in this study held many, varied, intersecting social identities. They shared the complex ways they described their identities and the difficulty some of them experienced in choosing a particular label for their identities. Students in this study also shared about the impactful early socialization they had around their identities and how

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that left a lasting impression on their current understandings of identities. Students' sense

of identity were shaped by negative experiences they had with their identities being

erased, questioned, or denied. Participants also described the important, affirming role

that meaningful relationships had on their understanding of their identities. Lastly,

participants shared how they understood their identities as intersecting and inseparable.

Through their intersectional understanding of their identities, participants were able to

understand the ways they experienced both marginalization and privilege. They

expressed feelings of alterity, or otherness, due to their multiple marginalized identities.

Yet, at the same time, also found a sense of pride and joy in their marginalized identities.

Sense of Belonging

The second, interrelated meaning-making process from research question one that

I explored was sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is defined in higher education

literature as "a student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of

connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted,

respected, valued, and important to others on campus" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17). Sense of

belonging has a significant impact on students' success and well-being (Strayhorn, 2012).

Developing a sense of belonging on campus has been shown to be both most challenging

and particularly important for students of marginalized identities (Strayhorn, 2012;

Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Sense of belonging can be impacted by a variety of factors,

including students' identities, peer relationships, campus involvement, campus climate,

and connections with faculty and staff (Strayhorn, 2012). Figure 4 (below) provides an

overview of the findings themes and subthemes related to *sense of belonging*. I found that

participants' experiences and relationships on campus could be identified in three themes:

shaped by intersecting identities, navigating systems not made for me, and *seeking belonging through relationships and community on campus*. Each of these finding themes are discussed in detail below with rich student narratives.

Q1: How do queer and trans student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of their **intersecting identities** and **sense of belonging**?

Findings Themes:

Sense of Belonging

- *Shaped by intersecting identities*
  - *Privilege*
  - *Marginalization*
- *Navigating systems not made for me*
  - *Lacking intersectional institutional support*
  - *Experiencing isolation and tokenism*
- *Seeking belonging through relationships on campus*
  - *Seeking supportive relationships with peers*
  - *Forging community and support*

Figure 2. Finding themes related to sense of belonging

Shaped by Intersecting Identities

Identities play such a strong role in the way each of us experiences the world. Priya, a south Asian non-binary lesbian described their identities as the way they view the world. During their post-dialogue interview, Priya explained:

> These identities, I mean, like they're kind of the way I view things, right? Like they they're the framework through which I have experienced interacting with other people or sort of interacting with systems and things like that and they kind of set the foundation for how I experience life in general. (Priya, post-dialogue interview)

Priya's identities not only impacted their view but also how they interact with other people and systems. Identities were what shaped Priya's whole life experience. Priya also

went on to say that their identities also shaped what they "viewed as culture or what I view is normal" (Priya, post-dialogue interview). Given the huge role social identities play, it is not surprising that many of the participants described their social identities as having a huge impact on their experiences, connections, and relationships in college. For example, Zander, a trans masculine multiracial queer person expressed that his identities were "like at the core of everything" at college.

> I think [my identities] have really shaped a lot of my life and my experiences in pretty fundamental ways. And also I've stopped consciously thinking about them a lot or just especially recently. Um, but if I, yeah, I think about my time [at Large NE Public] or as like a young person…it's been pretty like at the core of everything, which is weird. (Zander, post-dialogue interview)

Even though all of his identities are not something he thinks of consciously, Zander was aware of how they shape his experiences in profound ways. He continued this thought by sharing the ways in which he felt his college experiences had been shaped by his identities.

> They're not things that I think about daily and I know… where I spend my time and whom I've been around has been like really profoundly shaped by these identities like, um, my like workplace or just the people that I know. I don't think I know a single cis-het person (laughs) if I think about it off the top of my head…Um, I spent all my time in like queer and trans spaces and largely with other queer trans people of color. Um, yeah. And so that feels like pretty central to what my life has been like for the past couple of years. (Zander, post-dialogue interview)

As a transmasculine, queer, multi-racial person, Zander understood that his identities impacted who he spent his time with. He befriended and spent his time with mostly other queer and trans people of color and hanging out in queer and trans spaces. Zander's identities also shaped where he chose to work on campus. Over his time on campus, he held multiple positions at the LGBTQ Center on campus. So, while his identities were not

something he thought about daily, it was clear he had thought about how "central" his identities were in shaping his experiences in college.

All of the participants in the study held a similar understanding as Zander, that their identities largely shaped their experiences in college. As I described in the findings section on Intersecting Identities above, participants in this study held a complex understanding of their intersecting identities that allowed them to understand both the privileges they have and the marginalization they have faced due to their many salient social identities. The ways participants experienced marginalization based on their multiple social identities in college had a large impact on their college experiences.

Marginalization on Campus

Experiencing instances of oppression and marginalization on campus reaffirmed students of color's understanding of their alterity or "otherness" and also shaped the way they navigated college campuses. For example, Priya a South Asian, nonbinary, lesbian told me about a similar experience with professors, except from their point of view as a marginalized student whose voice was not taken as seriously by professors.

> There've been some classes where, like, I just feel like the knowledge I can bring has not been respected or…my level of intelligence has not been viewed as the same as some other people's…Like in classes like you know, I could, I could like say something and then the professor would just be like, okay. And then someone else whose white says it and the professor is like, good job. And I'm like, I just said that. (Priya, post-dialogue interview)

Priya felt that when they said something in class, the professor did not have a strong reaction or praise them for their contribution. Whereas, a White peer could say the same thing and get praise from the professor. In sharing more about their experience, Priya continued:

Things like that, I think that's been throughout high school…into college, just like how you, you, your contributions are not necessarily recognized. Um, or if you mess up, you know, like you often face harsher repercussions than a white student might face. (Priya, post-dialogue interview)

Not only did Priya feel that their contributions are not acknowledged the same way by professors, but Priya also felt that they were punished more harshly than their White peers if they made a mistake. Priya then shared about how they felt their specific South Asian racial identity impacted their educational experience:

And especially it being South Asian, like there's that whole idea that I don't like the whole model minority idea. So I think people really expect that you fit into that. And if you don't like people, instead of trying to be like, how can we help you succeed? People will just be like, well, you know, you're not like the rest of the Asians. Like you're obviously not working hard enough. (Priya, post-dialogue interview).

Priya shared about the pressure they feel as a South Asian to succeed. Priya felt they were expected to fit the "model minority" stereotype and that when they did not succeed, others looked at them as if they were not working hard enough, instead of offering support to help them be more successful. With this understanding, Priya also shared that they learned to not let it affect them. Priya continued by saying, "But I, I think the more I'm in college, like the better I've gotten about kind of just like not letting that bother me or finding those places where I can like just exist" (Priya, post-dialogue interview).

Like Priya, Eris, a Black, genderfluid ,queer person also shared that their racial identity "hugely shaped my experiences as a college student" (Eris, pre-dialogue paper) because they felt their identity and background impacted their ability to relate to the majority White students they met when they came to college.

Having come from [city in Massachusetts], and being a part of the public school system, a majority of my friends were Hispanic and Black, I had few Caucasian friends. However, coming to college, it was a very different experience as many of the people I met and became friends with were white, and had significantly

different backgrounds than I was used to. While my background differed from my Hispanic friends, it wasn't [a] large difference, we shared similar backgrounds. But the difference between those backgrounds and the backgrounds of people I met in college gave me a sense of culture shock. Truth be told, it was all a little confusing, and it made it a bit difficult to fit in, as I couldn't really understand how to interact with people with such aggressively different backgrounds. The way they acted was heavily influenced by their past, but so was mine. (Eris, pre-dialogue paper)

Having come from a city that was predominantly Black and Hispanic, Eris felt that they could relate to many of the friends they had while growing up. However, when they came to Large NE Public, a PWI, they had difficulty connecting with many of the White student. They found the transition to be confusing and experienced culture shock. Eris felt the significant differences between the backgrounds of White students at Large NE Public and their own made it difficult to feel like they could fit in on campus. Jericho, a African American and Puerto Rican gay man, also shared that his racial identity affects "almost every single aspect of my life" at college but knew that there were also ways that it affect his life that he was not aware of. He shared, "It is the curse of the person of color in America to never know when their race is playing a part in their interpersonal relationships, and when a person is truly looking past race both consciously and subconsciously" (Jericho, pre-dialogue paper). Jericho described how he felt he would never know how and if race was impacting his relationships or when someone else was genuinely not considering his race. This was a "curse" that greatly impacted his life and relationships on campus.

Participants' racial identities greatly impacted their experiences on the predominately White campus of Large NE Public. White participants in this study reflected on how their racial privilege allowed them to feel a sense of safety and ease on campus, in comparison to their peers of color. Whereas all of the students of color

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participants described the way that their racial identities impacted their relationships on campus, both with peers and professors. Like Cara and Jericho described, participants were also aware that their racial identities impacted their college experiences in many ways that they could never consciously be aware of. In addition to their racial identities, participants' other intersecting identities created experiences of marginalization and isolation on campus.

Navigating Systems Not Made for Me

When asked about how they felt their identities impacted the way their experiences on campus, Seena shared:

> My life as a college student has been affected quite distinctly by my racial, sexual, and gender identities. These three identities cannot be separated from one another. Whether it's constantly feeling like I'm not good enough or learning to navigate a system that was not made for me, college has felt like a long game of survival of the fittest—the fittest being the most privileged.

Seena understood that their identities were interconnected and that the marginalization they experienced from their social identities never allowed them to feel "good enough." Seena was aware that the system of college education was "not made for me," but that it was made for the most privileged students. Seena was not the only student to share this understanding with me. Many of the participants were keenly aware that college campuses were not designed for marginalized students.

For example, Cara, a White, queer, nonbinary woman felt that the university does not do a lot to support students with marginalized identities. In their post-dialogue interview, they shared:

> I would say from the campus at large, I don't feel that (Sense of belonging) super often. It's a very disconnected campus. The campus is very sluggish on actually following through on ["You Matter" campus slogan] uh, or the other diversity and inclusion slogans. Um, it just feels like there isn't much actual work put to

supporting minority identities. And so I would say that the campus doesn't feel very supportive for that…I just think that there isn't that much that the campus does to actually support that.

Cara felt that while Large NE Public has several slogan and inclusion campaigns, the campus did very little to actually support marginalized students. They felt the university was not supportive and was not putting in the effort to change that. Cara went on to describe the ways they felt the university was actively working against resources that were designed to support marginalized students and about the university's ineffective response to bias incidents on campus:

> They've been putting consistent effort in for years to, to defund the [LGBTQ Resource Center] and the different cultural centers we have on campus. Um, like, justice-based groups on campus are routinely, like, not supported very much by the university. They just don't take active steps, do anything when intimately supportive. Like, um, when there were some hate crimes at [Residence Hall] in the beginning of the year, the university just sent out a couple like this, "this is bad, this was a bad thing that happened" emails and it just felt like they weren't doing anything or taking active steps to like focus on that inclusion and focus on addressing the lack of diversity and inclusion on campus.

Cara shared multiple examples of times the university had cut funding to places, like the LGBTQ Resource Center or student organizations that support marginalized students. They also felt they did not take any major steps to build a sense of inclusion on campus and that the university did not react strongly enough to bias incidents that were happening in a residence hall on campus. They went on to say, "I would also like to see the university take a bit of stronger stances when really intense things happen on campus."

I then asked Cara what they thought the university could do better to support diversity and inclusion efforts on campus. Cara readily shared many examples of ways they thought the university could "do better," including having resident assistants attend

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antiracism training and for the university to take a stronger stance on bias incidents occur

on campus. If the University did those things, they would feel:

> Like the university legitimately cares about all students. And it would make it feel less like it is a neoliberal institution that's just here to like get money from people and also provide an education, as to a place that is looking to build a community and looking to build a community for the people that are here.

The university doing their part to support the development of community was important

to Cara. They experienced Large NE Public as a neoliberal institution that was designed

to support only some of its current students. They wanted the university to shift from a

place to just make profit to a place that showed its care for all students.

Priya, who has "psychiatric disabilities" felt their disability impacted their college

experience the most. They understood the education system as "inherently ablest" and

felt lucky to attend college as a "not neurotypical" student. They shared,

> But in general, I think one of the biggest ones for me is disability in that regard. Um, just because, you know, I think at the education system as it stands is pretty like inherently ablest. Um, and it's, it's tough to keep up when you're not neurotypical or when you don't like function.

Priya, like many of the other participants, knew that college was not made for everyone,

especially for people with a disability. Since the university was ableist, they felt that it

was difficult to keep up with their peers due to their disabilities.

<u>Lack of intersectional institutional support.</u> Part of the difficulty in navigating

campuses that were not designed for them was the challenge many participants faced in

trying to find places and spaces on campus that supported their multiple, intersecting

social identities, especially for the queer and trans students of color in this study. For

example, Tracy-Ann, a Black, genderfluid, queer person shared, "My intersectional

identities have made me have a very specific experience…. I often feel like there is no

specific place that all of my identities can be highlighted at once" (Tracy-Ann, pre-

dialogue paper). For example, many of the students of color in this study shared that they

felt that the LGBTQ spaces on campus were predominately White.

Liezel, a Filipino bisexual woman, shared in their pre-dialogue paper about the

difficulty of trying to connect with white LGBT people and the importance of finding

spaces that could support *both* her Asian and bisexual identities:

> As an Asian, it can be difficult navigating LGBT spaces since so many are catered
> to or happen to be dominated by whites. And one major issue that tends to
> accompany whites wherever they go— racism. Being LGBT does not absolve
> whites from their whiteness and the privilege that accompanies it. At the very
> least, it can be difficult finding common ground and interests with white LGBT
> people. And at the worst, I know many will go out of their way to not engage with
> me. I mainly stick to attending QTPOC events at Stonewall because of this. I have
> had experiences where it seems far too suspicious with how enthusiastic some
> people are with talking to me and my friends but are suddenly more than willing
> to befriend other white LGBT people. So, since I am both Asian and bisexual, I
> search for spaces that accommodate both those identities and recognize that they
> are not exclusive of each other. (Liezel, pre-dialogue paper)

Liezel not only shared how it is difficult for her to find common ground with White queer

people but explicitly named the racism she has experienced from White queer people in

LGBT spaces. Liezel pointed out that just because White people are LGBTQ does not

mean they are not racist. She felt this impacted LGBT spaces and, as such, sought out

spaces that accommodate both her racial and sexual identities, which are not separate

from one another.

Just as Liezel found it difficult to find spaces on campus that supported both her

racial and sexual identities, Priya, a South Asian nonbinary lesbian with a disability,

wrote about the difficulty of finding community that supports all of their intersecting

identities. They shared,

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Though college has provided me many resources to seek out information about LGBTQ issues (such as through the [LGBTQ Resource Center], the library, or classes), these resources may not incorporate discussions of race or disability. The LGBTQ community on this campus is also predominantly white, and as such, there are certain ways I feel alienated from such spaces.

While Priya had many opportunities to engage with resources regarding LGBTQ issues, these did not support their desire for intersectional conversations about sexuality and race. Priya felt alienated from LGBTQ community spaces on campus, since they were predominantly White.

While many participants described the impact of their intersecting identities creating experiences of marginalization and isolation on campus, participants were also able to reflect on how some of their dominant identities allowed them to experience instances of privilege on campus. These experiences of privilege are important because they affected how and where participants felt belonging and connection on campus. For students, these experiences of privilege might have mitigated or eased other forms of marginalization and isolation they felt; however, it did not totally eliminate the feelings of oppression they felt on campus as marginalized people. For example, the White participants in this study were able to reflect on how they experienced racial privilege on campus. White students reflected on how they do not often think about some of their identities, which they describe as a privilege in and of itself. Other participants were able to identify specific ways they know their White identity gave them forms of privilege during their time on campus.

Matthew, a White gay man, said he did not often think of his gender and "skin color" as "influential" to his experiences as a college student. He attributed this to "the privilege that is centered around my racial and ethnic identities" (Matthew, pre-dialogue

paper). He went on to say, "So, I guess my racial and ethnic identities have influenced my experiences in college, but in a way that reflects the systemic privilege of being a white male" (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper). Even though he was unaware of specifically how his identities have impacted his experience, Matthew did know that his White race and his Irish and Portuguese ethnicity allowed him the privileges associated with these dominant identities. Similarly, the other two White participants articulated how they did not have to think about their racial identity and how their college experiences were, in some ways, easier because of their whiteness. Jessica, a White genderqueer, bisexual/queer person, shared that being White helped them feel safer on campus. They said, "I think my being white allows me a lot of security on campus. I don't have to worry about acts of bias or hate or racism happening to me, because I am a white person" (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper). Feeling like they did not have to worry about bias or hate related to their race made Jessica feel safer as a White person on campus.

Cara, the third White participant in my study, who identifies as a queer nonbinary woman, shared another way they felt their life on campus was impacted by their White privilege. In their pre-dialogue paper, Cara wrote:

> My racial/ethnic identities have definitely had an impact on my college career. I am white, which has likely made things a bit easier for me. I have noticed that administrators, and even at times professors, take my words a bit more seriously than my peers of color. My points can be heard above the points of students from different ethnic groups. Put simply, my college career has been helped by white privilege, and I will likely never find out the full extent that it has. (Cara, pre-dialogue paper)

Cara noticed how being White made professors and administrators take their points more seriously than their peers of color. Yet, while they were able to see some examples of

their White privilege, Cara also knew that they would never know the full extent of the ways that their college experience was "helped" by their White privilege.

Identifying feelings of isolation and tokenism. Some participants in the study shared that having multiple, intersecting, and marginalized identities resulted in feeling isolated and tokenized on campus. These feelings impacted the way students saw themselves, the relationships they had or could have made, and their overall experiences on-campus. For example, Eris, a Black, genderfluid, queer person shared that they found themselves often playing the role of a "token minority"

> Being a minority, it is already hard enough to make the way through the society of academia, as it is heavily tied to other factors such as wealth, which are also ultimately connected to race. When I came to college, I found that I was most often fulfilling a role of being a "token minority." It took me a while to see that. (Eris, post-dialogue interview)

Navigating academia with multiple marginalized identities was difficult and for Eris often resulted in fulfilling the role of a "token minority" without even noticing. However, once they did, they worked hard to break down what it meant to be a "token minority" and how that was impacting their college experience.

Similarly, Seena, a Black, genderqueer, queer participant shared about their tokenizing experiences in which they are asked to speak "on behalf" of the many marginalized identity groups they are a part of. In their post-dialogue paper, they shared, "I've been asked to speak on behalf of black folks, immigrants, queer folks, and trans folks in class because I was the only person who held (or had family members who held) those identities" (Seena, post-dialogue paper). As the only person with their identities in most situations, Seena experienced this form of tokenism often. Seena also went on to say how they felt isolated from their own cultural identity since they were the only person of

their ethnicity at the college. They shared, "On top of all this, I am the only [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity] student at [my college] so I have been further isolated from my own culture". (Seena, post-dialogue paper).

Similarly, Tracy-Ann, a Black, genderfluid, bisexual person shared that they feel isolated within the context of their major.

> My race has impacted my experience at this university in large and minor ways. I feel slightly isolated within the context of my major as there are not many visible black anthropology majors. I also feel complicated things about being black at a predominantly white institution.

Being one of the few visibly Black anthropology majors impacted Tracy-Ann in feeling isolated in their major. They also broaden this by giving the context that they attend a PWI. Tracy-Ann felt conflicted about being Black and attending a PWI. Tracy-Ann went on to share how their gender and sexuality also impact their experiences on campus, saying "My gender and sexuality have made the physical space of the university particularly interesting…I must be on guard when I am walking around because I might get harassed or weirdly interacted with due to sexism and or misogynoir" (Tracy-Ann, post-dialogue paper). Tracy-Ann's isolating experiences as a Black person at a PWI was even more complicated through their gender and sexual identities. Being genderfluid and bisexual made them feel as if they had to be "on guard" on campus due to fear of experiencing oppression.

Experiencing marginalization, navigating systems that were not made for them, and not findings resources on campus that supported their intersecting identities furthered participants' feelings of isolation on campus. The feelings of isolation and lack of institutional support made seeking supportive relationships exceptionally important for the marginalized queer and trans students in this study.

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Seeking Belonging Through Supportive Relationships on Campus

College friendships play a large part in shaping a student's sense of belonging on campus. For queer and trans students, building relationships with other queer and trans students not only strengthens their sense of belonging, it also improves students' persistence to graduation. As such, I wanted to learn more about the relationships in my participants' lives. How did they make friends? With whom were they friends? And what impact did these peer relationships have on their experiences in college. Participants shared that their friendships in college were intentionally chosen and also had a big impact on their college experience.

Seeking Supportive Relationships with Peers

Participants' relationships with peers in college differed significantly from their pre-college friendships. Prior to college, many participants shared that their friendships growing up were largely based on where they lived and the demographics of their town and grade schools. These relationships were seemingly based on proximity (same town/school) and not by intentional choice of the participants. For example, in describing the difference in their friendships when living in Puerto Rico versus living in a northern US state, Jessica shared, "I think what led me to this was the proximity to it all. If [it] wasn't for my family having moved there, I wouldn't have gotten to know the people I did and befriended the people I did" (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper). Jessica recalled the differences in the friendships that they experienced and also knew that the only reason they were able to experience these different relationships was because of the proximity they had to different people, based on where their family moved. They continued to say,

"I stuck with the people in proximity to me, which were mostly white kids, just based on where we lived" (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper).

Liezel (Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman) shared, "It was not until I entered to college and had more freedom to venture out that I purposely tried to find friends of color, especially those who are LGBT" (Liezel, pre-dialogue paper).

Many other participants shared similar sentiments. Participants shared that they were finally able to be intentional with the people they developed friendships with and those relationships had a big impact on their college lives. Students shared several reasons for choosing the friends they did. A Black participant who attended a small, elite private college, shared that they excelled at making friends and were intentional about who they were and *were not* friends so that they did not have to educate them. They shared:

> As far as friendships, this is the one category I have excelled in. It's a matter of finding people who love and accept me and sticking with them. Although [Small Private College] is tiny, there's an entire population of students (mainly the athletes, who are often white and rich again) I do not interact with. I will never understand the experience of having a maid, nanny, housekeeper, and being able to ask for anything that I want. This is an experience that many students at [Small Private College] have and, quite frankly, our backgrounds don't line up. Sure, I can work with them for a class or project perfectly fine but I am not holding my breath for deep relationships with these students nor do I want them. These relationships often turn into me teaching them about the world and, quite frankly, I don't get paid for that (yet). (Small Private College student, pre-dialogue paper)

This student felt they could not relate to the backgrounds and experiences of many of the other students at Small Private College. However, they were not interested in building relationships with these students because they did not want to be in the place where they had to teach them about their life, especially without being compensated for it. Instead, this student sought relationships with people who love and accept them. This student was

successfully in finding people to building these accepting relationships with, and so they stuck to them.

Some students, like Devanshi, an Indian, bisexual, cisgender woman shared that they intentionally tried to befriend people of similar identities.

> For the first few years I had been part of a, an a cappella group, which was, uh, we sang in Hindi and English. And actually, well the reason I bring this up is because I joined it because, so I'd meet other people of my race or even just who speak Hindi. So not necessarily Indian, but Nepali or things like that. Um, and, and I really enjoyed that freshman year cause I, it's important to, um, for me anyway, it's important to meet people of your own kind of, so to say. So, uh, yeah, I did that for a long time. (Devanshi, post-dialogue interview)

When coming to college and meeting other people of the same race or who also speak Hindi was important to Devanshi. Devanshi chose to join and participate in a student group just to meet other people of these similar identities and experiences. Devanshi went on to tell me that she is no longer in the a cappella group but that she met her best friend through the singing organization.

Similarly, Tracy-Ann, a Black, genderfluid, bisexual student shared that their sexuality impacted how they went about making friends and with whom they made friends. In their pre-dialogue paper, Tracy-Ann shared that their "sexuality has affected the type of people I surround myself with; I generally interact with other queer people or people who I know do not have any prejudices" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper). Tracy-Ann's bisexuality affected who they made friends with since they wanted to surround themselves with people who also identified as queer or didn't have prejudice against queer people. In order to meet such people, Tracy-Ann shared that they "frequented the [LGBTQ Resource Center] over the years and meant friends and acquaintances there" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper).

Participants described wanting to develop friendships with people who could easily understand and/or relate to their lived experience. As described above, having shared identities was part of this for many participants. Some participants shared that the reasons they chose to befriend some people was specifically because they did not have to explain themselves, and their friends understood the social issues or how oppression impacted marginalized student's experience. Priya, a South Asian, non-binary lesbian told me that a lot of their friends are LGBT people color because:

> Even though we have very different experiences, there is some shared stuff that we kind of get and it's nice to like exist with people where you don't have to like explain your identities or just you're not like different from them, or not like VERY different from them.(Priya, post-dialogue interview)

Having similar identities allowed Priya's friends to have some shared experiences. This made Priya feel that they did not have to explain their identities to their friends.

Eris, a Black, Jamaican American, genderfluid, queer person shared that they befriended "woke" people. They shared that they tend to "gravitate to people who are "woke." People who understand social issues enough that I do not really have to explain how my race or gender or sexuality affects things they would not think to have been affected" (Eris, - pre-dialogue paper). It was important to Eris that they did not have to explain how issues of oppression to their friends, and their friends did not question them about their identities.

Similarly, Cara said that they felt supported by their friends after coming out as non-binary because there "weren't any questions of like, are you sure of this? Or like there were no questions invalidating my identities. It was all just like, how can we help you and how can we make sure we're actively working on it" (Cara, post-dialogue interview).

Forging Community and Support

In addition to supportive peers, participants expressed there were also places, spaces, groups, and mentors on campus who, in the words of Seena, "love and support all of me".

> College has been rough, to say the least. Much like the rest of my life, it has been a process existing in the grey area and finding the people who love and support all of me. My network of chosen family has literally pulled me through this deeply racist and queerphobic education system. At one of my darkest points last semester, my boss said to me "what do you need to get through the year? I will literally drag you across the stage if I have to." While this sounds like tough love, they're words I live by to this day. I know that no matter what I am going through, my network of QTPOC staff, students, and faculty…will always be there for me. (Seena, post-dialogue paper)

As Seena describes above, surviving in the margins or the "grey" area meant seeking out places and people of support. For Seena, one of these people was the director of the Resource Center they worked for. This director was invested in their success not only as an employee in the center but also their academic success and getting to graduate. Though they describe having a rough college experience, Seena was able to find support in other queer and trans students of color and faculty and staff who would always be there for them. In addition to friendships that I described above, the participants in my study described other people and places on campus that they had found community and support. For some students, this support existed with specific campus spaces and resources, some students found this in leadership roles or organizations, and other students found this with university faculty or staff. For example, Priya shared "for all the issues out here, there's also people who will, who understand and we'll be there for you" (Priya, post-dialogue interview).

Like Seena, the relationship that Zander held with a staff member of the LGBTQ Resource Center that they worked at was a vital form of support. In their post-dialogue interview, Zander shared, "I think my relationship with [LGBTQ Resource Center Staff Member], um, is probably the most like supportive relationship that I've like had in my time at [Large Public University]. Like by far" (Zander, post-dialogue interview). They shared that the LGBTQ Resource Center staff member was able to help them navigate the institution and make it to graduation. "Um, yeah, just making sure that like I try to get out of here eventually and like survive this institution in like a multitude of ways has been really, yeah, incredible" (Zander, post-dialogue interview). When I asked Zander, "Are there certain things about that relationship or the way in which [LGBTQ Resource Center staff member] supports you that help you feel supported?" they responded:

> I think that she's just like really thoughtful and um, like really, like listens really attentively and also tries to think about like how I show up as like a whole person. That sounds like corny, but like, in all these separate aspects of my life. So like, yeah, she's like my work supervisor, but also we don't just talk about work. It's about personal life and my family life, and my academic life, and all of these things coming together in a way that like doesn't feel really forced, like it feels really authentic. (Zander, post-dialogue interview)

Zander felt that the staff member was supportive of them as a whole person. Even though the staff member was their supervisor, Zander felt the staff member supported them in all aspects of their life. The staff member was thoughtful, listened, and demonstrated care. Zander felt this was a really authentic relationship and not forced on them just because of their work relationship.

For other students, faculty members were key support people. Priya shared that their professors have been very supportive and who have "help[ed] me make many decisions … guided me through difficult times" (Priya, post-dialogue interview).

Devanshi also was able to build meaningful relationships with some of her

professors.

> My freshman year, I was like, I want to, I would definitely want to leave having
> built great connections and I can say that I have now. Um, I've become close to a
> few professors, um, to the point where they are, they're like, "no, let's grab a drink
> and call me by my first name". Like I know they would do anything and I do give
> some credit to myself. Like I go out of my way to keep in contact with them after
> I leave their class, but still like they're really great and they actually care about my
> learning. Um, and they, and my thesis advisor specifically, he goes out of his way
> to like buy my books. He thinks that'll help me in my research and things like
> that. And so I know for, I'm a very strong faculty support and I will as after
> college as well, especially if I maintain that. (Devanshi, post-dialogue interview)

Devanshi describe the intentionality she put into building the relationships with her

professors. She took it upon herself to try and continue the relationships with some

faculty members after leaving their courses. Her thesis advisor played a big role in her

academic success, connecting her with research and buying her schoolbooks. These

relationships made her feel a strong sense of support from faculty. This support was so

meaningful that Devanshi wanted to work to maintain these relationships even after

graduation.

Places and Spaces of Belonging

In addition to friends, staff, and faculty, some participants shared that there were

specific community spaces, organizations, leaderships roles, or places in which they felt

supported. For some students, this included their Resident Assistant role. Jessica, a White

genderqueer, bisexual student shared that they felt supported by their RA staff because

they were a tight-knit, diverse group, and they respected Jessica's gender identity and

made efforts to educate themselves. Jessica shared that they found it easy to be

themselves with their RA staff:

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> I work as an RA on campus, in [Residential Area l], and a lot of our staff is white, but we have a few people of color on staff, and we're all a big eclectic friend group. They are all probably my favorite group of friends on campus. It's so easy to just be out and be yourself. For the most part, they all respect my gender really well and I appreciate them a lot for their efforts to educate themselves through my experiences. (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper).

Similarly, Devanshi also found support in her RA staff. When I asked about places on campus where she felt she belonged, she shared "I would say one when I'm in, um, staff meeting with my other RAs cause I feel like I do belong in that in [Residence Halls] cluster" (Devanshi, post-dialogue interview). Devanshi continued by saying she also felt like she belongs in the Women in Leadership organization in which she held a leadership role. She described the leadership organization as a "great group" that is full of people who are always there for you. She says the group has a group message, and if she posted that she needed help with anything, the group would respond quickly to assist her. Devanshi also felt supported by the group's leader. Devanshi shared, "The leader of that group, she's amazing too. Like, um, if you need, if I needed help with literally anything, I know she'll respond to me" (Devanshi, post-dialogue interview).

Most students of color in my study wrote and told me about the importance of finding and having spaces where they could connect with other people of color and feel supported in their racial and ethnic identities. Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman described the challenges of navigating a PWI as a student of color. Because of this, Liezel intentionally went to spaces and places that were designed for students of color.

> It never stops being exhausting having to constantly navigate whiteness and be hyper aware of what your race/ethnicity bring, or how they will be interpreted. This is a major reason as to why I intentionally navigate towards people of color. My close friend group is comprised of mostly people of color. Most of the spaces on campus I gravitate towards are meant for students of color: the [Asian Cultural

Resource Center] and QTPOC events at the [LGBTQ Resource Center]. Seeing as I am forced to be in white spaces where my identity and experiences as a Filipino are constantly being overlooked or are at a constant risk of being disrespected, I place myself in spaces where I can be around other POC. (Liezel, post-dialogue paper)

Liezel expressed that attending a PWI was exhausting because she was constantly being forced to be in White spaces and that identities were disrespected. As such, she went to the Asian Cultural Center and attended events for queer and trans people of color at the LGBTQ Resource Center.

Similarly, finding a resource that supported students of color in his profession, was pivotal for Jericho. Jericho, a biracial gay man who majored in Hospitality and Tourism Management shared about the difficulty of attending traditional career fairs and then how different it was for him to attend a conference specifically for students of color in his field. In his post-dialogue paper, Jericho wrote:

The notion of my stark color, my nonconsenting flagbearer-ship for all of my marginalized identities often sickens me. What do all of these white folks think of me, and invader in this "professional" space? Are they applauding me? Or is my mere existence an affront to what they were raised and molded to see as a business professional? Being at the [Conference for students of color in hospitality and tourism] was such a big deal for me, because it was one of the few moments where my race, and the baggage that came with it, did not seem like it was as much of a risk. On the contrary, my light-skinnedness and my eloquence probably gave me a privileged edge against my fellow people of color in the same situation as me.

At the conference for students of color in hospitality and tourism, Jericho was able to find a unique experience of being able to not worry about his race and the "baggage" that he felt was associated with it. There, his race was not a "risk" and, he even reflected, that being a lighter-skinned person might even give him an advantage over darker-skinned peers.

For many students in the study, queer spaces and the LGBTQ Resource Center were big points of support and connection. These spaces helped affirmed their identities, find people of similar identities, and build community. For example, Cara a White, queer, nonbinary woman shared that queer spaces are very important to them and their intersecting identities:

> I have made a point to seek out queer spaces on campus (such as this class!) [sic], and to find queer friends. I love being in queer environments, and they feel incredibly healthy to me. My mental health has been greatly helped by the expression of my identities on campus. (Cara, pre-dialogue paper)

Finding queer spaces and queer friends supported Cara in their ability to express their identities. Being able to freely express their identities on campus also improved Cara's mental health. In addition to affirm their identities, The LGBTQ Resource Center on campus was also a significant place for many participants to find support and build community.

Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman said that it was important for her to surround herself with other LGBT students. She was able to do this by attending events at the LGBTQ center.

> Because I am bisexual, I have taken part in the events held at [LGBTQ Resource Center] and purposefully surround myself with LGBT students and faculty in the hopes of making connections with those who I trust can make me feel safe and comfortable in my bisexuality. Since going to [LGBTQ Resource Center], all my closest friends are LGBT. (Liezel, pre-dialogue paper)

For Zander, a multi-racial, Korean and Irish, transmasculine, queer person, the LGBTQ resource center was also a place of support and belonging but his experiences there had also been challenging and complex. When I asked Zander about places that he felt a sense of belonging, Zander shared that he felt that at his job at the LGBTQ center. Zander had worked at the center for four years and "built things there." He shared about

people at the LGBTQ Resource Center, "I think those people, yeah. Make me feel like, yeah, this is like a place for me. Um, all the rest of campus, not so much" (Zander, post-dialogue interview). Zander did not feel a sense of belonging on the rest of the campus, but the people at the LGBTQ Resource Center did help him feel that. Even though it was a place where they felt a sense of belonging, it was also a complicated space for Zander. He shared, "The center is also like a cluster fuck. Um, but I think it's like the closest that I found to feeling what [belonging] feels like. Very nebulous. But yeah" (Zander, post-dialogue interview).

When I asked Zander more about his experiences at the LGBTQ center, he shared how they have had a mixed of supportive experiences and also noticed times of blatant racism.

> I dunno, it's, it's weird. I think mostly that it's a place for like, uh, there's a lot of conflict, like all the time. Um, but it feels like a place where like I feel necessary to like help try and like resolve the conflict or like work through it…Um, and I think that's where I feel like I most belong, whatever areas that like, I'm like needed here…I just have like a very complicated relationship with that space and with the people there where things have been like really fucked up…I'm like all of these different things, it just feels like really complicated. Um, and it's, it's true that I think that's the closest that I feel to like feeling like, "Oh, this is a place where like I belong or where I feel like respected or like whatever all of these things". And, it's still so messy that it feels like a, I don't know, like I'm not like advertising for the [LGBTQ Resource Center]. It's like a great place, but just that like, it's the closest that I've come to like being held by a space or by people.

While Zander had a very complicated experience with the LGBT Center and the other staff that worked there, it was still a place that Zander felt that he was "needed." Zander tried to work out the nuances of his experiences. He acknowledged the oppression he has noticed and experienced in the center, yet it was still the one place on campus where he felt like he belonged, supported, and respected. He felt "held" by the space and the people in it, and this was a unique experience on campus for Zander.

Summary of Findings on Intersecting Identities and Sense of Belonging

The findings explored in this chapter indicate that participants have a complex understanding of their intersecting social identities and the way these identities impact their lived experiences. The findings for research question one, summarized in Figures 1 and 2, highlight the ways that, while some students are still working to make sense of their identities and the labels that they chose, all student participants had many social identities that were salient to them. Beyond their race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender that this study sought to explore, participants' (dis)ability status, socioeconomic class, citizenship, and religion were also meaningful and impactful on their lived experiences. Participants saw these social identities as intersecting and inseparable. Their multiple, intersecting social identities allowed them to experience both marginalization and privilege in different life contexts. Students who held multiple marginalized identities often felt like a "minority within a minority" and "in-between" identity groups, often feeling like they were not "enough" in their social identities. Students shared that they made sense of these identities through different meaning-making processes, such as early messages they received from family or church or experiencing their identities being questioned or erased in the classroom. Through these socialization experiences of their multiple marginalized identities, students began to understand themselves as "othered" or existing outside of societal norms. Students also found support in their identities through relationships with friends and mentors. Through these relationships and self-reflections students developed a certain pride, joy, and freedom of existing in the margins, or holding multiple marginalized identities.

Study findings revealed that participants' social identities impacted their friendships, community, and sense of belonging on campus. Students reflected on how they had experienced moments of both privilege and marginalization on campus due to their intersecting identities. Students shared that they did not feel there were resources and spaces on campus that adequately supported them in exploring and understanding their many intersecting identities and, as a result, they often experienced isolation and tokenism on campus. Study findings demonstrate that, while participants understood that university systems and campus communities were not made for them as marginalized people, they sought friendships and other supportive relationships on campus to cultivate a sense of belonging. Participants were intentional in building relationships and communities with people they could trust, understood their experiences, and helped them feel supported as they navigated their college experiences.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS ON CROSS-RACE/ETHNIC RELATIONSHIPS
AND TAKING ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In this chapter I share findings related to research question two, which explored how the queer and trans participants described and made meaning of their relationships across race/ethnicity and took action for social change. I explore the findings related to these two interrelated meaning-making processes: *cross-race/ethnic relationships* and *taking action for social change* in detail utilizing rich narratives to give an in-depth understanding of the experiences and understanding of the student participants. I first discuss the themes I found relating to students' cross-race/ethnic relationship. Second, I discuss themes related to students taking action for social change. Within each section of this chapter, I begin with a figure that outlines the related themes and then discuss each of the individual themes.

Cross-race Relationships

In research question two, I was interested in exploring how participants understand and make meaning of the cross-race relationships they have or have held in their lives. Interacting with people of different identities is a crucial experience for students' meaning-making, especially making meaning of their social identities. The importance and impact of these relationships can be seen in findings presented in Chapter 4, in which I highlighted the ways that students' relationships helped them make meaning of their identities and develop a sense of belonging through their meaning-making process. When asked about cross-race/ethnic relationships, participants told me about why they chose to invest in relationships with people of similar marginalized identities and that they also had many cross-race relationships throughout their lives. Some

participants shared that they intentionally chose to build cross-race relationships; others

described having these relationships due to circumstances or for means of survival.

Within those cross-race relationships, students shared about how challenging it can be to

have difficult conversations across race and also how important these relationships were

in their learning and understanding different perspectives. Each of these finding themes is

discussed in detail below.

Q2: How do queer and trans college student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity

intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of **cross-race/ethnic**

relationships and **taking action for social change**?

Findings Themes:

Cross-Race/Ethnic Relationships

- *Circumstantial Interactions across race and ethnicity*
- *Finding support in familiarity*
- *Engaging difficult conversations across race and ethnicity in college*
- *Learning from others in college*

Figure 3. Research question 2 and cross-race/ethnic relationships finding themes

Circumstantial Interactions Across Race and Ethnicity

In the pre-dialogue paper, I asked participants to describe and reflect on their prior

experiences interacting, working, and befriending people of different racial and ethnic

identities. Specifically, I asked students:

> Have you ever tried to be friends or team up with people from a racial/ethnic
> background very different from your own? If so, what do you think led you to
> cross racial/ethnic lines in these relationships? If you have not had such an
> experience, why do you think that was?" (Pre-dialogue Paper Guidelines,
> Appendix C)

In response to the questions, students described and reflected on the ways they have

interacted and built relationships across racial or ethnic identities at various points in their

life. Many of them described these cross-race relationships being built out of circumstances, through the racial make-up of their schools and towns growing up. Priya, a South Asian nonbinary lesbian wrote:

> I have worked with and been friends with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds for almost my entire life. Some of this is due to circumstance. For instance, in the United States, most places I have lived were predominantly white. As such, many of my early friends in the US were usually white. (Priya, pre-dialogue paper)

Priya's cross-race relationships with White people were a result of her attending a predominantly White school and living in predominantly White neighborhood. Like Priya, many participants described that the cross-race and cross-ethnic relationships they had in their lives have been due to circumstance. Participants discussed the ways that the places they grew up, their schools, and family dynamics placed them in circumstances in which interacting across racial and ethnic differences was a regular part of their lives. For instance, Tracy-Ann, a Black, Jamaican- and Costa Rican-American, genderfluid, bisexual student shared that they had always gone to school in places that the majority of the population was a different racial group than them. Tracy-Ann's school provided the circumstance under which they frequently interacted with people of different racial and ethnic identities. During their kindergarten through eighth grade, they went to school with "predominantly Hispanic people" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper). They wrote, "This was because I lived on the side of town which had that population and also because my father's side of the family are Afro-Latino and lived there" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper). This experience "was the closest I have been to having ethnic similarities to the majority of my classmates. In that time period I had Hispanic friends, an Asian friend, and a few black acquaintances" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper). However, this all

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changed in high school when they went to a predominantly White, Catholic school in the neighboring town. During this time, Tracy-Ann said that the majority of their friends were White.

Eris, a Black genderfluid queer student, also shared that their school had a big influence on who they were friends with. Eris said they had many friends from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. They explained:

> Having grown up in [city in Western Massachusetts], I met a ton of people who were of varying backgrounds. I made a lot of these friends in school, as there was the bigger location for many of my peers my age to gather at. (Eris, pre-dialogue paper)

Having grown up in a very racial and ethnically diverse city and attending a diverse school allowed Eris to develop friendships with people of different racial and ethnic identities from an early age.

Jericho, a Biracial gay man, interacted with people of different race and ethnic identities as a part of his family life. He wrote, "Most of my life has been spent interacting with people of a race outside of my own…. As a multiracial man, all of my family members except for my younger brother have a different racial identity than me" (Jericho, pre-dialogue paper). Being biracial, African American and Puerto Rican, meant that many of Jericho's family members had a different racial and ethnic identity than he did. This resulted in cross-race and ethnic relationships being a part of his everyday life at home.

Seena, a Black genderqueer queer person, also described interacting across racial and ethnic differences as a circumstantial part of their lives. Seena described crossing racial/ethnic lines was not a choice but an act of survival. They wrote:

> My whole life has been a series of being in community with people from different racial backgrounds than my own. I did not cross racial/ethnic lines because I was eager to or, at times, even wanted to. I crossed these racial/ethnic lines because it is the only way to survive in this world. (Seena, pre-dialogue paper)

It was not desired or a choice for Seena to be in community with people of other racial and ethnic identities. Rather, they were forced to do so because they knew it was the only way they could survive. These findings suggest that participants' interactions across race, especially those that took place in their childhood and teenage years, were a matter of environmental circumstances—the multiracial families, communities, and schools they grew up in necessitated cross-race interactions and relationships. Participants did not describe them as a choice but, rather, as just a result of the circumstances in which they grew up.

Finding Support in Familiarity

Many of us are socialized to seek out people who share similar socioeconomic backgrounds, religion, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation. We are all socialized to seek out and build relationships with people of similar identities and experiences. These relationships are beneficial in that they provide a sense of comfort (belonging), connection, affirmation, and shared experiences. Since students in this study were often forced, due to their circumstances, to interact across differences for most of their lives, when they entered college and had more freedom to choose who to build relationships with, they sought out people of similar marginalized identities. Away from the circumstances, environments, and familial influences they had grown up with, participants had a newfound ability to not just explore their identities in new ways but also their relationships. This is a pivotal part of most college students' development and meaning-making. For many participants in this study, coming to college meant an

opportunity to build relationships and be in community with people who held similar

identities or experiences.

For example, Devanshi, an Indian, bisexual, cisgender woman shared that she

found herself naturally gravitating toward other people of color when she came to

college. In her pre-dialogue paper, Devanshi shared:

> I am always very wary of white people when I first meet them (is this racist? If so,
> maybe it's something I should also unpack during this session). I naturally
> gravitate towards other people of color, and when I meet another Indian, my day
> is made. (Devanshi, post-dialogue paper)

Devanshi openly shared that she does not trust White people when she first encounters

them. Instead, she seeks out other people of color. Seeing another Indian person brings

her joy and brightens her day. When I asked Devanshi about how she feels racism

impacts her experiences in college, she shared more about how she gravitates toward

other people of color.

> I think I gravitate more towards people of color. Like I was thinking about this the
> other day and, um, the only white friends I have are the ones from my hometown.
> Like, since I got [to college], all my close friends have been people of color, not
> even just Indian, just people of color of all races. (Devanshi, post-dialogue
> interview)

Upon some reflection, Devanshi realized that all of her friends in college were other

students of color. She only had a couple of White friends, and they were friends she had

made during high school in her hometown. Since coming to college, she has been able to

build relationships with people of different races but all people of color. Similarly, Priya,

a South Indian nonbinary lesbian, wrote about how they befriended other people of color

because of the shared understanding they were able to build as marginalized people. Priya

shared that they felt it was common for people of color to gravitate toward each other.

> Of course, there was also a tendency for any people of color to gravitate towards each other in environments that felt unfamiliar or alienating to us. Even then, we were generally from different ethnic backgrounds. We were able to bond mainly because we all understood what it was like to be marginalized and we found strength within one another. We also enjoyed learning about each other's cultures, where our experiences overlapped, and where they differed. Even now, most of my friends are from different demographic groups than mine.

Priya wrote that bonding with other people of color was easier, and through the relationships, they were able to find strength. Priya also shared that, because her friends were from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, they were able to learn from one another and find similarities and differences within their lived experiences.

Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender women, shared that she also sought out people who had a shared experience or similar social identity. She sought to build genuine connections with people, "regardless of us being different races or ethnicities" (Liezel, pre-dialogue paper) but had two main factors that led her to build relationships with people. The criteria are, "one, the majority are also LGBT and we easily connect over our shared experiences. Second, my friends and I are more than capable of extending respect and compassion to those different than us" (Liezel, pre-dialogue paper). A shared marginalized sexual identity allowed Liezel and her friends to connect through their shared experiences. Liezel's friends were able to demonstrate respect across the different identities that they held. Building relationships with other students who shared similar identities helped participants in this study to feel understood, respected, and affirmed in their identities. This finding suggests that seeking out supportive relationships with people of similar identities helped give participants a supportive space to make meaning of their own identities and experiences in new ways.

Engaging in Difficult Conversations Across Race and Ethnicity in College

Another aspect of cross-race/ethnic relationships in college that I found to be important was participants' ability to engage in difficult conversations across race and ethnicity identities. Participants described the ability to engage across differences as an important, yet difficult part of maintaining relationships across difference. For example, through having interacted and built relationships with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds for their whole life, Seena felt they had developed a strong skill set for having meaningful conversations with everyone. They wrote:

> I have always prided myself on my skill to have a meaningful conversation with just about anyone. As a black Muslim born and raised in the Southeast, I have had to learn these skills in order to survive. One of my necessary life skills includes engaging in dialogue with people from different backgrounds from myself. In a lot of ways, I think this life skill has also bled into my professional career as I have had to learn how to be polite and also effective in my communication. (Seena, pre-dialogue paper)

As a Black, genderqueer, queer person, Seena made meaning of the skills they used to dialogue with people of different races and ethnicities as a survival skill. This was a skill that had served them well growing up and was now important to them in navigating their career. They described being able to use skills they gained in order to have effective and polite communication in their future jobs. Seena also wrote about dialoging with people of different identities in their post-dialogue paper. Again, they wrote about seeing their ability to engage in dialogue as a survival skill. However, they also talked about the difficulty of having conversations across differences. They wrote:

> Whether it was talking about religion with my Christian friends or race with my white friends, being able to engage in dialogue was a survival skill. However, there came a point where my survival skill felt like it wasn't working anymore. I started preparing for the worst and completely shutting down when conversations got too tough. (Seena, post-dialogue paper)

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Seena's dialogue skills had helped them survive and build relationships throughout their whole life. However, there came a point in their life that their skills were no longer working. Seena found themselves shutting down during difficult conversations. Just as Seena described, other students in this study saw these conversations as important, yet difficult part of cross-race relationships in their lives.

For Zander, a multiracial trans masculine queer person, conversations about race have been a major part of his college relationships. In his pre-dialogue paper, Zander described times when these race conversations went well and a time it has been more difficult.

> Explicit conversations about race have been central to my college relationships. Sometimes these conversations were difficult but went well overall, bringing me closer to those I was building with. Other times I was not so lucky: two years ago, I had a major falling out with three of my closest friends—white queers who espoused radical politics—who were unwilling to differentiate their "anxiety" from white guilt and "radical vulnerability"/tender queer-ness from self-indulgent white fragility. (Zander, pre-dialogue paper)

While Zander had had many conversations with his friends about race, he also experienced a falling out with two of his closest friends who were White. Even though these White friends espoused radical politics, Zander said they were not willing to admit to their "self-indulgent White fragility." Zander went on to write about how these conversations and his other experiences at Large NE Public have taught him a lot about engaging with people about their whiteness. He wrote that he had felt his learning had stopped there but still wanted to learn more, particularly when it came to his "own colorism and anti-Blackness. I know that talking about whiteness is still important and valuable for me personally…and I am ready to leave the 'safe' realm of the basic 'POC vs white folks' conversation and dive a little deeper" (Zander, pre-dialogue paper).

Zander hoped to have the opportunity to dive into these sorts of conversation during the IGD course.

Cara was also looking forward to having more conversations about race in a formal setting. Cara, a White queer nonbinary woman, said they did not have a lot of experience with having conversations across racial and ethnic differences because they had grown up in a mostly White town and did not have many opportunities to talk about race with non-White people. They wrote:

> Though I didn't have too much experience with these talks, I have become the best advocate and ally to communities of color that I can be. The ability to talk about race with non-white people—and under my own personal queer lens—is relatively new to me. I only started having these talks in my sophomore year of high school, and I grew up in a mostly white town, so having them in a formal discussion setting where It isn't just me yelling at that racist kid who wears only camo is exciting. (Cara, pre-dialogue paper)

Though they did not have much experience with cross-race discussions about race, Cara knew that doing so was an important part of their development as an "ally to communities of color." They only began having conversations about race in their sophomore year of high school. As such, Cara was excited to have conversations in a more formal setting that did not just involve yelling at racist people. While cross-race relationships were a large part of participants' lives and meaning-making experiences, these findings suggest that even students who have significant experience with cross-race/ethnic relationships still find it difficult to engage in difficult conversations across-race/ethnicity.

Learning from Others

However, when participants were able to engage in meaningful conversations and relationships across differences, they did find them to be beneficial and developmental.

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Participants in this study shared that building relationships with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds allowed them to learn and grow in new ways. Many students saw this as a big part of relationship-building and also as a very rewarding part of cross-race/ethnic relationships.

Liezel described the importance in listening to different perspectives in her pre-dialogue paper. She wrote, "One of the major ways one can learn about the world and themselves, building a stronger sense of compassion and knowledge, is to listen to different perspectives with the intent of learning." Listening to others' perspectives not only helps her learn about other people, but it also helps her to gain a better understanding of the world and gain a stronger sense of compassion for others.

Similarly, Priya wrote about how they have learned so many new things just by talking with people of different backgrounds. They also knew that there were many other things they had yet to learn by interacting with people of different racial and ethnic identities. In their pre-dialogue paper, Priya wrote "Engaging with others in this manner helps me maintain momentum to learn about new information as well, since I am empowered to always critically think about and modify my own beliefs." Interacting with people of different identities motivated Priya to think critically and supported their meaning-making through learning new information and modifying their beliefs based on this new encounter.

Going to a very racially and ethnically diverse high school allowed Eris to develop relationships with people of different backgrounds. These varying backgrounds often became the topic of their conversations. Eris wrote:

> There were many times we've discussed out [sic] backgrounds and histories, and
> it was very invigorating to hear stories from other people, who's [sic] race

influenced a lot of what they did, such as which holidays they celebrated, or what religion they were a part of, or even how they celebrated the same things that I myself celebrate, such as birthdays or weddings. (Eris, pre-dialogue paper)

Through the cross-race relationships that Eris built, they were able to learn a lot about the role that race played in different people's lives. While Eris may have celebrated some of the same holidays and occasions that their friends did, Eris learned that their friends' racial background influenced how they celebrated and also the religion with which their friends affiliated.

Similarly, since coming to college, Cara had made a point to interact with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Through these relationships, Cara has been able to learn and grow. They wrote, "Experiences where I have discussions with people from different backgrounds are usually great! Learning about how vast human experiences can be is always eye opening." Through the relationships with people of different backgrounds, Cara was able to learn more about the human experience and to make meaning of the world in new ways.

One of the learnings participants described gaining through their interracial and interethnic relationship was confronting their internalized biases. For example, Devanshi, an Indian, bisexual, cisgender woman, wrote about being able to unlearn her biases toward Pakistani people through becoming a mentor and interacting with students from Pakistan.

> The summer of my sophomore year, I was a mentor for international students and professors around the world. These professors and students came from 28 different countries, but the group I worked with the most closely were all from Baluchistan, Pakistan. (Devanshi, pre-dialogue paper)

Through this experience, Devanshi was able to unlearn previous biases and make new meaning of the beliefs she held about Pakistani people. This was a bias that Devanshi was not even aware she had.

> I didn't even think I had an issue with Pakistanis until I realized that it was programmed into my brain from my birth onwards. My mother, being Indian and prejudiced, always has spoken badly about Pakistanis. I would always protest her saying "Mom, that's so racist and untrue" (and stupid, because Pakistanis are exactly like Indians!). I got so sick and tired and angry of confronting her every time that I eventually just stopped arguing [with] her and let her say what she wanted to say. I didn't realize what the impact of her words washing over me were, I thought I was impervious to them. However, I realized when I got to college and interacted with Pakistanis and if one of them did something I didn't approve of, I chalked it up to them being Pakistani. How racist of me! I can't even believe it! My mother's words had been programmed into me! I was sickened.

Devanshi had not realized that she had internalized the bias that her mother had about Pakistani people. She had heard her mom speak badly about Pakistani people most of her life and had tried to confront her mom about her bias several times. However, it was not until Devanshi came to college and interacted with Pakistani people that she realized that she had internalized some of the beliefs that her mother had shared as part of Devanshi's meaning-making of Pakistani people. She was sickened by the realization of her internalized bias. However, through her summer of working with students from Pakistan, she was able to confront her internalized bias and unlearn some of the beliefs she held about them.

> Luckily my summer of working with the Pakistanis (who were sweet and wonderful) helped me confront my biases on a daily basis. I was unlearning my racism. I bring this experience up because I wonder what subconscious biases I may have towards other minorities, whether it be race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender status, or more. I hope this class will help me uncover them. (Devanshi, pre-dialogue paper)

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Devanshi confronted her bias on a daily basis and said she was "unlearning [her] racism" through the cross-ethnic relationships she was building with Pakistani people during her summer work. That experience also made her wonder what other biases she was holding toward other marginalized groups. Devanshi was hopeful that the IGD course would help her uncover and explore any other biases she me be holding.

Summary of Cross-race/Ethnic Relationship-related Findings

In looking at participants' cross-race/ethnic relationships through this study, I found that the majority of participants had held relationships across differences for most of their childhood and young adult lives. These relationships were due to the multi-racial families, communities, and schools in which they grew up. These relationships were not out of choice but were limited by their environment and culture. As students' meaning-making and lives progressed into college, they were able to more freely choose who to befriend. Participants frequently built friendships with people who held similar, marginalized identities. These relationships helped them feel understood and supported in figuring out their identities and how they wanted to be in the world. I found that, while students had a lot of experience interacting across racial and ethnic differences, these participants still found it difficult to engage in relationships across differences— suggesting that participants were not lacking in opportunities to engage across difference, but, rather, they lacked the skills and support necessary to do so in a developmental manner. Last, I found that students were able to learn and grow through their cross-race/ethnic relationships. Participants gained new perspectives, challenge their biases, and altered previously held beliefs through their cross-race/ethnic relationships. This

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finding highlights the important role that relationships across differences play in students' meaning-making process.

<u>**Taking Action for Social Change**</u>

The fourth meaning-making process I explored in this study was focused on how the queer and trans participants described and made meaning of taking action for social change. Taking action is often an expected key outcome of IGD, as the IGD curriculum emphasizes conceptually and practically the value of bridging dialogue and action, including the fostering of larger social justice commitments. For that reason, I was interested in understanding what previous experience and insights participants had about taking action for social change. However, as a result of asking less action-related questions in the pre- and post-dialogue papers as well as in post-dialogue interviews, participants shared less with me about their experience with taking action for social change. However, in the little that participants did write about taking action, I was able to identify three main themes. The figure below (Figure 4) outlines the themes I found related to taking action for social change. I will review each of these finding themes in the following section.

Q2: How do queer and trans college student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of **cross-race/ethnic relationships** and **taking action for social change**?

Findings Themes:

Taking action for social change
- *Marginalization leading to action*
- *Acting to create a better world*
- *Motivation for action*
- *Types of action*
- *Self-awareness as action*
- *Challenges of taking action*

Figure 4. Research question 2 and taking action for social change finding themes

Marginalization Leading to Taking Action

I found that many participants' motivation to take action was deeply rooted in their marginalized social identities. Some students felt that they wanted to make the world a better place because of the negative marginalization or positive experiences they had with their social identities. For example, Tracy-Ann shared that they cared more about social justice issues because of their intersecting identities and experiences as a Black queer genderfluid person. In their pre-dialogue paper, Tracy-Ann wrote:

> My intersectional identities have made me have a very specific experience…often feel like there is no specific place that all of my identities can be highlighted at once. It has also made me care abut [*sic*] social justice and politics a lot more than I would otherwise.

Tracy-Ann shared that their intersectional identities had a big impact on their lived experiences. One of the ways that impacted them was that they did not have a specific place where they could go to support their meaning-making of all of their intersecting identities (as I discussed previously in question one). Tracy-Ann also shared that all of their intersecting identities also made them care more deeply about issues of social justice then they feel they would otherwise.

Similarly, Eris, a Black queer genderfluid person shared about how being a person of color gave them unique and important insights that they could bring to discussions of racism.

This realization helped shape and motivate Eris as an activist. After writing about feeling tokenized during their time in college (discussed previously in Chapter 4), Eris continued by discussing how these experiences lead them to develop as an activist:

> However, [these experiences] did allow me to see how much weight my words carry when it came to discussions of race. Fortunately, I had friends who acknowledged that my racial identity meant that I was discussing racism from a place of experience, and not as some "hypothetical." This has helped shaped me to be more of an activist. However, that does not mean that racism on campus does not heavily impact me. I have found that as I become more of an activist, I try to encourage others, particularly, those with more privilege that I—white people—into activism, as not just another body in the masses, but also because they are a voice that will get listened to by other white people, and their voice is super crucial to being able to dismantle the systems of oppression. (Eris, post-dialogue paper)

Eris shared that their experiences feeling tokenized, through the support of their friends, led them to develop as an activist. However, Eris's experiences with racism on campus still severely impact them. As an activist, Eris tried to encourage other people, especially White people, to get involved in activism. Eris felt that White people were crucial to the movement to dismantle systems of oppression because they would be listened to by other White people.

Just as Eris's experiences as a person of color motivated them to get involved in activism, Matthew, a White gay man, wrote about his positive experience coming out in a Catholic family as ultimately being what motivated him to play a role in building more inclusive environments. While Matthew knew he could never reflect on anyone else's

experiences, his own experiences allowed him to empathize more with other marginalized groups of people. In his pre-dialogue paper, Matthew wrote:

> We live in a society that makes marginalized and underrepresented populations feel like they are inferior to the rest of the world, and I feel like my experience with my sexuality made me empathize a lot more with these groups of people, even when I can only reflect on my own experience and not theirs. I also realized that while my experience was ultimately positive, that is not the case for many other people, and I wanted to go into college aiming to provide an inclusive environment in any way I can where everyone has a voice that is heard. (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper)

Matthew was able to connect with other marginalized people's experiences through reflecting on his experiences as a gay man. He also realized that his positive coming out experience was not necessarily the experiences of other queer people. As such, he wanted to help create inclusive environments that could allow for everyone's voices to be heard. While Matthew received lots of support after coming out, he did struggle internally for some time before he came to terms with his identity as a gay man and feel comfortable sharing it with others.

> [He wrote that his past experiences allowed him to see] how internally tormenting it is to deal with certain issues, especially regarding identity, by yourself, and no one should have to do that when there is a community that has great potential to act as a resource for those with limited access to power. (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper)

Matthew did not want others to struggle on their own the way that he did about his sexuality. He wanted to work to build a community and act as a resource to other marginalized people who were struggling. This finding highlights the way that students made meaning of their experiences as marginalized people. Participants gained understanding of the world and their reality through both negative and positive interactions and chose to respond to their reality by way of taking action to create social change.

Acting to Create a Better World

Similar to the participants' experiences described above, some participants understood the reality of the world and how desperately change was needed. Participants understood they could take action to make the world (and their reality) better. For example, Priya was motivated from their experiences as a South Asian nonbinary lesbian to play a role in creating a better world. They wrote, "my interests and work stem from this desire to support others and create a kinder world. From a young age, I was interested in community organizing, though I did not always have the language to talk about it" (Priya, pre-dialogue paper). Even before they knew what community organizing was, Priya held a passion for supporting others and bringing people together. In high school, Priya helped run their school's Gay-Straight Alliance and Environmental club. They "also tried to collaborate with state representatives to improve the quality of sex education in my school." Priya continued by saying that their experiences with activism early in life led them to be involved once they entered college. They then went on to describe how they view the goal of activism work is to build an inclusive, not monolithic community.

> In my opinion, political organizing, social justice work, education, and journalism all come with the expectation that you will build community, and that any community is not monolithic. Furthermore, each of these areas requires engaging in meaningful ways with those of different backgrounds and becoming politically conscious.

Through activism work, Priya understood that communities are not monolithic. There are many different ways that they had to engage in the community with people of different backgrounds and become aware of the political issues that impacted different members of that community. They said that this work influences who they associate with.

> Therefore, what I do in my communities also plays a large role in the type of people I associate with; activists, educators, and organizers of all backgrounds come into this work, and it is through these avenues that I have met some of the most amazing people.

Through working with different, diverse communities doing activism work, Priya was able to meet amazing people from all different backgrounds. They continued to say that these people have supported them through mistakes they have made and helped them grow. As a result, Priya hoped that they "can be this type of person for others." (pre-dialogue paper). Again, this finding shows that Priya and other participants responded to the reality of the world around them by choosing to take action to make it better for themselves as marginalized people and others.

Challenges of Taking Action

Even though participants were motivated to take action to make the world better, they still encountered difficulties and challenges when attempting to take action. For example, Priya's realization that communities are not monolithic and that different members of the same community could need different things motivated them to take action in intersectional ways (as I describe in the section above).

However, trying to take action that can support all members of a community felt overwhelming and challenging to other participants. For example, Matthew reflected on how oppression within a community is multifaceted. In his post-dialogue paper, he wrote:

> Oppression is multifaceted based on individual factors, and therefore not one single aspect can be hierarchically prioritized above the rest. These binary divisions and the multidimensional forms of structural-level oppressions come with adverse consequences that affect how one views them self, such as their self-esteem and mental health.

Matthew noticed that divisions in communities based on binaries and structural-level oppression affected peoples' mental health and self-view. This understanding motivated Matthew to be engaged in building safe spaces were people are supported.

> As a Psychology major and someone who wants change to happen, this knowledge motivates me to ensure that people with marginalized identities are able to be in a safe space where they are not perceived as less than or that something is wrong with them, and always keeping in check with the effects of the mainstream, white-focused society can help when evaluating how to engage in change.

Matthew wanted to create more safe spaces for people with marginalized identities. He knew that marginalized people are often perceived as less than and that they are always kept in check by mainstream, White society. Matthew's meaning-making of his personal experiences in the world as a gay man and his understanding of intersecting forms of oppression motivated him to create spaces that were inclusive and intersectional for all marginalized communities.

Zander, a multiracial trans masculine queer person, shared a personal example of a time that he faced a challenge when trying to take action for social change. Zander was working to plan a conference for queer and trans students of color. In his post-dialogue paper, Zander shared:

> In the process of planning that conference, I struggled navigating my role [a person helping to organize the conference] and as a sometimes-white-passing mixed-race East Asian person. This was the source of many conflicts between myself and a dear friend—another queer [POC] organizer who tried to lovingly call me in re: my privileges as a light-skinned non-Black person, but also held little room for the ways some of my social power was earned through starting the planning committee and doing the majority of the "grunt work"...While I have since repaired my relationship with that friend, I still carry a lot of guilt and shame with me from those experiences.

Zander's intersecting identities as a transmasculine "sometimes-white-passing" multiracial person made it complicated for him to make meaning of his identities while

also navigating his role as an organizer for the conference. He shared that his friend tried to call him in regarding his light-skinned and "non-black" privileges. However, the friend was not accounting for Zander's role and social power as the lead organizer or the fact that he had done the majority of the "grunt work" for the conference. Positional roles and social identities made it challenging for Zander to make meaning of that experience while in the moment. This moment exemplifies the challenges and complications of taking action in intersectional ways while also navigating relationships with others in the community.

Self-awareness as Action

I found that when asked about taking action, a particular form of action that students most commonly wrote about was developing their self-awareness. I wrote about how self-awareness was helpful to students in making meaning of their own intersecting identities in question one (Chapter 4). I found that this same self-awareness also helped participants understand their role and position in being able to do more intersectional, intentional social change action. For example, Jericho, a biracial gay man, shared that if we were ever going to make progress in this world, we all needed to do the work to "check our privileges."

> If we are ever to move forward as a society, it will take as many of us as possible, from the wokest to the least woke, to check our privileges and ask ourselves how life might have been different if we had been born into different circumstance. (Jericho, post-dialogue paper)

For Jericho, it was important that everyone (regardless of how educated and aware they are) to check in with themselves about the privileges they hold. This form of self-awareness was necessary in order for social change to occur.

Similarly, Matthew, a White gay man, shared that through acknowledging his intersecting identities, he was able to gain a deeper self-awareness. This self-awareness made it much easier for him to begin to "identify aspects of the community that are affected by various elements of systemic oppression" (Matthew, pre-dialogue paper). Matthew shared that he recently learned that a nearby city was redlined and, therefore, many residents were denied access to housing and resources just because of their race. This was an example of how his self-awareness impacted his understanding of the world and the action he wanted to take to change it.

Summary of Findings on Taking Action for Social Change

Findings related to participants' experience with and understanding of taking action for social change, shed light onto if, why, and how the queer and trans participants engaged in actions to create social change. Many participants in the study shared that the reason they engaged in forms of action was because of their experiences as marginalized people. Participants made meaning of their reality and their positive and negative experiences in the world and understood how they wanted to react to this reality was by taking action to create change. Reflecting on and understanding their own identities, positionalities, and their experiences as marginalized people motivated them to want to create a better world. These findings suggest that students conceptualized self-awareness as an important part of making meaning of not just their identities (as described in Chapter 1) but also in how they wanted to take action. Making meaning of their identities and communities as intersectional helped to illuminate the heterogeneity in their communities and that different members within the same community experience different challenges and have different needs. While participants found it challenging to figure out

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how best to take action in ways that support different needs, I found that participants

wanted to engage in change in an intentional and intersectional manner.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS ON INTERGROUP DIALOGUE EXPERIENCE

I developed this study to gain a more layered and nuanced understanding of how queer and trans participants, who joined a semester-long race/ethnicity IGD, describe and make meaning of their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change both in their lives and in connection to the dialogue experience. Chapters 4 and 5 provide an extensive description of my thematic analysis of how this group of participants made meaning of their lives as queer- and trans-identified students while grappling with their identity, belonging (particularly at a PWI, cis-heteronormative campus), cross-race relationships, and if and how they take action for social change. In this chapter, I share findings from my third research question, which explores how participants in this study describe the role of the IGD course in contributing to their individual and collective understanding and the interrelated meaning-making processes addressed in the two previous chapters (intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change).

While there exists extensive research on the experiences of college students in IGD courses and a small, but growing number of studies that focus on queer and trans student's meaning-making processes, this study and my findings are unique in many significant ways. Existing empirical literature on IGD experiences focused on a single identity or manifestation of oppression, with the majority of studies having explored students' experiences in race-focused IGDs and only four studies focused on sexuality-focused dialogues. My study explores a race-focused IGD, comprised of all queer and trans students. This composition and course focus created both an IGD in which students

dialogued across racial and ethnic differences, and an IGD in which students all held various queer and/or trans identities. The inter/intragroup dialogue in this study allowed for a supportive space in which students could surface and make new meaning of their multiple, intersecting identities and fostered exploration of differences and similarities in experiences across the race, ethnic, gender, sexual, class, religious, and ability identities that were present in the dialogue class.

Another aspect unique to this study is my choice to focus on how participating in this IGD course may support students' meaning-making process. While other scholars have documented more traditional learning outcomes associated with IGD experience, less is known about if and how IGD supports students' meaning-making processes more broadly. Since the meaning-making process incorporates so many forms of learning and development, by focusing on students' meaning-making I am able to capture more wholistic developmental experiences that may occur during the dialogue experiences. This study demonstrates how IGD, through its intentional design and dialogic process, invites multiple perspectives that provide significant support in students' meaning-making processes. The sharing of personal stories and opportunities for critical reflection within the dialogue course not only supported students' meaning-making processes but also kindled connections among student participants and served as a catalyst for students' intentions to take action for social change.

Jessica, a White, genderqueer, bisexual queer student, provides a great illustration of the role that the IGD course played on their understanding and lived experience. Jessica, who had previously talked about being misgendered on campus and feeling that

their bisexual identity kept being erased because of their long-term relationship with a cis man, described their feelings after completing the IGD course.

> This course offered a good space for me to not have those concerns about erasure. And in that, I think it led me to opening up a little more. I feel like I can be more comfortably myself now, outside of this class. Cissexism and heterosexism will always be oppressing me, but I am getting better at rising up and being myself more and more every day. This class helped give me that power to do so. Not only by giving me a family of support, but also by giving me good dialogue tips and help in learning how to have these hard conversations with other people. (Jessica, post-dialogue paper)

Participating in the IGD course gave Jessica the power to become more comfortable in their identities and be themself more openly. Jessica described their IGD classmates as a family of support, saying this played a role in them being able to be themself. Lastly, Jessica said they were able to gain dialogue skills and support in difficult conversations with other people. These skills could support Jessica in having more difficult conversations and building relationships across difference. Just like Jessica, the participants in the study describe the important role that the IGD experience had on their understanding of their *intersecting identities*, *sense of belonging*, *cross-race relationships*, and *taking action for social change*. In the next sections I share my findings related to IGD and each of these four interrelated meaning-making processes.

Intersecting Identities

The practice of IGD centers participant exploration of singular and multiple social identity at the individual, community, and systemic levels. Participants grapple with questions of visibility/invisibility, saliency, and multiple/intersecting identities as well as with questions of social location in systems of advantage (privilege) and disadvantaged (oppression). In Chapter 4, I examined how participants described and made meaning of singular and intersecting identities before and as a result of the experience. Interestingly,

many of them noted bringing to the experience a complex understanding of their racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities as well as other social identities that were personally salient to them, such as ability, socio-economic status, religion, and nationality. The opportunity to engage in intimate conversations and critical explorations with peers across and within lines of difference, such as race, gender, and sexuality may have contributed to shape the following emerging themes: *developing a more complex understanding of self and social identities*, *increasing understanding of systemic oppression and confronting privilege,* and *finding pride and joy in IGD*. Each of these themes is described and examined in more detail below, building on participants' detailed narratives.

Q3: How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the IGD experience** on their **intersecting identities**, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change?

Findings Themes:

Intersecting Identities

- *Developing more complex understandings of self and social identities*
- *Confronting privilege and increasing understanding of systemic oppression*
  - *increasing understanding of systemic oppression*
  - *Confronting privilege*
  - *Pride and joy in intergroup dialogue*

Figure 5. Finding themes related to IGD and intersecting identities

Developing a More Complex Understanding of Self and Social Identities

The opportunity to engage and grapple with questions of identity and social location can be a novel experience for some IGD participants but not for everyone. Some participants in this study related to their own racial, gender, and/or sexual identity—Who am I? Who are my people (s)? Where and with whom do I belong?—and started early in high school, and continued in college through friendships, coursework, and involvement in student organizations or cultural centers. The stories shared by Priya and Liezel, both women of color and upper level students, captured this sentiment when noting that their understanding of their own intersecting social identities did not drastically change as a result of the experience. For instance, Priya shared, "Overall, though I feel that there has not been a drastic shift in the way I understand my identities, as these are questions I have been thinking about for a long time." (Priya, post-dialogue paper). Priya came to their IGD course with an already complex understanding of their intersecting identities and what it meant for them to be a South Asian, nonbinary lesbian. Similarly, Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman, shared that her "understanding of my sexuality honestly didn't evolve much through the course of the class" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper).

Nonetheless, in their post-dialogue papers and interviews, all participants described aspects of their IGD experience *that did* have an impact on students developing a more complex understanding of themselves and their intersecting identities. Some of the aspects that impacted the development of more nuanced and layered understanding of self included sharing of personal stories, active listening, classroom discussions, reflective course assignments, and readings. For example, after saying that the dialogue

did not cause a drastic shift in their understanding of their social identities, Priya went on

to say that they do have "a somewhat more complex view of my positionality in society

as a result of our class discussions, in the sense that I am thinking more about how I feel

comfortable voicing my thoughts in certain situations, but not others" (Priya, post-

dialogue paper).

Similarly, Liezel shared that she did not have a drastic shift in her

understanding of her sexuality. Yet, she was able to develop a more nuanced

understanding of her racial and ethnic identities from listening to other students of

color. The opportunity to share and listen to her peers of color racialization stories

enabled Liezel to realize some "internal things" about her own racial and ethnic

identities.

> During the retreat, a classmate discussed how their racialization and
> understanding of their blackness evolved depending on who they were surrounded
> by. For them, how they saw themselves in relation to the world changed when
> they were with predominantly white people versus predominantly black and
> brown people. Hearing this made me think back of how I understood my identities
> during middle school, when I was first gaining more awareness of how being
> Asian affected me. (Liezel, post-dialogue paper)

When another student shared that their self-perceptions changed depending on whether

they were with White people or people of color, Liezel realized that she had previously

shaped her self-perceptions of her Asian racial identity in similar ways. Liezel continued

by describing how she saw her "Asianess" [*sic*] in middle school.

> I realized I initially understood and defined my Asianess [*sic*] from a white lens—
> I presented myself in a way that was palatable to whites. Of course, by doing this
> I was rejected what made me *me*. It was not until hearing a classmate discuss their
> evolving relationship with their race that I fully recognized why I was so adamant
> about being into stereotypical East Asian things. (Liezel, post-dialogue paper)

Through this conversation, Liezel became more aware of the extent to which she defined her Asianess through a lens of whiteness while in middle school. Listening to one of her peers' story about their racialized experiences contributed to Liezel's new awareness helping her understand why she was into "stereotypical East Asian things" in middle school even though she was Filipino.

In a similar vein, Zander was able to do some reflection on his racial identity through the IGD course. He shared, "I was able to use the weekly logs as well as some of the in-class activities (particularly during the retreat) to explore my own relationship with race and my racial identity. I really appreciated this opportunity" (Zander, post-dialogue paper). Through the self-reflection activities in the IGD course, Zander was able to explore his racial identity as a mixed-race person. These students' observations suggest that even when the course does not have a drastic impact on participants' understanding of their own social identities, there are aspects of the course that actively contribute to a more nuanced, rich, and layered understanding of racial, gender, and sexuality identity storytelling, including listening to peers' insights and experiences, classroom discussions, readings, and specific assignments appear to support students to develop an enhanced understanding of what it means to hold singular and intersecting social identities in this world.

Confronting Privilege and Increasing Understanding of Systemic Oppression

The IGD experience provided many opportunities for participants to reflect on their own identities and, particularly the privilege and marginalization they experienced as a result of those identities. Participants were able to hear personal stories from other students during the course that illuminated new insights on how systemic oppression

operates in the world and opportunities for them to confront their own privilege in new ways.

Increased Understanding of Systemic Oppression

Student participants entered the IGD course with a nuanced understanding of oppression and how it operates on the systemic level. Students had developed this understanding through their own lived experiences as people who hold marginalized and privileged identities as well as through other courses they had taken in college. However, most participants were able to share about new insights they gained during the IGD experience about how systems of oppression operate and the impact they have on people's lives. For example, Cara, a White, queer, nonbinary woman, shared that through participating in IGD:

> I learned about how personally systems of oppression impact people of color, often in nearly every aspect of their life. Though I have been involved in racial justice for years, I don't think I fully understood just how impacting oppression is to a person until recently. (Cara, post-dialogue paper)

Even though Cara had been doing racial justice work for years, it was through the IGD course that they were able to fully understand how systems of oppression impact people in such a personal and complex way. Cara learned that systems of oppression impact almost every aspect of life for people of color. This was not something she understood as clearly before participating in the IGD course.

Zander also shared that in the IGD course he "learned about how systems of oppression and privilege work in greater detail" (Zander, post-dialogue paper), even though he was previously familiar with many of the concepts covered in class. Zander provided an example of watching the third episode of the PBS series "Race the Power of an Illusion," "The House We Live In" (Smith, 2003) and having a discussion in the IGD

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course about how racism shows up in various institutions and "impacts the distribution of life-changes through things like housing, education...healthcare, the criminal justice system, and the immigration system" (Zander, post-dialogue paper). In the discussion, Zander was able to understand in more detail about the power of institutional racism.

> Learning in detail about how housing discrimination/discriminatory lending practices (such as redlining and racial zoning) created affluent white suburbs and excluded most people of color from home ownership really helped solidify the power of institutional racism for me... Although I had been introduced to the different levels and types of oppression before, I also appreciated the reminder about how the different levels and types of racism (individual, institutional, and cultural) often occur simultaneously and work together to reinforce each other. (Zander, post-paper)

Zander learned new, specific examples of injustices in the housing system through watching the PBS episode. These new examples allowed Zander to develop a more solidified understanding of the power of institutional racism. Even though he had previously learned a lot about racial oppression, the examples from the video served as a significant reminder to Zander of the ways each different level of racism interacts and underpins the others.

Like Zander and Cara, Devanshi also gained an advanced understanding of systemic oppression, but she also understood with more complexity how institutional racism affects her directly, even though she had previously thought it did not.

> Prior to this course, I always believed that institutional racism did not impact me greatly, perhaps because I was protected by my socioeconomic status… I most definitely was aware of my racial identity from a fairly young age. However… I really did think that institutional racism did not affect me as a privileged middle-class Indian, and that it was "easier to be lucky" if you were me as opposed to someone black or Latina. While I still think this is true in many ways, I realized during the course of this class that perhaps institutional racism does affect me, and I've just never noticed it. (Devanshi, post-paper)

Devanshi, a middle-class, bisexual, Indian, cisgender woman, had previously thought that she was not impacted by institutional racism on campus. While she was very aware of her identities and she thought that she was lucky. Even as an Indian woman, Devanshi thought that institutionalized racism did not impact her, especially the way that it impacted Black or Latina students. However, through the IGD experience, Devanshi gained new insight in how, even though she is privileged in her middle-class Indian identity, she *is* impacted by institutional racism on campus but had never noticed it prior to being able to reflect on it in this course.

<u>Confronting Privilege</u>

In Chapter 4, I shared how participants were aware of the privileges they hold, even as people who hold marginalized intersecting identities. The IGD course gave participants an opportunity to further explore their privileged identities and to confront new understandings about their privilege and how it impacts their lives. Confronting their privilege was an uncomfortable, challenging but important experience. In this section, I share the reflections from three participants who each wrote in-detail in their post-dialogue papers about what is was like to confront their privilege during the IGD course. I chose to share their in-depth reflections because they help to illustrate the complexity of many participants' experiences as they grappled with privilege during the IGD course.

In his post-dialogue paper, Jericho, a multiracial gay man, shared about being confronted with his "potentially problematic maleness" during the IGD course. Jericho had struggled with making sense of the intersections of his identities as a feminine-leaning gay man of color. Being confronted with his male privilege during the dialogue added another layer of complexity.

Being confronted with my own potentially problematic maleness in that situation was very uncomfortable. I had spent a lifetime being judged by so many people; my family, my friends, school peers, other adults and figures of authority in my life. Judged for not being masculine *enough*. In truth, I have questioned whether it would be more apt for me to carry a nonbinary gender instead of a maleness that I could never seem to master. I have always been soft and sweet, but I pride myself on being strong, assertive, willful, and outspoken as well. Good qualities in a person shouldn't be attached or claimed by a gender; isn't that feminist? Everyone should be encouraged to find their voice and demand that the world at least acknowledges it. But can I even separate that ideal from my maleness? (Jericho, post-dialogue paper)

Jericho struggled with being confronted with his maleness after a lifetime of being challenged by his family and peers about not being masculine enough. He shared that he even questions if his cis-man identity is truly a fitting label for how he experiences his gender. He said that he had worked to be strong and outspoken, even though others had always seen him as "soft and sweet." Jericho then shifts to questioning if good qualities, like being assertive, should not be attached to a specific gender and wonders if this is a feminist notion. While Jericho believes everyone should find their voice and demand to be heard, he also questions if this idea of what people should do is attached to his maleness. Is this his privilege at work?

Jericho continued to wrestle with his identities and his ability to "check his privilege." He began his next section of his final paper by wondering why he does not often think about his maleness.

As someone who identifies as about 60% traditionally feminine and 40% traditionally masculine, I wonder if this defiance of gender norms would bolster or damage my ability to check my own privilege as a male. My other identity of being a gay man on top of that, especially a gay man of color, has certainly forced me to train myself in paving a space for me. I have never, ever let my differences from the norm stop be from putting myself out there. I can only be me, so me I be. But, it's certainly possible and, dare I say, likely, that my ability to fight and succeed as being an active presence in every space I'm in is because of my cis maleness. I don't think I pass as straight a lot of the time, and I certainly don't pass as white. But my cis maleness is something I carry, and although the effects

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of toxic masculinity have hurt me very much in the past, I realize I can and do still benefit from that privilege in spite of my other identities… I will put more effort into checking my privilege around non-males, and put the extra effort into making sure that they have ample room to exist, even as I fight for my own (Jericho, post-dialogue paper)

Jericho wonders how the intersections of his femininity as a cis-male, which he describes as a "defiance of gender norms," and his identity as a gay man of color affect his ability to understand his privilege as a male. Given his marginalized identities, Jericho shares that he has worked hard to create space for himself, even though he exists outside the norms but then wonders if this ability to take space and make his voice hear is due to his cis maleness. While Jericho does not pass as straight or White and is impacted by toxic masculinity, he understands that he still benefits from his privilege as a male. He ends by saying that, moving forward, he will put more effort into checking his male privilege and fight to make sure that others have space to exist, while still fighting for his own. Jericho's complex reflection on his privilege as a cis-male exemplifies how complicated it can be for a person with multiple marginalized identities to come to terms with how they also experience forms of privilege. Through his experiences in the IGD course, Jericho was directly confronted with his cis-male privilege in ways he had not previously experience. This allowed him the opportunity to wrestle with the complexities of his identities, experiences, marginalization, and privilege in new ways. Leaving the IGD experience, he was committed to continuing to examine his privilege moving forward.

Matthew, a White gay man, also shared about confronting his privilege during the IGD experience and how this made him feel. For Matthew, confronting his privilege led to feelings of guilt and hopelessness but resulted in new understandings and desire to challenge himself to act differently.

This class prompted a roller coaster of emotions for me… There were times where I felt hopeless and guilty from the discussions and videos we watched in class, and at the same time there were times where I felt motivated and empowered. An example of a moment where I felt guilty was when … we split into two affinity groups (white students and students of color) and were discussing what we talked about in our affinity group in front of the students of color. There was a clear difference between the flow of conversations between the white affinity group and the affinity group of students of color, and I felt guilty because there were moments where I held back because I did not want to say the wrong thing or did not know what to say, which is problematic. (Matthew, post-dialogue paper)

Matthew felt guilty when he was in the White student affinity group and noticed the difference between what was being shared in the White student group and what was shared in the students of color affinity group. Matthew noticed a different flow to each group's conversation, and he also felt guilty because there were times during the affinity group that he did not share something out of fear of saying the wrong thing. He understood that his holding back was problematic. However, it was not until he heard the prospective of the students of color in the course that he felt he was able to really understand and reflect on this situation.

Some of the students of color expressed that they would have appreciated it more if we openly admitted that talking about race in front of people of color makes us uncomfortable, which really stuck with me throughout the rest of the class. Hearing this perspective helped me address and challenge the ways in which I can engage in dialogue about race with people of different identities and also helped me understand and reflect on the ways that socialization has impacted how I engage with race and the emotions that I feel when talking about race. The affinity group activity also challenged myself to speak more during the dialogues and group activities and to be honest with my own vulnerabilities. (Matthew, post-paper)

Matthew shared that students of color in the IGD course expressed concern and wished that White students, like Matthew, would have just admitted that talking about race in front of people of color made them uncomfortable. Hearing this from his peers really stuck with Matthew and made him think differently about the ways he engages in

dialogue about race with people of different identities. In the future, Matthew wants to be more vulnerable and engage with his emotions when talking about race. The IGD experience allowed Matthew to not only reflect on his feelings of guilt and hopelessness that were tied to his White identity, but the dialogue space also allowed him a new opportunity to hear from students of color about the impact of his silence. Hearing from students of color what it was like to watch the White students hold back their feelings and emotions gave Matthew a new perspective to understand the situation and supported him in addressing the challenges and feelings he was facing.

A third participant reflected about their experiences with a different type of privilege— their internalized elitism. This participant was a student of color who attended a prestigious private liberal arts college close to Large NE Public. While they did not gain any new insights on their other social identities, participating in the IGD course allowed them to confront their privilege as a student from an elite private school. The participant noticed that their internalized elitism manifested in many ways during the IGD course, including their desire to push past the introductory conversations and dive into complex conversations.

> While this class did not help me in gaining new insight on my racial, ethnic, sexual, or gender identities, it did help me with confronting my own privileged identities. Coming from a lower income background, it was always hard for me to grapple with the idea that I am "privileged" in some ways. However, this class made me understand that as an English speaking, Private Liberal Arts educated person, I have quite a bit of privilege in the world. I know that my degree from [Small Private] will grant me entry into jobs and organizations that other folks may not have entry to. The biggest way, however, that my educational privilege shows up is…in my need to push past the introductory conversations… As someone who is educated and goes to a private liberal arts school, I realized that everyone is not where I am at and it is my job to be patient and accessible so that I can do the necessary work without feeling frustrated at others. (Participant from Small Private, post-dialogue paper)

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Having multiple marginalized identities, this student was not used to confronting and grappling with their privilege. However, participating in the IGD course made them reflect on the privileges that they have as an English-speaking person who is attending an elite private liberal arts college. They realized that their degree from Small Private will allow them access to many things that other people may not have access to. During the IGD experience, this participant realized that not everyone is at the same place educationally or developmentally, and, therefore, they needed to be more patient and less frustrated with others. Understanding their privilege and internalized elitism made them realize they needed to engage in dialogue in different ways.

> I realized that I not only need to learn how to engage in dialogue again, but I need to relearn how to understand where other people are coming from. When moving from the position of the privileged, dialogue becomes a completely different thing. Rather than interjecting my own ideas, I had to sit back and learn how to listen to and learn from others. That is one of the first lessons I learned in the class: I am privileged and I must relearn how to engage in dialogue now that I have some level of privilege. (Participant from Small Private, post-dialogue paper)

This participant desired to learn how to dialogue again but from the position of privilege. They realized that engaging in dialogue from a privileged point of view would be a very different experience from what they are used to. During the IGD course, they learned that they had to sit back and listen to others so that they can learn from them, rather than interjecting their own ideas. The IGD experience allowed them the opportunity to reflect on the way they held privilege as a student from an elite private school, even though they held many other marginalized identities. This new understanding of their privilege made them want to engage in different ways.

Through the IGD experience Jericho, Matthew, and the participant from the Small Private had all gained new insights into the privileges they hold. While each of them

learned about a different form of privilege, based on different social identities, they all shared that they had not previously reflected on this area of privilege in ways that they were able to during the IGD experience. The rich narratives from these three participants serve as but a few examples of the way that the majority of participants confronted their own privilege during their IGD experience and grappled with what that meant for them and the way they engage in the world.

Finding Pride and Joy in IGD

In Chapter 4, I wrote about how many participants held immense pride and joy in their marginalized identities. As participants reflected on their experiences in the IGD course, they also wrote about the ways that their IGD experience helped them develop pride and joy in their multiple intersecting identities. The dialogue course helped Jessica, a White, genderqueer, bisexual person, realize how radical it can be just be themself.

> As for this class, it hasn't taught me much about my own gender, honestly. I kind of realized how radical it is to be myself in some spaces. We talked early on about radical acts we do, and one that was mentioned was just being yourself. I had never seen this as a radical act before, and I really love seeing that within myself. (Jessica, post-dialogue paper)

Hearing another dialogue participant share that being yourself is a radical act made Jessica consider how this could be true from themselves. While they had never considered this as radical before, they enjoyed the idea of seeing that as a part of them self.

Similarly, Jericho, a biracial gay man, shared that he was able to learn how other students of color in the dialogue course experience joy in similar ways as he does.

> As far as my racial identity as a black and Hispanic person, I have not learned enough. To be as frank as possible, the only thing I "learned" about my identity as a black and brown person is that others have suffered in similar ways as I, and

that others have gained joy in similar ways to my joy. This knowledge is far from useless; on the contrary, solidarity can move mountains. (Jericho, post-paper)

While Jericho felt as though he did not learn enough about his identity as a Black and Hispanic person, he was able to learn that others have experienced pain and joy in similar ways. Jericho went on to say that this understanding was important because there could be solidarity through these similar experiences. To Jericho, solidarity was important as it can "move mountains."

Jericho and Jessica described finding joy and connection in their marginalized identities while another participant, Matthew, described how the course facilitators reminded him to find pride in his privileged identities as a White, cisgender, gay man.

> Sometimes I did not even feel anything when talking about racial and sexual identities and I had a hard time navigating what that meant as a white, cisgender gay man. However, the facilitators [Grey] and [George] and my fellow classmates helped me take pride of who I am while also understanding my privileges and how to understand them in a way that can help me never forget about my privilege when addressing inequalities and injustices in our community. (Matthew, post-dialogue paper)

Matthew expressed having difficulty navigating what it means to have his multiple, intersecting identities. However, his fellow dialogue participants and the two dialogue facilitators helped him to take pride in his identities. Having pride in his identities could happen while simultaneously acknowledging his privilege and working to address inequalities in society. Having a sense of pride was a new way of understanding and relating to his privileged identities.

Devanshi, an Indian, bisexual, cisgender woman, also enjoyed how the IGD course helped center joy in the exploration of their identities, rather than the trauma that is normally at the center of identity-based conversations.

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Something that I appreciated about the class is that we often centered around the joys of being our own identities, rather than the traumas. I enjoyed this because I think this is something that I do in my own life anyway. Sometimes I think people focus too much on how their identities affect their lives negatively, or perhaps focus on the part of the identities that make them victims. That is not to downplay anyone's experiences of course, because living as your identity in a world that might not accept it is tough work in its own. However, it's also important to think about the ways in which you are privileged and how that affects your life. In a similar vein, it is important to remember the joys of your identities, because it is really the only way to survive. In this way, I appreciated how this class reinforced my understanding of the joys of my racial identities. (Devanshi, post-paper)

Devanshi felt that trauma and negativity are commonly the focus of conversations on identity. While she understood that living with certain identities may be "tough work." However, she felt it is important to focus in on the ways that people are privileged. She shared that focusing on the joys of identities was a pivotal way to survive. The IGD course served as a reminder of the importance of celebrating the joy in her racial identities.

While many participants already felt a sense of pride and joy in their intersecting identities, this section shared the ways that many students were able to gain a different or amplified sense of pride in their identities that they had not experience before or it served as a reminder of why it is important to center joy in conversations about identity. The IGD course provided a way for students to celebrate their intersecting identities and encouraged them to think about how radical it is just to exist as themselves in this world.

Sense of Belonging

In Chapter 4, I explored how the student participants in this study understood and made meaning of their sense of belonging. Students shared that their experiences on campus were greatly impacted by their intersecting identities. It was difficult for students, especially for the students of color in this study, to find resources and spaces on campus

that supported their multiple, intersecting identities. Students shared that they often felt isolated on campus and were frequently tokenized in classes or community spaces. As a result, participants talked about how important it was for them to find community, connection, and support on campus. Building relationships with friends, colleagues, and mentors provided immense support for their success in college and, sometimes, survival. In this section, I explore the ways that students describe the role of the IGD experience on their feelings of support, connection, and sense of belonging more broadly. Students shared that in the IGD experience they found support through *sharing similar marginalized identities* and *building stronger friendships and a sense of community*. Each of these themes are discussed in detail below.

Q3: How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the IGD experience** on their intersecting identities, **sense of belonging**, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change?

Findings Themes:

Sense of Belonging
- *Sharing similar marginalized identities*
- *Building stronger friendships and sense of community*

Figure 6. Finding themes related to IGD and sense of belonging

Sharing Similar Marginalized Identities

The IGD course brought together 11 students who all identified as LGBTQ+ or other marginalized gender or sexual identities. Seven of the 11 students identified as students of color, 3 as White, and 1 as multiracial. Being in a space with others who shared similar identities was a rare and important experience for participants. Sharing

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common identities allowed participants to feel more comfortable sharing about their experiences and connecting with other students in the course. For example, Eris, a Black, genderfluid, queer person shared that being in a course with such a small number of people and all of them being "queer" allowed them to be a lot more comfortable with other students in the course. Eris felt they did not need to hide their gender or sexuality and was able to openly share about their experiences.

> Being in a class as small as ours, it was very easy to make every interaction we had a significant one. I also think the fact that we were all queer played a big role. I think we were a lot more comfortable with each other earlier on, and were able to have natural dialogues because of that, because we all were queer. Being queer is a big part of my identity, as I imagine it would have been for the others in the group, so having a space where there was no need for the obstacle of hiding our gender or sexuality, which happens often times in these kind of spaces. However, not having had to do that, we were able to connect to each other more, and were more willing to really listen to each other, and I think that ability to find shared community really helped us engage. (Eris, post-dialogue paper)

Being queer is a big part of Eris's sense of self and feeling that they did not have to overcome the "obstacle" of hiding that part of themselves allowed them to build a sense of comfort with other students in the course who all shared common identities. They were easily able to connect with other students in the IGD course and could listen to each other's experiences. Through their shared identities, Eris found shared community. This helped them more easily engage in the class. They continued by saying that had they not been in the section for all queer and trans people, they probably would not have shared as much with the class. This is because Eris would be "having to spend so much energy to hold a cishet (cisgender and heterosexual) persona for my own personal safety while discussing race, which can be a tiring enough conversation to have as a person of color" (Eris, post-dialogue paper).

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Similarly, Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman, shared about the significance of being surrounded by other LGBT POC who have common experiences. She wrote, "Being surrounded by LGBT POC and hearing how their experiences mirror mine and seeing how some of them connected through our experiences was endearing" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper). Seeing the connection with others in the course around common experiences was a significant part of Liezel's IGD experience. She continued by saying, "Being with these people and hearing their stories was a comforting reminder that despite all we go through, we have created beautiful communities" (Liezel, post-paper). Hearing stories from other LGBT POC people in the course not only allowed her to develop a sense of connection, it also reminded Liezel that in spite of all the difficult things they experience in their identities, that LGBT POC people have built beautiful communities with others who share similar identities.

Zander, a multiracial, trans masculine person, also wrote about how rare it is to be in a course full of other queer and trans students. While Zander spent the majority of his time in college surrounded by other queer and trans people, like his chosen family, friends, and coworkers at the campus LGBTQ Resource Center, he felt that his academic life was the only space that was not "dominated by queerness and queer people." In his courses as a sociology student, he was normally surrounded by cishet (cisgender and heterosexual) students and instructors. Zander shared that the IGD course diverged from this norm. "This course gave me a glimpse of what it might feel like to be a cishet student at [Large NE Public]—to be able to assume that your classmates and instructors will have similar identities and experiences around gender and sexuality" (Zander, post-paper). Being surround by fellow students and instructors who had similar identities and lived

experiences in the IGD course was a unique experience for Zander but one he imagined

being an everyday experience for his "cishet" peers on campus. All participants shared

that participating in the IGD course with all queer and trans students and facilitators was

a unique and special opportunity. Sharing similar marginalized identities allowed the

participants to feel more comfortable sharing about their lived experiences and felt that

they were able to easily find connections with others.

Building Stronger Friendships and Sense of Community

Having shared identities and experiences with the other students and facilitators in

the IGD course as well as feeling supported in their multiple intersecting identities

allowed participants to build a sense of community within the class. For Cara, a White,

queer, nonbinary woman, queer exclusive spaces, like the IGD course, were not common.

She shared what it felt like to experience this kind of space. "Maybe it's because queer

exclusive spaces are so rare, but I really did get a feeling of community within our group.

It felt like we were a group of friends talking about a problem together, not necessarily a

classroom of strangers" (Cara, post-dialogue paper). Since the IGD course was made up

of only LGBTQ+-identified students and facilitators, Cara was able to get a sense of

community from the group. They likened the experience to talking with a group of

friends rather than a classroom of strangers.

Similarly, Jessica, a White, bisexual, genderqueer person shared that in addition

to learning a lot in the IGD course, they have "made quite a few friends and became

closer with some vague acquaintances through this class" (Jessica, post-dialogue paper).

The IGD course allowed Jessica to better understand how many queer and trans

people there are on campus. They wrote:

> I realize how many of us there are after the class. Everyone in this class was queer or trans and I find so much strength in the fact that we all came together and took this class. Solidarity is so important, and I am so grateful to have felt that in this class. (Jessica, post-paper)

Realizing how many queer and trans students there are on campus and seeing more of them come together in this course gave Jessica a sense of strength. Seeing other queer and trans students come together in the course was an important experience of solidarity for Jessica. They saw solidarity as an important aspect of community and were thankful they had the opportunity to experience it through the IGD course.

Similarly, Seena, a Black, [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity], genderqueer, queer person shared that they built community in their IGD course. They shared they are "so happy to now add the folks from this class"(Seena, post-dialogue paper) to their network of support that "will always be there for them" (Seena, post-dialogue paper) that previously included QTPOC staff, students, and faculty on campus. Seena continued by saying, in the IGD class, "We achieved one of my main goals for the semester: building a community" (Seena, post-dialogue paper).

Participants shared that the IGD course served as a rare opportunity to connect with other people who shared similar identities and experience. Since all classmates and facilitators shared similar identities, participants felt they could easily find connections with others. Many students shared that they felt that during the IGD course they were able to build a sense of community and have built meaningful, supportive relationships with fellow classmates.

Cross-race/ethnic Relationships

In Chapter 5, I explored how the participants in this study described and made meaning of the cross-race and cross-ethnic relationships in their lives. In the theme

Circumstantial interactions across race and ethnicity, I found that most participants had been interacting and building relationships with people of different races and ethnicities for most of their lives due to the families, communities, and schools in which they were raised. In *Learning from others in college,* participants also shared that they often learned a lot from interacting with people who hold different social identities. This section explores the ways participants described the role of the IGD experience on the way they understand and make-meaning of cross-race/ethnic relationships. As noted in Figure 7, two themes *Building relationships across difference in IGD* and *Learning from others in IGD* are described in detail below.

Q3: How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the IGD experience** on their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, **cross-race relationships**, and taking action for social change?

Findings Themes:

Cross-race Relationships
- *Building relationships across difference in IGD*
- *Learning from others in IGD*

Figure 7. Finding themes related to IGD and cross-race relationships

Building Relationships Across Difference in IGD

During the IGD experience, some students were able to reflect on the types of relationships they had in their life, while other students shared about desiring new relationships across racial or ethnic differences. The dialogue course provided an opportunity for Eris, a Black, genderfluid, queer person, to reflect on how they interact with others in the world and how they build relationships.

> I think this class definitely made me look at how I interact in society as a person of color more. Not just about how society treats me, but how I form friendships, or how I interact with strangers from different racial backgrounds. It helped me to dismantle a good amount of internalized racism I wasn't even aware I held. (Eris, post-dialogue paper)

Talking with other students of different racial identities and hearing about their lived experiences helped Eris reflect on their own life. Through the IGD course, they began thinking about how they make friendships and how they relate with people of different racial backgrounds. Eris also shared that the course helped them to grapple with internalized racism, of which they were formerly unaware. Becoming aware of this internalized racism could allow them to better understand the ways they have previously interacted with people across racial differences.

Similarly, Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman shared, "This class has impacted the relationships I have with students of different social identities by redefining and reaffirming expectations I have of others" (Liezel, post-dialogue paper). Liezel continued by sharing some examples of the redefining and reaffirming that occurred for them during the IGD course.

> I naturally am more understanding towards POC since we have much more going against us. I have gotten used to white people, even if they are LGBT, hurting and disappointing me. But a few white folks in the class, especially [Grey, white dialogue facilitator] really impressed me and gave me hope that all people are capable of learning and helping groups they are not apart of. It also reminded me and made me more wary of men of color. Certain discussions and interactions with the men of color reminded me that just because people share similar communities as you, it does not guarantee they you will get along and/or that they will support you as you would support them. On the brighter side, this course also created a greater respect and appreciation for LGBT POC in general. There were more amazing people that made me feel welcomed than not. (Liezel, post-dialogue paper)

Liezel shared that while they had gotten used to White people letting them down and hurting them, interacting with the White people in the IGD course allowed them to gain a

different understanding of White people. Liezel gained a sense of hope that all people, including White people, are capable of helping other groups they do not identify with. They were also able to gain a greater sense of respect for LGBT POC people and felt welcome by most other students in the IGD course. However, the IGD experience also made them more weary of men of color due to discussions that happened throughout the class. Liezel was reminded that even though you share similar identities does not mean you will agree or be of support to one another.

While Liezel took away a lot of new understanding of certain groups of people from the IGD course, it is unclear how their new insights into White students, men of color, and LGBT POC people will impact their relationships with people of these identities moving forward.

Whereas Zander, a multi-racial trans masculine queer person, shared that their dialogue experience made them feel "confident in my ability to make connections with other students—especially students of different social identities than my own. I imagine this experience will make me more open to building authentic relationships with different groups of folks moving forward" (Zander, post-dialogue paper). Through interacting with people of different racial identities, Zander was able to build a sense of confidence in connecting with other people of different identities. He assumed this would help him be able to build more relationships across difference in the future.

The IGD experience gave participants the opportunity to learn a lot from and about students of different racial and ethnic identities. Participants were able to gain new insights and understandings by hearing other students share their own stories and lived experiences. Hearing about these experiences and interacting regularly with students of

different racial identities also allowed participants to gain new understanding about and confidence in building relationships across difference.

Learning from Others in IGD

Throughout the IGD experience, students wrote and talked about learning from peers of similar and different racial and ethnic identities through the many open and critical discussion that occurred during the dialogue course. This provided many participants with new insights and understanding of the lived experiences of people who hold different identities than themself. For example, Priya a South Indian, nonbinary lesbian, shared that they "learned much more by listening to my peers' experiences, and the ways their identities shape their college experiences" (Priya, post-dialogue paper). They continued by describing one key learning experience from their IGD experience:

> One thing I was especially curious to learn about was the white students' personal stories about how they were racialized. While I have an understanding of racism as a system and how I am affected by it, I don't really know how white people themselves are taught whiteness or raised in it. We did talk a little bit about this, such as when some white students said race is not a topic they discuss openly or freely, leading to the normalization of certain values and patterns of behavior without really unpacking *why*…[In this case] the discussions came directly from people's personal experiences, which I found more meaningful than only learning through theory or academia (Priya, post-paper)

Through hearing the experiences of White students in the IGD course, Priya gained insight into how White people are taught about racism and whiteness. Prior to the course, Priya did not know much about how White people were socialized around race. From the White peers in the course Priya learned that race was not frequently discussed in the White students' lives, and this led to their internalization of some values and behaviors associated with whiteness. Priya stressed again that this learning came from hearing their peers' personal experiences in the IGD course, not from theory or "academia."

Similarly, Tracy-Ann, a Black, bisexual, genderfluid person, shared that during the IGD experience, they were "enriched by the things that the Asian people stated; they shared a lot of things about the Asian experience that I had not known or thought about before" (Tracy-Ann, post-dialogue paper). Hearing personal stories from the Asian-identified participants allowed Tracy-Ann to gain new insights into the lived experiences of a different marginalized racial group than their own, just as Priya was able to gain new insights into the lived experiences of White people and their socialization around whiteness. These are insights that Priya and Tracy-Ann could not have gained in the same way from a textbook or academia.

Two other participants shared that they were specifically able to learn a lot about the experiences of bi- and multi-racial people through the IGD experience. Cara, a White, queer, nonbinary woman, shared that "through the class, I learned that multiracial people have a much tougher time working through the frameworks of race…I had never thought about how complex the impacts of racially oppressive systems must be to people who have several racial identities" (Cara, post-dialogue paper). Cara was able to better understand the complexity of multi-racial people's experiences and how oppressive racial frameworks make it challenging for multi-racial people to hold multiple racial identities.

Eris, a Black, genderfluid, queer person shared that "by hearing other people's stories, I was able to learn something, especially when it came to biracial and multiracial people" (Eris, post-dialogue paper).

> Often time, and it is as much a fault of my own as it would be for anyone else, I neglect to think about how having more than one identity can cause conflict between identities. I think most about the internal conflict that comes from being biracial or multiracial, and trying to figure out how all of your identities interact with each other. While I do believe I do the same when I explore all of my personal identities together, I think that there's something different about it when

you are trying to connect different identities of the same category. (Eris, post-dialogue paper)

Through hearing about the experiences of bi- and multi-racial people, Eris was able to gain a new understanding of what life may be like for them. Eris grappled with what it may be like for bi- and multi- racial people to deal with the internal conflict of having more than one racial identity. Eris was able to make some comparisons to having intersecting social identities but knew that it was not the same experience as having more than one identity within the same category, like race. This was a new insight that Eris was able to gain through listening to their bi- and multi-racial peers in the IGD course.

Through hearing different perspectives from fellow students in the IGD course, other students were also able to learn about the differences that exists *within* a particular identity or community. For example, Jessica, a White, bisexual, genderqueer person, shared that by listening to other people's experiences, they realized "that everyone's life is so unique. Everyone had their own story to tell" (Jessica, post-dialogue paper). They continued by offering a few examples, "Even within the three White people in the class, we all had our own experiences of being White. Every person of color had a specific story to tell as well" (Jessica, post-dialogue paper). Jessica, being one of the three White people in the class, was able to realize intragroup differences by hearing the experiences of other White people in the IGD course. They were able to learn about differences among the students of color in the IGD course.

Similarly, Priya, a South Indian, nonbinary lesbian, was also able to learn about intercommunity differences through the IGD course.

> Perhaps the biggest insight I gained during the course was the complex web of relationships that exists *within* a group or community of people... During the class, I had wanted to engage in dialogue about intracommunity issues anyway,

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and being able to do that truly highlighted this. In other words, the fact that no group is a monolithic - and two people with even the same/similar identities will not think the same way about everything - is a crucial component to consider in any intergroup dialogue. (Priya, post-dialogue paper)

Through the IGD course, Priya realized that no community is monolithic and that complexity exists *within* each identity group. During the course, they were able to hear from other students about their lived experience and also engaged in conversations about intercommunity issues. From listening to these stories and engaging in discussions, Priya was able to more clearly understand that no group is "monolithic" and that everyone has their own experiences, even if they share similar identities. Hearing other participants' personal stories was a key learning opportunity for all students in the IGD course. Through hearing each other's personal stories, students were able to gain new insights about differences that occur *across* racial/ethnic groups and *within* them.

Taking Action for Social Change

In Chapter 5, I shared the themes of how participants described and made meaning of taking action for social change. In this section, I explore the role that the IGD experience had in challenging, furthering, or expanding participants' understanding of taking action for social change. The IGD course is designed so that students can reflect on the social change action they have done in their lives, the types of social action that exist, and the impact that social action can have on all levels and types of oppression. Students in the course get to try out two forms of action—dialogue and participating in an intergroup collaboration project. Dialoging across difference, learning from others, voicing your own experiences, and developing the skills to navigate difficult conversations is a form of action in and of itself. All students also participate in an intergroup collaboration project (ICP) during the second half of the course. In their post-

dialogue papers and interviews, I asked several questions about what participants had

learned about taking action for social change during their IGD experience. Through the

IGD course, participants were able to *Engage in dialogue across difference as a form of

action,* which allowed them to develop and apply dialogue skills. Participants shared

about *gaining new insights about taking action* and *creating plans for future action*. Each

of these themes are explored in detail below, using rich student narratives.

Q3: How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the

IGD experience** on their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race

relationships, and **taking action for social change**?

Findings Themes:

Taking action for social change

- *Engaging in dialogue across difference as a
  form of action*
  - *Developing dialogue skills*
  - *Applying dialogue skills*
- *Gaining new insights about taking action*
  - *Learning about the challenges of taking
    action*
  - *Small actions*
  - *Developing White peoples' roles in racial
    justice actions*
- *Creating plans for future action to create
  change*
  - *Taking action in campus leadership roles*
  - *Taking action with their families*
  - *Taking action in their future careers*

Figure 8. Finding themes related to IGD and taking action for social change

Engaging in Dialogue Across Difference as a Form of Action

All participants came to IGD course wanting to gain new skills that could help them to better engage in dialogues and difficult conversations in their lives. Dialoguing across difference is an important and difficult form of action. Through the IGD course, many participants described being able to develop and strengthen skills to thoughtfully engage in dialogue, even when it is difficult. Some students described the skills they were able to develop in class, *Developing dialogue skills*, and others described how they have already used some of the dialogue skills they learned through the IGD course in their lives outside the classroom in the theme *Applying Dialogue skills*.

Developing Dialogue Skills

During the IGD course, Priya shared that they were able to develop a lot of different dialogue skills. The skill they feel they were most able to hone was their "ability to inquire and reflect on what my peers have said." Priya went on to refer to a handout that was distributed in the IGD course titled "Questions to Move A Conversation" (Zúñiga, 2010) that lists questions students can use to learn more about a person or situation. This could allow students to gain a better understanding and keep the conversation going. Priya shared that they refer to this handout often. They said, by asking questions "such as 'What do you mean by that?' or 'Can you help us understand the reason behind your statement?' helped me to not make assumptions about where a person is coming from when they say something I don't fully agree with" (Priya, pos-dialogue paper). By the end of the course, Priya had already started using many of the questions in their daily life \ to gain a better understanding of the world around them. They shared that when using the questions, "It is much easier to get a fuller picture of the

situation before I respond out of haste and worsen it. This also makes me be more critical of my own opinions and reasonings" (Priya, post-dialogue paper). Priya was able to learn about a new skill, inquiry, practice the skill in the dialogue course using a course handout, and apply the new skill to other aspects of their life.

Similarly, Eris's goal for the IGD course was to "learn how to better engage in actual discussions about race. I find that it is often difficult for me to actually do that in many conversations that were related to race" (Eris, post-dialogue paper). Eris was able to meet their goal for the IGD course. They shared that they have "picked up a solid amount of skills relating to being able to talk to other people" (Eris, post-dialogue paper). Eris, like many of the other participants, said that they use these skills in many conversations in their lives, not just those about race or gender, "but just any dialogue at all. I find that I have more conversations and less debates" (Eris, post-dialogue paper).

Applying Dialogue Skills

Like Eris and Priya, many participants described using the dialogue skills they gained in the IGD course in their lives outside of the course. Students shared that they had already begun using their dialogue skills at work and in their social lives. Seena, who described developing the skills to be able to "respectfully and eloquently interject when someone has said something harmful," said that they have already began applying it in their work at a campus resource center.

> I recently found myself applying the skills while facilitating a program at work focused on the internalization of beauty standards and how they affect our desires. During the conversation, a person made a comment that was a little too close to victim blaming for my own comfort. In the past, I would assume that it was just me, say nothing in the moment, and then get angry later. Instead, I found myself respectfully and eloquently explaining to her why her comment could potentially be harmful. I was pretty proud of myself and realized that having the space to

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practice dialogue in class gave me the tools and confidence necessary to fully engage in productive dialogue at work. (Seena, post-paper)

Rather than falling into old patterns of staying quiet and getting angry, Seena responded to a situation at work differently, using the dialogue skills they gained through their IGD experience. Seena was able to explain how they felt to the student in an "eloquent" and informative manner. They were able to practice these skills during the IGD course and also gained the confidence to apply them to their work.

Similarly, Zander was able to develop skills and knowledge around dialogue, specifically the six building blocks of dialogue, and found himself using these building blocks during a difficult conversation with an old housemate with whom he had not spoken in two years. He said that he was reluctant to go to a meeting because Zander "did not know if [he] would be equipped to have a conversation about the conflict which ended [their] relationship (a conflict our other housemates referred to as 'some racist bullshit')" (Zander, post-dialogue paper). Even though he was fearful, Zander did go to meet with his old roommate. He shared about their meeting and how he used his dialogue skills to navigate the conversation.

> Not long into our "coffee date," the subject of the conflict came up. Although I was a little guarded at first, I found the six building blocks of dialogue—deep listening, suspension of judgement, voicing, respect, identifying assumptions, and reflection and inquiry—to be really helpful in making that difficult conversation as productive as possible. Even though I was feeling some pretty big emotions, I was able to hold my judgements "softly" and really listen attentively to what my housemate was saying. I found also found some skills around active listening and purposeful sending—such as paraphrasing back what another person says to see if you have understood them—to be really helpful in minimizing misunderstandings (Bidol, 1986). (Zander, post-dialogue paper)

During his difficult conversation with his roommate, Zander was able to reflect on the building blocks of dialogue that he learned about during the IGD course. He had a lot of

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"big emotions" but was able to use building blocks of suspending his judgments and active listening to engage more in the conversation and hear what his former roommate had to say. He also used some dialogue skills, such as Bidol's (1986) concept of "purposeful sending" to be useful in the conversation. All of the skills and knowledge of dialogue that Zander gained during the IGD course were very helpful in supporting him to have a more clear and productive conversation where both sides of the conflict felt heard.

Through the IGD experience, participants described being able to develop, hone, and practice dialogue skills, such as asking questions and active listening. These are skill sets that participants came to the dialogue course wanting to learn. Students were already beginning to use these skills in many aspects of their lives. Participants shared that their dialogue skills were useful not just in conversations about race or social justice but in many other types of difficult conversations with friends or colleagues.

<u>Gaining New Insights About Taking Action</u>

During the IGD course, participants described gaining new insights about taking other forms of action. While some of the participants already had experience taking action for social change through student clubs and organizations or during their youth, participating in the IGD course allowed them to further their understanding of taking action. I identified three sub-themes from what students shared about the insights they gained during their IGD experience about taking action. Those three sub-themes are: *Learning about the challenges of action, understanding how small actions make a difference,* and *developing awareness of White peoples' role in social change action.*

<u>Learning About the Challenges of Action</u>

Some participants, prior to their IGD experience, were aware of some of the challenges of taking action for social change. These challenges are detailed in Chapter 5, in my findings related to the *Challenges of Taking Action* theme. However, more students were able to directly learn about the challenges of taking action for social change through their IGD experience. A main experience by which students learned a lot about potential challenges was during their IGD Collaboration project, which places students in small groups, composed of 3-4 students with different racial and ethnic identities. These groups are each asked to complete an action project of their choice and to complete a written summary and presentation on their project and what they learned through completing the action.

For example, Cara, learned a lot about collaborative social action through their ICP project. They "learned that collaborating is tough, but often worth it" (Cara, post-dialogue paper). Cara described trying to coordinate their schedule with other group members to complete the action project was not easy and sometimes felt "impossible." However, they went on to talk about how impactful collaborative social change action can be. They shared, "But when you can get a group of people together on a project, it is possible to create something much more impactful than one person would have been able to" (Cara, post-dialogue paper).

Similarly, Liezel shared that her ICP project helped her learn how time and labor intensive activism could be.

> The IGD project taught me just how labour [*sic*] and time intensive activism work
> is. My group specifically chose a social media based project since we believed it
> would be more manageable and not as exhausting. However, it took a lot more
> time and energy out of me. It also reminded me that just because you work

> alongside another LGBT POC, does not mean they will have our back and make
> you feel supported and respected. (Liezel, post-paper)

Liezel felt that it was challenging to complete their ICP project. The project took a lot

more time and energy than Liezel expected, even though her group chose to do an

activism project that utilized social media. The ICP project was also challenging for

Liezel because she did not feel supported by all of her group members. Liezel felt let

down specifically by another LGBT POC class member who was in her ICP group. Her

group-mate did not have her back, and Liezel felt disrespected by their lack of support.

Like Liezel, Zander experienced challenges with his group-mates during the ICP

project. His ICP project did not go smoothly and that his group did not plan for the time

and care that was necessary for the project to be successful.

> I think that was my major take away from the ICP: that collaborating across
> difference can be surprisingly hard. Although there were very few conflicts that
> were voiced in our action planning process, I think my groupmates would agree
> that our project did not run as smoothly as we would have wanted. Most of all, I
> think I learned that taking action requires a lot of time and care. My group had
> difficulty choosing a project which left us with very little time to work out the
> kinks with other. (Zander, post-dialogue paper)

Through the ICP group process, Zander learned how much time and care that taking

action requires. His group mates took a long time to choose a project, and this impacted

the planning process, and it ended up that their project did not go as smoothly as they

wanted it to. Even though Zander experienced many challenges while trying to

implement an action project with his ICP team, he expressed that he is interested in

planning a similar form of action again. He wrote, "In the future, I would be interested in

holding a similar action—some kind of dialogue space—in which we are more

thoughtful, careful, and patient in working through all of the moving parts of working

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across difference" (Zander, post-dialogue paper). Zander hopes to implement what he learned about the challenges of taking action during his future action projects.

Small Actions

In addition to learning about the challenges that can happen while trying to take action to create change, Liezel, like many of the dialogue participants was reminded of the power of taking small action. Many of the dialogue students shared that it can be overwhelming to think about taking action because of all of the time, energy, and knowledge that it would take to implement large scale action for social change. However, through the Intergroup Collaboration Projects and IGD course, more broadly, participants like Liezel were reminded of the power of small actions.

> Looking forward, I would like to take the skills I have practiced and learned and the experiences I have had and use them to better the communities I am a part of. I want to enrich my life and the lives of others by being a more active community member. I want to carry the idea that "there are many ways to make a difference" and I should not let the assumption that small actions are useless stop me from intervening or initiating an action (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). In many ways this class has reminded me that there are many good people doing good work. (Liezel, post-paper)

Liezel's IGD experience, including some of the assigned readings, like "Teaching Tolerance" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017) reminded her that there are multiple ways to make a difference and create change. Her assumption that "small actions are useless" was challenged through the course, and she no longer wanted it to keep her from action. Liezel wanted to be one of the many people who are doing good work, even if it was small, important actions.

Similarly, Devanshi learned about the power of small actions.

> From this project I did learn that taking small steps towards doing work around social justice issues is easier than it seems. Sometimes I get overwhelmed by how deeply ingrained oppression is within our institutions, and therefore instead of

planning action to counter this, try to hide instead. However, I really enjoyed that this class helped me realize my second goal: how to go about creating change, because even small change is important. (Devanshi, post-paper)

Devanshi would get overwhelmed thinking about all of the oppression in the world and that kept her from taking action to counter the oppression. She would "hide" instead of thinking about what she could do to create change. During the ICP project, she learned that "small steps" in taking action for social change was easier than it appeared. She felt she was able to meet one of her goals for the course—learning how to create change. She learned that one way to create change was through "small steps."

Developing Awareness of White Peoples' Role in Racial Justice Actions

While all participants in the study shared that they had gained new insight about taking action for social change, the three White participants specifically wrote about the insights they gained into the role that White people can plan in taking action for social change related to racial justice. The three White participants, Jessica, Matthew, and Cara, each described having previously not understood their "place" in taking action to address issues of racism or in conversations about race/racism. For example, Jessica shared that they had previously taken "a backseat in a lot of conversations about race, if I participated at all" (Jessica, post-dialogue paper).

> I was aware of the problems and racism going on around me and I never felt or acted in any racist way myself, but I never spoke up that much. I felt I was too white to say anything. However, now I know that it needs to be up to white people sometimes to take the load off the back of people of color. We need to help them sometimes. It is exhausting having to stand up for yourself every single time. So, we need to be there for them, and have these conversations and be present and stand up for them. I understand that I'm not "just" a white person. I am white, but that won't stop me from talking about race and fighting for social justice and fighting for what's right when I can…. I've always known that I benefit from white privilege and I can't experience racism, but I have learned about my place within social justice through this class…. I kind of always dismissed my story as

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that of just another white person, but upon taking this class, I realized that my voice still matters in the context of social justice. (Jessica, post-dialogue paper)

Prior to the IGD course, Jessica was aware of their own White privilege and the racism happening around them. While they did not act in a racist way, Jessica never spoke up to address the acts of racism they witnessed. They had previously felt that, as a White person, it was not their place to say anything. Through the IGD course, they learned that it is important that White people do interject and help to "take the load off" of people of color. While Jessica is White and cannot experience racism, they now understand that they should engage in conversations about race and take action to fight for social justice. In the IGD course, they learned that their voice as White people can play an important role in working to create change.

Similarly, Cara shared that, through the IGD course, they "have been encouraged to remember that I have a place in conversations of race, and that I should be taking some responsibility when it comes to talking to white people about race" (Cara, post-dialogue paper). After the course, Cara was specifically interested in the racism they became more aware of in the queer community. They shared, "I have a better understanding of race's impact on my life, and my role in combating that. I also feel as if I have more specific communities I need to be aware of this in as well—the queer community" (Cara, post-dialogue paper). During the class, students watched a video titled "*I'm White, Gay, and Racist*" (Dempsey, 2015). Watching this video and discussing it in the IGD course reminded Cara that they should be:

> Taking an active role combating this unique type of racism in queer spaces I am in… through this course, I have gained a bit of insight about how the concept of race and whiteness has shaped my life, and the extent of my benefits from it. I can see people give me the benefit of the doubt more often in situations where I am underqualified, or underprepared, or have messed up. People are a little less likely

> to be rude to me, and are more likely to overlook my queerness. This is because I am white. The insight I gained was this: though I am not at fault for this, I am responsible for taking active steps to counter it… I need to recognize the unique role I must play if I want to make the spaces I love more just. I have gained the insight that I can and should speak about race more often, and should especially do so. (Cara, post-paper)

Cara gained new insight during the IGD course about their "unique" role as a White person in queer spaces. They realized that they had experienced privilege as a wWhite queer person because people would "overlook" their queerness because they are White. They realized that they must take active steps to counter the privilege they received. They were committed to playing a role in making the queer spaces that they love more socially just by speaking about race and racism more frequently.

Matthew, the third White participant in this study, also learned about his role in taking action as a White person. He shared that before the IGD class, he "never thought critically about what this meant about political action, oppression, and myself. I am thankful for taking this class as it helped me find ways to improve myself in relation to future actions I will take part in" (Matthew, post-dialogue paper). He continued by sharing an example of the new insights he gained about his role in taking action.

> For example, before taking this class I always thought that I was never a problem in relation to racism because I, myself, feel like I am not racist. However, was I always thinking about race? Was I always thinking about the incidences of racially motivated hate crimes that occur in America, or the portrayal of people of color in the media? The answer was no, and this class helped me realize the importance of paying attention to issues of race regarding social and political action. (par 6, post-paper)

Similar to what Jessica described above, Matthew thought that he was not a problem when it came to racism because he was "not racist." However, he also realized he was not taking an active role in understanding and examining the racism that was happening around him. Through the IGD course, Matthew gained new insight into how important it

was for him to pay attention to the issues of racism happening around him and the action being done to address it.

<u>Creating Plans for Future Action to Create Change</u>

In addition to developing important dialogue skills and gaining new insights about taking action, participants also described the important role that the IGD course had in helping them to create plans for future action. Students wanted to take what they learned and the skills they gained during the IGD course and apply it to many aspects of their lives, including their roles as campus leaders, with their family and friends, and in their future careers.

Taking Action in Their Campus Leadership Roles

A major place that students saw themselves implementing the knowledge and skills they gained during the IGD course was in their roles as student leaders across campus. For example, Liezel who worked at the Asian Cultural Center on campus, wanted to apply her "skills and mindset" to her work there as an events coordinator. She wrote, "There are many issues with the centers being depoliticized, underfunded, and generally being mistreated. I want to push back against administration and demand … better treatment for centers and students of color in general" (Liezel, post-paper). Liezel knew that the Asian Cultural Center was being underfunded and "depoliticized" by the campus administration and wanted to take an active role in demanding more for the cultural centers and for students of color on campus. In addition to pushing back again the administration, she was interested in running an event specifically for "LGBT Asian students" at the Asian Cultural Center. With the new "skills and mindset" she gained through her IGD experience, Liezel shared that:

I would feel comfortable with pushing for and creating an LGBT event at [Asian Cultural Center]. It could be a fun and relaxing craft night centered around creating a space where LGBT Asian students feel safe or it can be a more educational and serious event centered around discourse and students talking about their experiences. The first step to bringing this action to life would be discussing the idea with coworkers at [Asian Cultural Center], then we would have to talk to [Multicultural Success Center that oversees the Asian Cultural Center] about greenlighting the event. I would not be surprised if we got pushback so I would have to get the workers to help me demand the time and budget for such an event. (Liezel, post-paper)

Liezel had an idea for a specific event she wanted to create as part of her work at the Asian Cultural Center. She was excited about the idea of planning an event specifically for LGBT Asian people and envisioned it either being a craft night or a more "serious" educational event. Liezel was aware of the steps she would need to take to make the event happen. She also understood that she was likely to receive pushback so she wanted to get the help of other student workers to assist her in "demanding" the time and money required for the event.

Devanshi also saw herself using the dialogue skills that she gained in her IGD experience in her student leader but in her role as an RA. She said "Situations where I hope to apply these skills in the future are all the times in which I have wanted to say something but am unsure of what to say" (Devanshi, post-dialogue paper). Devanshi saw her dialogue skills being helpful when she encounters difficult conversations with her residents.

For example, the other day I was talking to one of my residents (white, male) about the movie *Us*. I mentioned to him that I had loved it even though my friends didn't, and he joked "oh it's because you're a colored person". If one of my friends (non-white) had said this to me I really wouldn't have thought twice of it. But just the fact that this white person used the outdated term "colored" really bothered me, but I didn't know what to say in the moment, especially since I was relatively close to this person. I wish I could have said something but now I feel as if the moment is passed. That moment shattered my rose-colored glasses of him however, and I notice that I don't talk to him as much anymore. Perhaps if I had

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been able to intervene in the moment, he could have apologized and we could still be friends. In this way, I hope to use these dialogue skills in circumstances exactly like this--where someone you are acquaintances with says something and you have to uncomfortably intervene. (Devanshi, post-paper)

Devanshi described a difficult conversation with a resident with whom she was close, who had used an offensive, outdated term. At the time she did not know what to say, and, therefore, she just let it go. However, she could tell that it was impacting her relationship with him, and she wished that she would have just addressed the situation in the moment. Devanshi said that if she had been able to use her dialogue skills in this type of situation she could have intervened, even if it would have felt uncomfortable. She hopes to use the dialogue skills she acquired during the IGD course to address these situations in the future.

Similarly, Jessica saw their dialogue skills being helpful in their role as an RA. Jessica said that they presume it will be specifically helpful when they "have to deal with difficult situations, such as roommate disagreements" (Jessica, post-dialogue paper). They said that while they normally just act as mediators during the disagreements, Jessica said, "I think I can use these skills to get them into a dialogue and actively listen and speak with intention and I think things will get resolved easier" (Jessica, post-paper). They feel the dialogue skills they gained during their IGD experience could help their residents to dialogue and more actively listen to each other. They think this would help the residents get their conflicts resolved earlier. Many participants described the skills, knowledge, and confidence gained during the IGD course being particularly useful to the leadership roles they held on campus. As Devanshi, Liezel, and Jessica illuminate, the knowledge, skills, and confidence could help students to put on new intersectional

programs, collaborate with colleagues, advocate for support, and navigate difficult conversations.

Taking Action with Their Families

Another important place where participants were excited to implement the knowledge and skills they gained during the IGD experience was with their family. In addition to using their knowledge and skills in their role as an RA, Jessica saw their dialogue skills being helpful with their parents. They shared, "I also really hope to use these skills when I speak with my parents about serious issues. They are kind of racist old white people." Jerrica hoped that they could use their dialogue skills with their parents to help them understand how their comments and jokes could be problematic.

> There are some aspects where they're trying to be accepting, but they still make some jokes and comments that are really problematic. I plan on talking with them about these problematic ideals and comments and using my dialogue skills to help move the conversation along rather than getting stuck in a yelling loop. (Jessica, post-paper)

Jessica hoped that the dialogue skills they honed during their IGD experience could help them move conversations with their parents about their "problematic ideals." Jessica wanted to help them understand the impact of their behavior but would often get stuck yelling at each other. Jessica plans to use her dialogue skills to help make these conversations more productive.

Similarly, Cara wants to use her dialogue skills to promote discussion with her conservative parents. They said that their parents "often have trouble connecting their own experiences with privilege" (Cara, Post-dialogue paper). Cara hoped that they could work with their parents in a calm way to "make sure they are taking the chance to look at their own identities in a metaphorical mirror. Even if I am not convincing them to change

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their views, I hope I can work with them to understand the views of others" (Cara, post-dialogue paper). While Cara knows that they may not be able to convince their parents to change their views, they still wanted to help them understand their privilege and other peoples' point of views.

Taking Action in Their Future Careers

In addition to planning to take action in their campus leadership roles and with family, participants also saw themselves apply their learning and skills from the IGD course to their future careers. Priya, who wanted to be a radio broadcaster, planned to use their skills to engage with questions about social justice.

> Generally speaking, the dialogue skills I learned in this class can help me in any field of work where I will interact with other people and engage in questions about (in)justice and (in)equity. I aim to pursue a career in journalism, [particularly radio broadcast, so skills such as asking generative and/or clarifying questions will be helpful in learning about the experiences of other people. I will also be able to learn more about how people relate their own experiences and figure out ways to communicate these stories accurately and fairly. (Priya, post-paper)

Priya hoped to use the dialogue skills they gained in the IGD course to help them in asking more generative and/or clarifying questions to learn more about the people that they are interviewing. They also want to use their skills to help communicate peoples' stories in fair and accurate ways that they and other can relate to.

Similarly, Jericho wanted to use the skills he gained in the IGD course and his current job as a diversity education facilitator to "uplift and defend all the people of color that I can in my workplaces and in my daily life." Jericho was committed to using his skills to make the places where he lived and work better for all people of color. He continued, "Using the privileges, I was given, I will continue to speak and to try to open the minds of others, sometimes through discourse, and sometimes just from being

unapologetically me" (Jericho, Post-dialogue paper). Jericho realized that he could make a difference in his workplace and daily life by speaking his mind and also just by being his full self.

Participants in this study shared that the IGD experience played a large role in their understanding of and desire to take action for social change. Students shared that they developed and honed important dialogue skills in the class that they were then able to implement in many parts of their life. They described gaining new insights into taking action, the challenges of taking action, especially collaborative action. Students were also motivated to take action after understanding the power of "small actions" and about their role as White people in social justice movements. Lastly, participants created plans to implement the knowledge and skills they acquired during their IGD experience into their future roles as student leaders, family members, and employees.

Summary of Findings on Intergroup Dialogue Experience

The findings in this chapter indicate that IGD was a beneficial, developmental experience for the queer and trans student participants. Participants shared that the IGD course supported their development and meaning-making of their intersecting social identities, a sense of belonging among their peers, their cross-race/ethnic relationships, and taking action for social change. Although participants came to the dialogue experience with an understanding of their intersecting identities and the way they shaped their lived experiences, during the IGD experience, students developed a more complex understanding of themselves and their social identities. Students described developing an understanding of their own positionality and confronting the privileges they hold. Participants also furthered their understanding of systemic oppression by hearing about

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the experiences of other participants and reflecting on their own lives. Through the IGD experience, participants were also able to find more pride and joy in their intersecting identities, both their marginalization and privileged identities. This study's findings illuminate the role that IGD played in supporting participants' connections with people of similar marginalized identities and building relationships across difference. Given that the IGD course was made up of all queer and trans students and facilitators, participants felt comfortable sharing about their experiences and found it easy to connect with others in the group. Many participants described a feeling of community, support, and solidarity with the other IGD participants.

The ease of sharing and connecting among the queer and trans participants of various racial and ethnic backgrounds also allowed participants to strengthen their skills and desire to engage in relationships across racial and ethnic differences. During the IGD experience, participants were able to reflect on their previous relationships across difference and gain more confidence in making connections with people of different racial and ethnic identities. The personal stories shared by other participants gave students a unique opportunity to gain new insights into the lived experiences of people with different racial and ethnic identities. This illuminated differences and complexities across and within racial or ethnic groups.

The IGD experience was also shown to strengthen participants' skills and desire to engage in dialogues across difference and take on other forms of action for social change. During the IGD experience, participants were able to learn and practice dialogue skills, such as asking questions and other building blocks of dialogues, and had already began applying these skills into many aspects of their lives. Beyond conversations on

race or social justice, participants found these skills helpful in many difficult conversations throughout their life. Participants were also able to engage in an Intergroup Collaboration Project (ICP). From these collaborative action projects that they took on during the course, students were able to gain new insights about taking action, particularly the challenges and benefits of taking collaborative action, how small actions can make a significant difference in social change, and developing an understanding of their role within particular efforts. Students envisioned using the knowledge, skills, and confidence they gained during the IGD course to engaged in many different forms of future action in their campus roles, with their family, and future careers.

Overall, the findings from this study illuminate the impactful role that the IGD experience had for all participants' individual and collective meaning-making. While all participants learned in different ways, depending on their prior experiences or identities, all participants described IGD as a valuable and unique meaning-making experience that allowed them to learn, grow, and connect in ways that were not possible through other courses or co-curricular spaces they had previously experiences. The IGD experience supported all queer and trans participants in enriching their understanding of their own intersecting identities, lived experiences, relationships, and their social justice commitments. These findings are meaningful contributions and can help scholars and practitioners better understand IGD's potential to support students with multiple, salient, marginalized identities meaning-making processes. The findings from this study suggest that students were able to develop a stronger systemic and intersectional understanding of identity and oppression. This highlights the important learning experience that was made possible through this unique inter/intra group composition and dialogue focus. Taken

together, these IGD-related findings suggest that the learning and developmental

potential of IGD pedagogy could be expanded through the further exploration and

development of intersectional and intragroup dialogues.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of queer and trans undergraduate college student participants in a cross-race intergroup dialogue course. The study sought to develop a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of queer and trans participants in a cross-race dialogues. Specifically, I was interested in exploring the following three research questions:

1) How do queer and trans student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of their **intersecting identities** and **sense of belonging**?

2) How do queer and trans college student participants in a cross-race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue describe and make meaning of **cross-race relationships** and **taking action for social change**?

3) How do queer and trans college student participants describe the **role of the intergroup dialogue experience** in their understanding of their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race relationships, and taking action for social change?

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I reported my findings from my constructivist grounded theory analysis of the experiences for 11 queer and trans students who participated in a cross-race/ethnic IGD course. I first presented themes I found that are connected to how participants described and made meaning of their *intersecting* identities and *sense of belonging* (Chapter 4). I then presented the themes I found that are related to how participants described and made meaning of their *cross-race/ethnic relationships* and *taking action for social change* (Chapter 5). I next shared themes I found that are related to participants *intergroup dialogue experience* and how the IGD course supported their understanding of their *intersecting identities*, *sense of belonging*, *cross-race relationships*, and *taking action for social change* (Chapter 6). The findings presented in

these chapters are significant because they contribute new knowledge about the way queer and trans college students make meaning of their many intersecting identities, develop a sense of belonging on campus, develop cross-race relationships, and how they take action for social change. This study adds new understanding of how participating in IGD supports queer and trans college students meaning-making processes. Although these findings are not generalizable to all queer and trans college students, this study presents important findings that add to the available literature examining the meaning-making of queer and trans college students of various racial backgrounds and also addresses the current dearth of scholarship on the experiences of queer and trans identified participants in cross-race/ethnic dialogues. Lastly, the findings from this study support previous IGD study findings on the value and impact of intergroup dialogue for all students, including those that hold marginalized or multiple marginalized identities.

To begin this discussion chapter, I provide a brief review of the study's context, participants, and the methods I utilized to conduct the study and analyze data. I then share a summary and discussion of some of the significant findings, situating them within relevant bodies of literature that I discussed in Chapter 2. I then bring these findings together to construct a conceptual model, consisting of three dimensions of meaning-making. I break down the model and discuss how it helps to explicate my findings and queer and trans students' meaning-making processes. I conclude with a discussion of implications of my study for practice and recommendations for future research.

Study Context, Participants, and Methods

Participants in this study were all enrolled in the same section of an 11-week, IGD course at Large NE Public. The section was a cross-race IGD for all-LGBTQ+ identified

students. In order to be enrolled in the section of the course and to participate in the study, students had to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) or other gender and sexuality minorities. While the course followed the typical sustained, critical IGD curriculum used in many other cross-race dialogues at Large NE Public, it was unique in its composition of students. This course was the first time that the Large NE Public offered a section of the course that was a cross-race dialogue for only LGBTQ+ people. I examined data from pre-dialogue papers, post-dialogue papers, and post-dialogue interviews collected from 11 study participants. The course's unique focus was designed and implemented specifically for this research study. I was interested in studying a course with this focus and composition so that it could explore race and racism within queer and trans communities as well as students' intersecting race, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities.

The 11 students who participated in this study held diverse racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. Seven participants identified as students of color, 1 as multi-racial/mixed, and 3 participants identified as White. To participate in the research study, students consented to allowing me to collect, view, and store all of their course assignments as a part of my study data. This dissertation study utilizes data from all 11 students' pre-dialogue papers and post-dialogue papers. I completed semi-structured post-dialogue interviews with nine of the dialogue participants. Data from those nine interviews were also analyzed as a part of this study. Once data collection was completed, I conducted document analysis of the pre-dialogue and post-dialogue papers. I also transcribed the post-dialogue interviews and conducted analysis of the transcripts. Constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006) were used for both the

document and transcript analysis. I began by grouping together data on similar dimensions and creating categories, using inductive or "ground-up" processes that allowed me to be open to all possibilities. After open coding, I used in vivo codes, or codes created based on participants' own words, for focused coding and then axial and final coding. Throughout the coding process, I completed many descriptive and analytical memos that would help me identify patterns within the data and generated thematic categories related to the three research questions I explored.

Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I reported my findings from my constructivist grounded theory analysis of the experiences of queer and trans students who participated in a cross-race/ethnic IGD course. I first presented themes connected to how participants described and made meaning of their *intersecting identities* and *sense of belonging* (Chapter 4).

I then presented the themes related to how participants described and made meaning of their *cross-race/ethnic relationships* and *taking action for social change* (Chapter 5). I next shared themes related to participants *intergroup dialogue experience* and how the IGD course supported their understanding of their *intersecting identities*, *sense of belonging*, *cross-race relationships*, and *taking action for social change* (Chapter 6). The previous chapters presented the findings of this study by organizing data from various sources to produce a narrative that addressed each of this study's three research questions. The purpose of this discussion section is to provide interpretative insights into these findings. Whereas the findings chapters split apart and separated out pieces and chunks of data to address the research questions and tell the story of my research, this section is an attempt to reconstruct a more holistic understanding and

integrated picture of the significant findings from my study. In this section, I have

distilled the major findings into four groups, or analytic categories: *Participant's*

Meaning-Making and Identity development, *Participant's Relationships and Community-*

building, *Participant's Social Justice Commitments*, and *Participant's IGD Experience*.

Within each category, I will summarize all related findings and then synthesize and then

discuss some of the significant findings that stand out to me within each category,

situating them within relevant literature that I discussed in Chapter 2.

Summary and Discussion: Participants' Meaning-making and Identity Development

The findings in Chapter 4 indicate that participants have a complex understanding

of their social identities and made meaning of them in intersectional ways. The findings

for research question one highlight the ways that, while some students are still working to

make sense of their identities and the labels that they chose, all student participants had

many social identities that were salient to them and students made meaning of their

identities as intersectional. Students made sense of these identities through different

meaning-making processes and external forces, such as early messages they received

from family or church or experiencing their identities being questioned or erased in the

classroom. Students also found support in their identities through relationships with

friends and mentors. While participants took in messaging from external forces and

understood themselves as "other," meaning they fit outside of societal

norms/expectations, they also described developing a certain sense of pride, joy, and

freedom by coming to terms with their marginalized identities.

Study findings in Chapter 4 revealed that participants' meaning-making of their

social identities was shaped by their friendships and community and that their

understanding of their identities impacted their sense of belonging on campus. In this sense, participants described social identities as an inward understanding of self and as a *process* of meaning-making. Within my findings related to participants' meaning-making and identity development, their *intersectional meaning-making*, *the impact of external forces on their meaning-making process*, and *making meaning of their marginalized social locations* stand out as significant to me. I explore each of them in more detail below, situating their significance in existing, related literature.

Intersectional Meaning-making

Taken together, these findings on students' understanding of their identities indicate that participants made meaning of their many social identities in ways that redefined their understanding of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This ultimately produced intersectional meaning-making, wherein participants were able to integrate their thinking about social identities and systems of oppression into a more critical worldview. The findings highlight the ways that, while some students are still working to make meaning of their identities and the labels that they chose to describe their identities, all student participants had many social identities that were salient to them and saw these as intersecting and inseparable. Intersectionality can be understood as the effects of holding multiple minoritized identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Combahee River Collective, 1977). Intersectionality can be a helpful analytic tool for critically analyzing the ways that oppressive structures, such as racism and cis-heterosexism, reinforce one another and lead to unique and lived experiences for people with multiple, interconnected social identities (Collins & Bilge, 2016). An intersectional analytic frame is important as "the events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as

shaped by one factor. They are normally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 4). As participants in this study came to understand more about themselves and the many social identities they hold, including their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, not only was it clear that many of their social identities were salient and important to them, they also understood their identities as intersectional, overlapping, and that their salient social identities collectively shaped their lived experiences.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on student's meaning-making process. Jones and McEwens (2000) and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) conceptualized and reconceptualized a Model of Multiple Dimensions (RMMDI) of Identity among college students. In the RMMDI model, the students' social identities are demonstrated as intersecting rings that encircle a student's core sense of self. Each ring represents a different social identity and the intersection of the rings signifies how "no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). In the RMMDI, a social identity could only be understood in relation to other social identities. The importance, or saliency, of the identity dimension is represented on the model by dots located on each of the identity dimensions. The proximity of dot to the core represents the salience of that identity to the student at that time. In the RMMDI, the intersecting rings and the various locations of the dots indicating saliency also represent that more than one identity can be relevant to the student at one time. The findings from my study support that students made sense of their identities as interconnected and that many of them were salient at different times for participants. However, my findings extend on the RMMDI by noting

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how these students saw many of their social identities as salient and as important parts of their lives. Holding multiple marginalized identities made it so that students frequently experienced oppressive structures related to many of their identities, serving as a constant reminder of their identities and marginalized place on college campuses.

The students in this study understood that their multiple marginalized identities resulted in a particular, unique lived experience. For some participants, this unique lived experience meant not feeling as though they fit in any of the social identity communities, they were a part of and not feeling supported as their full selves on campus.

Another important finding from this study is that as some students developed an intersectional meaning-making, they were better able to understand and integrate both the marginalization they experienced and the privileges they held.

Impact of External Forces on Meaning-making Process

In the RMMDI (Abes et al., 2007) portrays dimensions of the interactive nature of relationships among components of identity construction: context, meaning-making, and identity perceptions. Contextual, or external influence are represented in the RMMDI as arrows external to identity. Students' meaning-making capacity is drawn as a filter. The permeability of the filter is dependent on the complexity of the student's meaning-making capacity. The depth and complexity of the meaning-making filter influences how a student incorporates any contextual influences into their understanding of their identities. The RMMDI demonstrates the centrality of meaning-making in a student's identity development process.

The findings from my study support the RMMDI model in that they highlight the significance of external forces on participants understanding of their identities.

Participants experienced both negative and positive external messages about their identities from trusted family, friends, and faith groups. These messages impacted not only how students understood their identities but also if and how they chose to share or deny them. However, as participants entered college and advanced in their meaning-making process, they were able to become more secure and comfortable in their marginalized identities. Consistent with the RMMDI, external influences had less of a negative impact on students' identity development process.

Making Meaning of Marginalized Social Locations

One of the ways that external forces influenced participants' identity development process was in how students made meaning of themselves as marginalized or "othered." Through external negative messages about their identities, participants were keenly aware of the how their marginalized identities did not fit into their family's, friends', or society's expectations or norms. At first, this made many participants question or deny their identities and feel isolated. However, as participants advanced in their meaning-making process, many of them began to experience and express their multiple marginalized, intersecting identities as a source of pride and joy.

These findings are consistent with some previous studies on marginalized students' meaning making processes, such as Abes and Jones (2004), who found that their lesbian-identified participants used external expectations to understand and make sense of their sexual identities. While earlier in their meaning-making process, lesbian students in their study wanted to be seen as normal, to fit in with their peers, and used identity labels that were in line with others' expectations of them (Abes & Jones, 2004). This study and others that looked at meaning-making processes with specific student

populations (Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Pizzolato, 2003, 2004) highlight the importance of context in shaping meaning-making processes. As participants' meaning-making journey continued, the lesbian students began to realize the limitations of stereotypes and began to feel frustrated by identity labels, feeling that they were insufficient in describing how they made sense of who they are (Abes & Jones, 2004). During this moment, lesbian students also challenged others' expectations for who they out to or were "allowed" to be (Abes & Jones, 2004). When students advanced to the self-authorship stage of their meaning-making, they develop the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identities, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2009). In trusting their internal voice, participants began to recognize the distinction between reality and their reaction to it. They realized that while they could not control what happened in the world or their lives, they could control how they reacted to what happened (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Participants in my study advanced in their understanding of their identities in similar ways that are documented in these previous studies on college student meaning-making. As the queer and trans participants in my study advanced in their meaning-making, many of them were better able to trust their internal capacities to understand and label their identities. They also realized that, while the external messages had told them about how their identities fit outside of societies norms, they had control over how they could respond to this marginalization. They realized that their marginalization could produce a sense of joy and freedom, where they could comfortably and excitingly live outside of norms and expectations. This is also consistent with many critical and queer theories on existing as marginalized people.

Critical queer theorist, Cohen (1997), stated that true radical, transformational potential is located in the ability for queer people to create a space that is in opposition to dominant norms, where non-normative, marginal, and most vulnerable positions are centered, and an intersectional lens is utilized to recognize how an interlocking system of domination regulates and polices most people. Similarly, Muñoz (1999) explored the ways that those with racial and sexual identities that fall outside of mainstream culture navigate their identities not just through the binary options of "with" or "against" mainstream identities but, rather, by transforming and fashioning a queer world for themselves. Munoz's perspective on how marginalized people perform, survive, and create change in society is crucial to understanding alternative possibilities that exist for marginalized students as they make meaning of their identities and the world around them. Participants in this study understood their positionality in the margins, and as their meaning-making progressed, they began to understand themselves as multiply marginalized people, as being in opposition to dominant norms. Instead of feeling restricted by their "othering," many students found it freeing once they realized they could live outside of the constrictive White, cis-hetero norms of society. Muñoz's (1999) work also stresses that disidentification is a performance, or an attempt to fashion one's own queer world. Meaning-making and identity development do require space for rehearsal and an ability to try on new ways of being. College is a key time in which many young adults rehearse identities and campuses often provide the space needed for trying on new ways of thinking, being, and performing in the world. Participants in this study were finding safe places and relationships in which they could "try on" or engage new ways of articulating their multiple, marginalized, intersecting identities.

Summary and Discussion of Findings:
Participants' Relationships and Community-building

As participants developed an intersectional meaning-making, they were able to better understand the role that their social identities played in their lives as college students and beyond. Most prominently, their social identities shaped with whom and where they felt they belonged on campus. If identity was a process of meaning-making, as I articulate above, belonging could be seen in my findings as an *outcome* of meaning-making.

Study findings revealed that participants' social identities impacted their friendships, community, and sense of belonging on campus. Students reported both small and more egregious ways they experienced marginalization on campus due to their intersecting identities, resulting in feelings of isolation, fear, and tokenism. Study findings demonstrate that, while participants understood that university systems and campus communities were not made for them as marginalized people, they sought friendships and other supportive relationships on campus to cultivate a sense of belonging. Participants were intentional in building relationships and communities with people they could trust, understood their experiences, and helped them feel supported as they navigated their college experiences. Within my findings on participants relationships and community-building, findings related to participants' *sense of alterity and development of a sense of belonging on campus*, and their *relationships across difference* stand out as significant. I explore each of them in more detail below, situating their significance in existing, related literature.

Sense of Alterity and Development of Sense of Belonging on Campus

The majority of participants in my study held multiple marginalized identities and as such, struggled to find places they could fit in or connect to other students on campus. Students shared that they did not feel there were resources and spaces on campus that adequately supported them in exploring and understanding their many intersecting identities and, as a result, they often experienced isolation and tokenism on campus. Study findings demonstrate that the lack of intersectional resources on campuses as well as the oppression (negative external messages) they experienced on campus due to their marginalized identities supported students making meaning of college and the university campus as a place that was not made for them. Feelings of alterity among marginalized people within college and other institutions can be better understood through the lens of critical and queer theory.

Most higher education scholarship positions the institution as a neutral system that is designed to benefit all students. However, like any organizational system, higher education institutions support and replicate systems of domination and oppression through their policies and practices. One of the main things that critical and queer theoretical perspectives can offer is the deconstruction of the normative functions of higher education institutions, that is, queer theorists encourage scholars to recognize the fact that no act that takes place within a system can be ideologically neutral. Therefore, exploring the ways that the system of higher education reaffirms small and significant forms of domination and discrimination (Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989) is necessary to completely understand students' experience in college. Critical theorists Moten and Harney (2004) contended that the university is always a state strategy, advancing state

agendas, and, therefore, the actual beneficiary of the institution is the state and not the people (students, faculty, or staff).

Participants in my study were aware that college campuses were not made with their multiple, intersecting marginalized identities in mind and that they were not supposed to succeed in higher education as marginalized people. The systems and structures in place at Large NE Public did not support their meaning-making and actually contributed to feelings of alterity among many of the queer and trans participants in my study. However, all participants sought friendships and other supportive relationships on campus where they were able to cultivate a sense of belonging. Participants were intentional in building relationships and communities with people they could trust, understood their experiences, and helped them feel supported as they navigated their college experiences.

The findings from this study support previous findings on the experiences of queer and trans students and how they understand and build a sense of belonging on campus. Only three published studies (Duran, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016) have looked specifically at queer college students of varying racial backgrounds and how they define and develop a sense of belonging on campus. Vaccaro and Newman found that their participants associated belonging within three different contexts: university, group, and friendships and that the way they made meaning of their belonging experiences in each of those contexts was closely related to their identities as queer people. Similarly, Strayhorn's 2012 national study of gay students of color at predominately White and historically Black colleges and universities found that friendships are a significant positive factor in developing a sense of belonging. To satisfy

their emergent need to belong, gay men of color who participated in the study engaged in various activities on and off campus and established "fictive kin" relationships (Strayhorn, 2012). Duran's (2018) study of queer students of color showed that participants only felt a sense of belonging toward smaller networks that they were a part of on campus.

The findings from this study also support critical theories focus on the importance of kinship for marginalized people. Kinship theory, originating from the fields of anthropology, sociology, and critical race theory, is interested in understanding the governing principles of relationality (Freeman, 2015). Within queer theory, queer theorists have examined the importance of queer kinship or chosen family. Many queer people develop "families of choice" (Weston, 1997), this "choice" being relative, as it is made under circumstances they have encountered in the world due to their queer and other intersecting social identities, such as race and class (Weston, 1997). Often queer kinships come about through a shared history. Weston stated, "This shared history testifies to enduring solidarity which can provide the basis for creating familial relationships of a chosen or nonbiological sort" (p. 36). For higher education scholars and practitioners, understanding queer kinship theory can help to not only illuminate the many possible forms of relationality that students can and do experience but also the importance of such relationships to queer students and their well-being, happiness, and sense of belonging. Kinships, and the *habitus* and spaces that sustain them provide enduring support and security for queer and trans students that may not exist within traditional, university-driven forms of support.

Relationships Across Difference

The participants in this study held various racial and ethnic identities and most of them had grown up in families, communities, and schools that required that they interact with people of different racial and ethnic identities on a regular basis. The findings in Chapter 5 illuminate how participants navigated their circumstantial interactions across racial differences, some describing them as forced or an act of survival. It was not until the students came to college that they could be more intentional and select the people with whom they wanted to build relationships. Participants reported seeking relationships with people of similar marginalized identities (race and/or sexuality and/or gender) as a form of support. Even though most participants in this study had interacted with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds for most of their lives, the findings from this study indicate that students still found that engaging in conversations across race/ethic lines or about race/racism was difficult in college. There were not a lot of spaces or opportunities for students to gain support in having these difficult conversations, and they often felt that they lacked the desire and/or skill to engage productively in conversations across race. This finding is significant in that it demonstrates that even through participants had a lot of experience interacting across racial and ethnic differences, these participants still found it difficult to engage in relationships across differences—suggesting that participants were not lacking in *opportunities* to engage across difference, but, rather, they lacked the *skills and support* necessary to do so in a developmental manner.

However, when they were able to intentionally engage across difference, participants shared that they were able to learn a lot about different identities and

experiences in the world through the stories and experiences that their peers shared. I

found that students were able to learn and develop in their meaning-making process

through their cross-race/ethnic relationships. Participants gained new perspectives,

challenge their biases, and altered previously held beliefs through their cross-race/ethnic

relationships. This finding is significant in that it highlights the important role that

relationships across difference can play in supporting students' meaning-making process.

Summary and Discussion of Findings: Participants' Social Justice Commitments

The findings in Chapter 5 shed light onto if, why, and how the queer and trans

participants in this study engaged in actions to create social change. Many participants in

the study shared that the reason they engaged in forms of action was because of their

experiences as marginalized people. I found that participants in this study were motivated

to take action for social change through reflecting on and understanding their own

identities, positionalities, and their experiences as marginalized people. Participants made

meaning of their reality and their positive and negative experiences in the world and

understood how they wanted to react to this reality was by taking action to create change.

These findings are significant in that they suggest that students conceptualized self-

awareness as an important part of taking action. Understanding their identities as

intersectional helped to illuminate the heterogeneity in their communities and that

different members within the same community experience different challenges and have

different needs. Participants understood that these multiple needs must be accounted for

when taking action to support a community. They found this to be one challenge of

figuring out how to best take action to promote social change.

Summary and Discussion of Findings: Participants' IGD Experience

Last, taken as a whole the findings in chapter 6 indicate that IGD was a beneficial, developmental experience for the queer and trans student participants. I found that the IGD course supported participants learning, development, and in making meaning of their intersecting social identities and their understanding of systemic oppression. Through this unique inter/intra group dialogue for all queer and trans students, participants were able to confront the privileges that they hold and find more pride and joy in their intersecting identities. This study's findings illuminate the role that IGD can play in supporting participants' connections with people of similar marginalized identities and building relationships across difference. Last, intergroup dialogue experience was also shown to strengthen participant's skills and desire to engage in dialogues across difference and take on other forms of action for social change. Within my findings on participants' IGD experience, *IGD as a space for meaning making, Supporting a complex understanding of intersecting identities,* and *Pride, Joy, and Community as dialogue outcomes* stand out as significant. I explore each of them in more detail below, situating their significance in existing, related literature.

IGD as a Space for Meaning Making

The findings from this study suggest that participating in IGD was a unique meaning-making experience for the queer and trans participants. The self-reflection, sharing of personal stories, content knowledge, and facilitated dialogue that took place within the intergroup dialogue course created served as significant learning and development opportunities for participants and advanced their capacity to make-meaning

of their intersectional identities and lived experiences, the identities and lived experiences of their peers, and a more critical understanding of the world around them.

While empirical existing literature on the outcomes of race-focused dialogues highlighted the many ways in which IGD could shape aspects of students meaning-making. All previous literature on IGD highlight the ways in which participation in IGD shaped specific learning outcomes such as cognitive, affective, and action outcomes. This study is unique in that I foregrounded meaning-making as a whole rather than specific learning outcomes. This allowed for my study to capture a more holistic insight of the learning, development, and meaning-making that could occur within the dialogue space.

Previous findings of race-focused IGDs found that participants gained an enhanced meaning-making related to self and society highlight how many students, in reflection, recognized that their thinking prior to the IGD experience was less complex, critically conscious, and open minded than they had originally understood it to be (Alimo et al., 2002). This findings from this study supports previous studies that looked at participants' meaning-making related to salient social identities (Alimo et al., 2002; Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003), finding that students gained an increasingly complex understandings of how their own identities and experience fit into broader patterns within society. Additionally, this study supports other findings relating to students meaning-making as it related to critical thinking. I found that participating in IGD enhanced student's capacity for reflecting and analyzing their own experiences, and critically reflecting on the truth claims of others, and the way that society functions. This study suggest that the structure of IGD guarantees conversations and interactions across

difference, and this is essential in developing more critically conscious thinking and meaning-making.

This study also highlighted much more about the developmental and meaning-making processes that are supported through the intergroup dialogue experience. Moving beyond specific learning outcomes allowed for me to capture a more holistic and complex understanding of participants experiences and meaning-making process. This study suggests that much can be gained by broadening the focus of IGD empirical studies, beyond predetermined learning outcomes and by rather looking at holistic meaning-making processes.

Supporting a Complex Understanding of Intersecting Identities

This study is also unique in that it studied an intergroup dialogue experience with unique composition and focus. The intergroup dialogue I studied followed a standard curriculum design of other race-focused dialogues, however it altered the way that participants were selected for the dialogue. All participants in this dialogue were queer or trans (LGBTQ+) identified college students. This make up of an all queer and trans dialogue that focused on race, racism, and racial justice created a unique learning and meaning-making space. Through this inter/intra group dialogue, students were able to discuss their multiple salient identities, systemic reflection on intersectional forms of oppression and supported intersectional meaning-making. The dialogue also simultaneously encouraged a web of connections across multiple intersecting identities that are seldom explored on college campuses.

Since race-focused IGDs are the most common type of dialogues that take place at college and universities, the outcomes of this type of dialogue are also the most well-

researched and reported of all types of IGDs. However, there has been a recent implementation of dialogues focused on Whiteness/White privilege (Alimo, 2012; Ford, 2012; Saldaña, 2011; Yeung, Spanierman, & Landrum-Brown, 2013) and sexual orientation/heterosexism (Dessel, Woodford, & Warren, 2011). More recently, in an attempt to focus explicitly on these forms of privilege, IGD practitioners have begun adopting intragroup dialogue. Intragroup dialogues bring together a group of students based around a shared or common identity. These dialogues give students an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences that exist among members of a social identity group. However, no previous studies have documented the intragroup dialogue experiences of queer and trans students.

The findings from this study support and extend previous research on IGD. There is a rich documentation of the outcomes of participants in race-focused dialogues on college campuses. Only four previous studies have documented the outcomes of sexuality-focused dialogues. There are no current studies that explore the experiences of intragroup dialogues among all queer and trans students, as these dialogues have rarely, if ever, been offered on college campuses. Even as IGD programs continue to expand their reach and are offered at more campuses across the country, IGD remains a marginalized practice that results in an inability to document the possible powerful implications of this unique pedagogical model. This study's findings, focusing on such unique dialogue focus and composition are significant, suggesting that there is great potential in the expansion of traditional IGD programs and models to include more dialogues that have an Intra/Inter group blend, as it could better support students' meaning-making processes.

As programs and models of IGD expand, more research is needed to understand these new learning spaces.

The participants in this study not only held many social identities; they experienced many of their identities as salient to them and their lived experiences. Through the unique IGD space, they were able to explore their multiple salient identities in ways that were not otherwise supported in their lives as multiply marginalized people. This finding suggests that the learning experience of IGD provides a unique space for students to explore multiple identities, beyond those of the dialogue focus.

Through exploring their multiple identities, participants were able to make meaning of the identities in which they hold privilege. Even though most participants held multiple marginalized identities that have resulted in experiences of oppression and isolation, through the IGD course, students were supported in reflecting on how they still hold some forms of privilege. Some students were able to reflect on their socioeconomic class, citizenship status, or formal education experiences as places of privilege and understand how these identities have also shaped their lived experiences. The dialogue focus, composition, reflection activities, personal sharing, and dialogues allowed students to explore the complexities of their identities and make meaning of the privileges they hold. This finding extends current IGD research by suggesting that IGD may be a pedagogical practice that can support marginalized people in exploring their own privileged identities and experiences.

Pride, Joy, and Community as Dialogue Outcomes

The findings related to participants' IGD experience are also significant in that they demonstrate the pride, joy, and community development that could be possible

within an IGD space. While previous studies on IGD have demonstrated that participants gained an increase comfort with and skills to interact with others (Alimo et al., 2002; Murray-Everett, 2016), this study's findings support the notion that participating in an IGD course could aid in students' development of relationships with other students of shared identity. Students from this study left feeling more connected to other students in their community. This suggests that IGD could play a role in supporting marginalized students' sense of belonging.

Integration of Findings and Introduction of Conceptual Model

The information I summarized and discussed in the previous sections helped to answer my research questions. It also highlights the complex and interrelated meaning-making processes of the queer and trans participants. I also highlighted how my findings build on, confirm, and extend existing literature. In the following section, I share the results of my constructivist grounded theory analysis of the data, across pre-dialogue papers, post-dialogue papers, and post-dialogue interviews in the form of a model that brings together the different central categories of participants' meaning-making process, illustrating how all of these categories fit together and support one another. This model represents a method of putting the data presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 together in a coherent way to better understand participants' holistic meaning-making process.

When analyzing the data and writing the previous findings chapters, I noticed the ways that the concepts and processes I discussed were interconnected and served as integrated parts of participants' meaning-making processes. While I had presented these concepts as discrete categories in the findings chapters to thoroughly address each of my research questions, they are, in reality, much more connected. For example, students

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described a key way they made meaning of their intersecting identities was through the relationships and connections they built with people of similar and different identities. Similarly, participants described the reasons they chose to build relationships with certain peers or to join certain clubs was because of their intersecting identities. Students described their intersecting identities and relationships across difference to be main motivators for their commitment to social justice. Lastly, participants described the IGD experience as a way they were able to further their understandings of themselves, the community they were a part of, and taking on social justice commitments.

During my analysis and writing processes, I began to diagram my thinking as a way to think about the findings categories and their relationship. Bringing these concepts together allowed me to see the full complexity of meaning-making processes and the way that the IGD experience supported their meaning-making. Creating this model allowed me to pull together the different parts of a participant's meaning-making that I had previously parceled out in order to analyze and share my findings. Bringing these meaning-making areas together allowed me to see and share a more holistic narrative of a student's experience and more accurately see the complexity of a student's experiences and understanding. Meaning-making is holistic and does not happen piece by piece. Rather, all of our experiences are constantly helping to shape and inform all areas of our understanding.

Charmaz (2014) stated, "Diagrams can offer concrete images of our ideas" (p. 218). Diagraming is an important part of grounded theory methods, as it allows researchers to see relative power, scope, and direction of the findings categories as well as the relationship between them (Charmaz, 2014). The conceptual model that I

developed and honed throughout my data analysis process and writing of my findings

chapters allowed me to see three main areas, or dimensions, of meaning-making shared

by the participants in this study. The three dimensions are: understanding identities and

social location, building relationships and community, and fostering social justice

commitments. The three dimensions are reflected and described in three of the analytic

categories I summarized and discussed in the previous section. Laying out these

dimensions in a conceptual model demonstrates the relationships and integration among

the three major dimensions of participants' meaning-making. It also helps to situate the

IGD experience as part of participants' meaning-making process in all three dimensions.

Lastly, the conceptual model helps to contextualize the dimensions and IGD experience

as taking place within an institutional context and a societal context.

Below, I discuss each of the dimensions of meaning-making and bring together

the themes from the findings that fall within that dimension. I utilize participant quotes to

bring the parts of my model to life and remind the reader of where these findings were

highlighted in the data. After discussing each of the three dimensions in detail, I bring

them together to help articulate my conceptual model, including how the dimensions of

meaning-making interact and influence one another and how the IGD experience

furthered participants' meaning-making in each of the three dimensions.

Figure 9. Understanding identities and social location

The first significant dimension, or area of meaning-making that I identified through my analysis and findings, was participants' "Understanding Identities and Social Location." This dimension speaks to the ways that participants made meaning of their social identities, what these identities mean to them, and how those identities shape their relationship to the world around them. Social location is how one's identity incorporates individual, community, societal, and global factors. All of these factors overlap and express the core of a person's existence in the social world (Kirk & Okazawa-Ray, 2013). Social location "places us in particular relationships to others, to the dominant culture of the United States, and to the rest of the world" (Kirk & Okazawa-Ray, 2013, p. 15). A person's social location can determine the power and privilege they have and can use in the world as well as ways in which they have less power and privilege (Kirk & Okazawa-Ray, 2013). I found that participants making meaning of their identities and social location was made up of components. Those include their understanding of *identities as intersectional*, *integrating marginalization and privilege*, *self as othered*, and *pride and joy in the margins*.

Identities as Intersectional

Findings related to *identities as intersectional* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students' complex understanding of their intersecting identities. As participants in this study came to understand more about themselves and the many social identities they hold, including their race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, not only were many social identities salient and important to them, they also understood their identities as intersectional, overlapping, and inseparable. For example, Seena shared, "My life as a college student has been affected quite distinctly by my racial, sexual, and gender identities. These three identities cannot be separated from one another" (Seena, pre-dialogue paper). The students in this study understood that their multiple marginalized identities resulted in a particular, unique lived experience. For some participants, this unique lived experience meant not feeling as though they fit in in any of the social identity communities they were a part of and not feeling supported as their full selves on campus. For example, Eris shared about being both Black and queer. They wrote, "Especially being a minority within a minority, I have often found myself vilified for being queer within the black community, and also being black within the queer community." (Eris, pre-dialogue paper). Eris did not feel that they could fully belong in either the black community or queer community because of intersecting, marginalized identities.

Integrating Marginalization and Privilege

Findings related to *integrating marginalization and privilege* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students' complex understanding of their intersecting identities. As participants in this study understood their identities as intersecting, they also began to

understand their marginalization and privilege related to their multiple social identities. Some students shared about their experiences being multiply marginalized and the difficulty they can find in feeling supported in their multiple marginalized identities. For example, Eris, a Black genderfluid queer person shared about "being a minority within a minority" and the challenges that come with being at the "crossroads of gender, sexuality, and also race" (Eris, pre-dialogue paper). Other students shared about how they became aware of the privilege they experienced, even though they hold other marginalized identities or even within marginalized communities, such as the queer and trans communities. Cara, a White queer non-binary woman, reflected on how they experience privilege within the queer community due to their whiteness. They wrote, "White queer communities can be oddly racist at times (surprising, I know), and it can be easier for me at times to occupy white queer spaces. In addition, I have an easier time navigating new spaces as openly queer" (Cara, pre-dialogue paper).

Self as Othered

Findings related to *self as othered* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students' complex understanding of their intersecting identities. Participants made meaning of their marginalized identities through their socialization with family, friends, and church starting at a young age. This socialization helped them begin to understand what it means to hold their identities in this world. For many participants, part of making meaning of their intersecting social identities was coming to the understanding that they did not fit into society's norms and experienced being "othered" in society as a result. Participants described how society defines normal as White, straight, cis, and able bodied. Many participants, like Seena, developed this reconnection of being "othered"

and existing outside of society's norms from an early age. Seena, a Black, [majoritarian east-African ethnic identity], first-generation American wrote, "I remember being in second grade and already understanding that I looked different from everyone else in the class…. While I wasn't consciously thinking about my blackness in the same ways that I do now, there was still that inkling of difference" (Seena, post-dialogue paper). Participants also shared that it was through their marginalized gender or sexual identities that they realized they existed outside of society's norms and that came with significant costs. For example, Jerrico a Black gay man described being scorned due to his multiple marginalized identities. He wrote, "To be black and to be brown in America, especially whilst simultaneously holding a queer identity makes it obvious that you are a deviation from the norm, and that these deviations are seldom appreciated and often scorned" (Jericho, pre-dialogue paper).

Pride and Joy in the Margins

Findings related to *Pride and Joy in the Margins* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students' complex understanding of their intersecting identities. While participants in this study shared about the ways their intersecting identities resulted in them often feeling marginalization in small and big ways in their daily lives, including feeling othered or not supported by their communities. Participants also shared how they have developed pride and joy in their marginalized identities. For example, Priya a south Indian, non-binary lesbian wrote:

> More than the hardships, the joy of being a nonbinary South Asian lesbian, and being able to be with QTPOC, is a unique type of joy and belonging that I have not found replicated anywhere else. There is a certain freedom in existing in the margins or outside multiple sets of norms (Priya, post-dialogue interview)

With the awareness that they fit outside of societal norms, many participants, like Priya, described that they were able to find pride and freedom in existing in the margins of society.
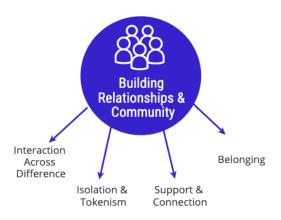

Figure 10. Dimension: Building relationships and community

The second significant dimension, or area, of meaning-making that I identified through my analysis and findings was participants' "Building Relationships and Community." This dimension speaks to the ways and reasons that participants built relationships and community before and during their college experiences. The students in this study shared about the ways that relationships were sometimes challenging to build but also a necessary form of support. Participants described the process of making meaning of building relationships and community as including four major components. Those include their understanding of *interaction across difference*, *isolation and tokenism*, *support and connection*, and *belonging*.

Interaction Across Difference

Findings related to *interaction across difference* were documented in Chapter 5, related to students' *cross race/ethnic relationships*. Most of the students in this study

described interacting with people of different racial and ethnic identities for most of their lives due to the circumstances in which they grew up. Participants grew up in racially diverse families, neighborhoods, and schools, so interacting across difference was an everyday part of their lives. For example, Tracy Ann, a Black genderfluid, bisexual participant, interacted across race and ethnicity daily due to their school. During their kindergarten through eighth grade, they went to school with "predominantly Hispanic people" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper). They wrote, "This was because I lived on the side of town which had that population and also because my father's side of the family are Afro-Latino and lived there" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper).

However, most of these circumstantial interactions were unstructured and unsupported. Many participants described that it was difficult for them to have conversations across race/ethnicity or about race/racism. It was not until students entered college that they felt they could intentionally choose and intentionally seek out friendships with certain people. This was the first time for many students to intentionally build relationships with other people of the same ethnicity or within the queer or trans community. Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman, shared, "It was not until I entered to college and had more freedom to venture out that I purposely tried to find friends of color, especially those who are LGBT" (Liezel, pre-dialogue paper).

<u>Isolation and Tokenism</u>

Findings related to *isolation and tokenism* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students sharing they were "navigating systems not made for me." Since many of the participants held multiple marginalized identities, they often experienced a lack of spaces and resources where they could be supported and affirmed in all of their interesting

identities. Students often felt used as token minorities due to their identities. This took place in courses in which students were asked to "speak on behalf of" one of their marginalized identities. Participants often felt isolated on campus as a result. For example, Seena, a Black genderqueer participant shared, "I've been asked to speak on behalf of black folks, immigrants, queer folks, and trans folks in class because I was the only person who held (or had family members who held) those identities" (Seena, post-dialogue paper). As the only person with their identities in most situations, Seena experienced this form of tokenism often. Seena also went on to say how they felt isolated from their own cultural identity since they were the only person of their ethnicity at the college.

<u>Support and Connection</u>

Findings related to *support and connection* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students "seeking belonging through relationships and community on campus." Due to the marginalization, isolation, and tokenism they experienced, students shared that it was important for them to seek out support and connections with people whom they could trust. Part of this trust was based on their friends being "woke," or educated enough that the participants did not feel as if they needed to educate their friends or that their friends would question them. One of the ways they sought support on campus was by connecting with students of similar, marginalized identities. Tracy-Ann shared that their "sexuality has affected the type of people I surround myself with; I generally interact with other queer people or people who I know do not have any prejudices" (Tracy-Ann, pre-dialogue paper). Many students shared that they joined clubs and organizations, like ethnicity-based organizations or events for queer and trans students of color (QTPOC), to

be with people who had similar lived experiences and interests. Some students shared

about meaningful relationships they built with faculty and staff on campus. Zander, a

multiracial trans student, wrote about the importance of the supportive relationship he

had with a staff member in the LGBTQ center on campus. He wrote about their

relationship, "She's like my work supervisor, but also we don't just talk about work. It's

about personal life and my family life, and my academic life, and all of these things

coming together in a way that like doesn't feel really forced, like it feels really authentic.

(Zander, post-dialogue interview). Mentor relationships, like the one Zander described,

provided holistic support in an otherwise unsupportive campus environment for the queer

and trans participants.

<u>Belonging</u>

Findings related to *belonging* were documented in Chapter 4, related to students

seeking belonging through relationships and community on campus. While participants in

this study were aware that the higher education systems that they attended were never

made for them—and most of them had experienced marginalization and isolation on

campus—all students were able to make connections and build a sense of belonging. One

of the key ways that students did this was through forming supportive relationships with

friends, as described above. Another key way that students in this study developed a

sense of belonging was through joining clubs and organizations with people of similar

identities. For example, Liezel, a Filipino, bisexual, cisgender woman, wrote:

> It never stops being exhausting having to constantly navigate whiteness and be
> hyper aware of what your race/ethnicity bring, or how they will be interpreted.
> This is a major reason as to why I intentionally navigate towards people of color.
> My close friend group is comprised of mostly people of color. Most of the spaces
> on campus I gravitate towards are meant for students of color: the [Asian Cultural
> Resource Center] and QTPOC events at the [LGBTQ Resource Center]. Seeing as

I am forced to be in white spaces where my identity and experiences as a Filipino are constantly being overlooked or are at a constant risk of being disrespected, I place myself in spaces where I can be around other POC. (Lizel, post-dialogue paper)

Liezel's quote exemplifies the challenges of navigating a PWI (Large NE Public) as a queer student of color that many of the participants faced and how they intentionally choose spaces and places where they could feel supported. Last, some students describe their on-campus leaderships positions—at campus resource centers or on a RA staff— were places and spaces they felt that they belong and felt supported as their full selves. For example, Jessica wrote about the belonging and support they feel in their RA staff.

[They said their RA staff is] probably my favorite group of friends on campus. It's so easy to just be out and be yourself. For the most part, they all respect my gender really well and I appreciate them a lot for their efforts to educate themselves through my experiences. (Jessica, pre-dialogue paper)

Figure 11. Dimension: Fostering social justice commitments

The third significant dimension, or area of meaning-making that I identified through my analysis and findings was participants' "Fostering Social Justice Commitments." This dimension speaks to the ways that participants developed an understanding of their desire and ability to take on action and other forms of social justice

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commitments for social change. Those include their *Self-awareness, understanding*

intersectionality within communities, and *taking action to create a better world.*

Fostering Social Justice Commitments

Self-awareness

Findings related to *self-awareness* were documented in Chapter 5, related to

students' describing their *self-awareness as action*. Students described how being

exposed to new situations and educating themselves about social justice issues allowed

participants to develop self-awareness. Students shared that they developed an awareness

of their privilege and positionality in the world. For example, Jericho, a biracial gay man,

shared that if we were ever going to make progress in this world, we all needed to do the

work was to "check our privileges." He shared:

> If we are ever to move forward as a society, it will take as many of us as possible,
> from the wokest to the least woke, to check our privileges and ask ourselves how
> life might have been different if we had been born into different circumstance.
> (Jericho, post-dialogue paper)

Participants saw the awareness of their privilege and positionality was a necessary, initial

form of social justice commitment that could support them in doing more intersectional,

intentional social change action. Some participants talked about checking their privilege

in different situations in order to be more aware of the impact they were having or how

they could better create space for other students of marginalized identities. Developing a

more nuanced understanding of systemic oppression and their role in it also helped other

students become more self-aware and better prepared for future action.

Understanding Intersectionality Within Communities

Findings related to *understanding intersectionality within communities* were documented in Chapter 5, related to students describing their "acting to create a better world" and "challenges of taking action."

As participants developed a better sense of their own intersecting identities and self-awareness, they also furthered their understandings of the communities they were a part of. For example, Matthew, a white gay man, shared that understanding his intersecting identities and privileges allowed him to gain a greater self-awareness. This self-awareness made it much easier for him to begin to "identify aspects of the community that are affected by various elements of systemic oppression" (Matthew, Pre-dialogue paper).

Participants in this study shared that one of the challenges they faced when trying to take previous action was trying to meet all of the needs of one community. Students understood, just as they had intersecting identities that resulted in unique needs and experiences, so did every other member of the communities they were a part of. Understanding that members of a particular community have many intersecting needs and issues helped students become more aware of the intentionality and thoughtfulness that would be necessary when wanting to take action to support a particular community. For example, Priya shared:

> In my opinion, political organizing, social justice work, education, and journalism all come with the expectation that you will build community, and that any community is not monolithic. Furthermore, each of these areas requires engaging in meaningful ways with those of different backgrounds and becoming politically conscious. (Priya, pre-dialogue paper).

Understanding intersectionality and heterogeneity of a community was a big part of many participants' meaning-making process around taking action and developing a more intersectional lens for their social justice commitments.

Taking Action to Create a Better World

Findings related to *taking action to create a better world* were documented in Chapter 5, related to students describing their *acting to create a better world*. Many participants in this study had experienced marginalization and acts of bias as a result of their marginalized identities. This allowed participants to see how unjust and cruel the world could be. These experiences motivated many participants to want to take action in order to create a better and kinder work. For example, Tracy-Ann wrote about their intersecting identities as a Black, queer, genderfluid person and how this shaped their experiences and their commitments to social justice. They shared:

> My intersectional identities have made me have a very specific experience…often feel like there is no specific place that all of my identities can be highlighted at once. It has also made me care abut [sic] social justice and politics a lot more than I would otherwise. (Participant 5, pre-dialogue paper)

Some participants shared that they were involved in community organizing from a young age, while others did not get involved in taking action until college. However, all participants described plans for taking on future action to create change in the world.

Conceptual Model

The above section describes each of the three dimensions of meaning-making that I identified during the data analysis process and during my time of drafting the findings of this study. Each of these three dimensions played a big role in participants making meaning of their experiences. In this section, I bring those dimensions together in my conceptual model, Figure 12. Laying out these dimensions in a conceptual model

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Figure 12. Meaning-making of queer and trans college students in an IGD experience

demonstrates the relationships and integration among the three major dimensions of

participants' meaning-making. It also helps to situate the IGD experience as part of

participants' meaning-making process in all three dimensions. Last, as can be seen in

Figure 12, the conceptual model helps to contextualize the dimensions and IGD

experience as taking place within an institutional context and a societal context. Below, I

explicate the ways that the different *dimensions of meaning-making interact and*

influence one another as well as describe the *role of intergroup dialogue in participants'*
meaning-making processes.

Dimensions of Meaning-making Interact and Influence One Another

The three dimensions—understanding social identities, building relationships and
communities, and forging social justice commitments—are not desperate or isolated
meaning-making processes. Each of the three dimensions interact and influence one
another as part of the participants' holistic meaning-making processes. This is
represented on the conceptual model with the multi-directional arrows between each of
the three dimensions. Each of those arrows, or points of interaction, is described below.

Understanding Identities and Social Location ⇔ Building Relationships and Communities

Participants described the processes by which they came to understand their
intersecting social identities. One of the key ways they came to make meaning and feel
affirmed in their identities was the meaningful relationships they built with other people
in their lives. This can be seen in the findings theme from Question 1, "relationships to
define and affirm identities." On the other hand, interactions with others also influenced
participants' understanding of their identities in negative ways, including feeling like
their identities were erased and questioned (from findings for Question 1, presented in
Chapter 4) and feeling othered (from findings for Question 1, presented in Chapter 4).

The way that participants went about building relationships and communities was
largely shaped by how they made meaning of their intersecting identities. Participants
sought relationships with people of similar identities and lived experiences. These
findings are detailed in the findings for research Question 2, in "Finding Support in
Familiarity." Students shared about seeking support services and organizations on

campus that were identity-based, such as QTPOC events at the LGBTQ Resource Center in order to forge community and build a sense of belonging on campus. This can be seen in findings shared from Question 1, Seeking Belonging Through Relationships and Community on Campus."

Building Relationships and Communities ⇔ Social Justice Commitments

A key way that participants' relationships influenced their social justice commitments was through their interactions across racial and ethnic differences. Through interacting and building relationships with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, students gained new insights and understanding of the world. They also gained a stronger sense of compassion for other people through listening to different perspectives and hearing about different lived experiences than their own. These findings are shared in Question 2, "Learning from Others." Through hearing different perspectives and learning about different lived experiences, participants also gained a better understanding of the heterogeneity of their communities and the unique needs and experiences of each person (from findings related to research Question 2, acting to create a better world, presented in Chapter 5). This understanding helped them to see that an intersectional approach was necessary when seeking to take action for social change. Students' relationships were also impacted through their social justice commitments. Some students who were involved with activism efforts on campus say that they have built important friendships with other students who were involved in similar activism work. Their shared interests in taking action for social change was able to serve as a basis for a meaningful friendship.

Social Justice Commitments ⇔ Understanding Identities and Social Location

Participants shared that a main reason they were invested in taking action for social change was due to their experiences as marginalized people. Holding multiple marginalized identities and experiencing the oppression and bias that exists in the world motivated the students to take action to make the world a better place. Having a marginalized gender or sexual identity motivated some students to want to take action to support other marginalized communities. Similarly, the self-awareness students developed about their social identities and the privilege and oppression they experienced was a necessary first step in their commitments for social justice. Understanding their identities and social location allowed students to better understand their motivations for taking action and also their "place" or "role" in social justice movements.

The Intergroup Dialogue Experience

The IGD experience is visualized on the conceptual model as a dotted circle connected the three meaning-making dimensions. This represents the role that IGD played in furthering participants' meaning-making in each of the three dimensions. As the findings from research Question 3 suggest, IGD was a meaningful and developmental experience for all participants. Each participant shared about how the dialogue experience furthered their meaning-making around their intersecting identities and social location, supported their development of relationships across- and within-identities and understanding of community, and furthered their desire and capacity to take on social justice commitments.

IGD Experience and Understanding Identities and Social Location

Findings on the *IGD Experience and Understanding Identities and Social location* were documented in Chapter 6 in "Intersecting Identities." These findings show that while the participants came to the dialogue with a complex understanding of their identities, the self-reflective assignments and in-class activities gave students an opportunity and container to explore their intersecting identities and the impact these identities had on their lived experiences. For example, Jessica shared that through the IGD experience, they were able to develop a more complex understanding of what it means to be White. They wrote, "At the beginning of this course, I identified as a white person. I still do. But my understanding of what that means has changed over this time."

The intersectional focus of the dialogue also supported students in exploring their multiple identities in ways that were lacking in other places on campus. The IGD experience supported participants in *confronting their privilege* and *increased understanding of systemic oppression*. For example, Jericho a Black gay man, shared that the IGD experience allowed him to confront his privileges as a cisgender man. He wrote, "My cis maleness is something I carry, and although the effects of toxic masculinity have hurt me very much in the past, I realize I can and do still benefit from that privilege in spite of my other identities" and, as a result of this realization, he wants to "put more effort into checking my privilege around non-males, and put the extra effort into making sure that they have ample room to exist, even as I fight for my own" (Jericho, post-dialogue paper).

As participants reflected on their experiences in the IGD course, they also wrote about the ways that their IGD experience helped them in *finding pride and joy* in their

multiple intersecting identities. For example, Jessica, a White, genderqueer, bisexual person, the dialogue course helped them realize how radical it can be just being themself. They shared that through the IGD course, they "kind of realized how radical it is to be myself in some spaces. We talked early on about radical acts we do, and one that was mentioned was just being yourself. I had never seen this as a radical act before, and I really love seeing that within myself." (Jessica, post-dialogue paper)

IGD Experience and Building Relationships and Community

Findings on the *IGD Experience and Building Relationships and Community* were documented in Chapter 6 within findings on "Sense of Belonging.*"* One of the main ways that IGD supported students in their building of relationships and community was by bringing them together with other students within the queer and trans community, with various different racial and ethnic identities. Being in an academic space and *sharing similar marginalized identities* with all the students and facilitators was a rare and important experience for participants. Sharing common identities allowed participants to feel more comfortable sharing about their experiences and connecting with other students in the course. For example, Eris shared:

> Being in a class as small as ours, it was very easy to make every interaction we had a significant one. I also think the fact that we were all queer played a big role. I think we were a lot more comfortable with each other earlier on, and were able to have natural dialogues because of that, because we all were queer. Being queer is a big part of my identity, as I imagine it would have been for the others in the group, so having a space where there was no need for the obstacle of hiding our gender or sexuality, which happens often times in these kind of spaces. However, not having had to do that, we were able to connect to each other more, and were more willing to really listen to each other, and I think that ability to find shared community really helped us engage. (Eris, post-dialogue paper)

The dialogue not only supported students in building stronger friendships with individual students in the group but also a greater sense of community with the group of IGD

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participants. For example, the IGD course allowed Jessica to better understand how many queer and trans people there are on campus. They wrote:

> I realize how many of us there are after the class. Everyone in this class was queer or trans and I find so much strength in the fact that we all came together and took this class. Solidarity is so important, and I am so grateful to have felt that in this class. (Jessica, post-paper)

Through the dialogue experience, students gained a better understanding on just how big and diverse the queer and trans community is on campus and about the other intersecting identities these community members hold and felt more supported through the relationships they developed with other participants.

IGD Experience and Social Justice Commitments

Findings on the *IGD Experience and Social Justice Commitments* were documented in Chapter 6 within findings on "Taking Action for Social Change." The IGD experience allowed students the opportunity to have sustained, supported interactions and *engage in a dialogue across differences as a form of action*. Through this experience, students were able to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage in dialogues across difference. Eris, like many of the other participants, said that they use these skills in many conversations in their lives, not just those about race or gender, "but just any dialogue at all. I find that I have more conversations and less debates" (Eris, post-dialogue paper).

Participants shared about already *applying dialogue skills* in their lives and shared multiple ways they plan to use the dialogue in their future. Students were able to develop new insights about taking action, including how *small actions* can make a difference for social change. Participants were also able to engage in self-reflective activities and hear about the lived experiences of other students. This supported students in *gaining new*

insights about taking action and their role in social justice movements. All participants left the dialogue experience with *plans for future action to create change*. For example, Cara planned to use the knowledge and skills she gained during the IGD experience to engage in conversations about privilege with their parents. Cara hoped that their conversations could help their parents to "look at their own identities in a metaphorical mirror. Even if I am not convincing them to change their views, I hope I can work with them to understand the views of others" (Cara, Post-dialogue paper). Cara knew that her dialogue skills would help in this important but difficult conversation with her conservative parents. In addition to using dialogue skills with family members, participants planned to use the knowledge and skills they gained during the IGD experience to create change in their leadership roles on campus and in their future careers.

Summary of Conceptual Model

I brought together the significant findings from this study into a conceptual model. This model allowed me to explore the main meaning-making dimensions of participants: *Understanding Identities and Social Location*, *Building Relationships and Community*, and *Forging Social Justice Commitments*. I then detailed how each of these dimensions was an integrated part of the participants' meaning-making process. The dimensions all influence and impact one another. Through the conceptual model, I was able to demonstrate the way that the IGD experience furthered participants' meaning-making processes in each of the three dimensions. This conceptual model helps to add complexity to and extend existing literature. Specifically, this model helps to bring together different but interrelated meaning-making processes and demonstrates the ways

in which they support and are dependent on each other. The conceptual model highlights the ways that IGD can be an important pedagogical practice that supports all three dimensions of student's meaning-making and also the necessary connections among them. In the following section, I will share how each of the findings related to each of the dimensions of meaning-making and the IGD experience support specific recommendations for practice and implications for research.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to better understand how queer and trans students described and made meaning of their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, cross-race/ethnic relationships, and taking action for social change. The study also explored the role that participating in a cross-race/ethnic IGD course played on participants' understanding and meaning making. The findings from this study provide new insights into the meaning-making dimensions of queer and trans students and how their meaning-making was supported through the IGD experience. Though the experiences of these 11 participants are not generalizable, the findings I surfaced from these students' stories and experiences provide insights that may be useful to the broader fields of higher education and IGD. Below, I offer specific strategies and consideration for higher education and IGD practice and recommendations for future research, based on the findings from each of the three meaning-making dimensions and the IGD experience.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study suggest several important implications for practice within the broad fields of higher education and IGD. The implications for practice described below may be of value to practitioners across higher education and IGD in

developing services and structures to better support queer and trans students with

multiple marginalized identities and further the impact and application of IGD programs.

I link specific implications back to the dimensions of meaning-making and IGD

experience that were highlighted in my findings and conceptual model. I present these

implications in bullet points to ease the way for the reader in identifying specific

recommendations that may be relevant to their own practice.

<u>Understanding Identities and Social Location</u>

- Understanding the nuance of students' identities rather than just one social identity category can help to more fully understand students' lived experiences and their support needs.

The students in this study held complex understandings of their intersecting identities and

the way these identities impacted their experiences on campus. Students held many

salient identities beyond their race, gender, and sexuality that impacted their sense of self

and lived experiences, such as their religion, immigrant status, or (dis)ability. These

findings support the need to create and better fund programs, spaces, and courses in

which students can be supported in the exploring *all* of their intersecting identities and

celebrate their unique lived experiences while finding commonality and connections with

other students of similar and different social identities. Specifically, the findings in this

study support the urgent need to address the overwhelming whiteness of queer and trans

resources and spaces on campus and the lack of queer- and trans-affirming programming

and spaces within racial/ethnic-affinity spaces and resources.

- Findings from this study highlight the way that participants held pride and joy in their multiple marginalized identities.

Often identity-focused support services, spaces, and events can focus on the negative

effects of marginalization or the oppression that marginalized groups face. While these

spaces and resources are a necessary form of support for marginalized students, they

cannot be the only focus of resources designed for these students. Campus cultural and

LGBTQ resource centers as well as campus events and initiatives should be attentive to

develop resources and spaces for students to also reflect on and celebrate the pride and

joy they feel (or could feel) in all of their intersecting identities.

Building Relationships and Community

- Findings from this study support and extend previous research on queer and trans
  students and how they develop relationships, community, and sense of belonging
  on campus.

Students in this study reported that an important form of support was their individual

relationships with chosen friends. It was important that these students felt a sense of trust

and support from their friends, and they could understand their lived experiences. Often,

this meant seeking students of similar identities and lived experiences. Colleges and

universities could develop more initiatives and services that support students in their

individual sense of belonging and connection versus an institutional sense of belonging.

Programs and spaces that bring students together and allow them to develop meaningful

relationships could support students in finding people with similar identities and lived

experiences that would further their sense of support and belonging.

- Many participants in this study shared that they had interacted with people of
  different racial and ethnic identities for most of their lives; however, they still
  found that conversations across difference or about race/racism were difficult
  and hard to navigate.

This suggests that students, particularly students of color and/or queer and trans students,

may come to college already having experienced interacting across racial and ethnic

differences but may still found it difficult to engage in relationships across differences—

highlighting that students may not be lacking opportunities to engage across difference,

but, rather, they may be lacking the skills and support necessary to do so in a

developmental manner. However, when my participants were able to intentionally engage

across difference, they shared that they were able to learn a lot about different identities

and experiences in the world through the stories and experiences that their peers shared.

College and universities could offer programs and initiatives that offer supported

opportunities for students to engage in frequent and meaningful conversations across

difference and programs that support students in developing skills and confidence in

having difficult conversations across difference. Not only could these programs increase

students' capacity to engage across racial and ethnic differences; it could support them in

having more developmental and meaningful conversations with their chosen friends and

families, further increasing their sense of support and belonging.

Forging Social Justice Commitments

- Findings from this study highlight the importance of reflection and self-awareness as a critical part of students' taking on social justice commitments.

With a more complex understanding of themselves and their positionality—both their

privilege and marginalization—students were better able to understand their place in the

world and the action they wanted to take to make the world a better place. Programs,

courses, and spaces that support students' critical self-reflection can build their critical

self-awareness. This can be a fruitful starting point for any initiatives they seek to help

students engage in action for social change.

- The findings from this study demonstrate the connection between students' experiences as marginalized people and their motivation to take action.

With this understanding, colleges and universities could design initiatives that are aimed

to both support students in their marginalized identities and their capacity to take on

social justice commitments. Very often, these initiatives are conductive separately, in siloed corners of campus work. However, bringing together action initiatives, such as grassroots organizing programs and identify affirming initiatives, such as cultural/resource centers and programs, could result in a more meaningful experience for marginalized students to think more holistically about who they are and the work they want to do as marginalized people to create social change.

Intergroup Dialogue Experience

- Intergroup dialogue remains a marginalized, underfunded, and underutilized pedagogical practice.

Through extensive empirical studies, the outcomes of participating in a sustained critical IGD experience have been well documented. This study supports and extends previous studies in suggesting that participating in a sustained, critical IGD course supported all students' development and meaning-making processes in key ways that are not offered through other initiatives on campus. More colleges and universities could invest in intentionally developing IGD initiatives for their campuses. While each campus will have unique needs and structural limitations, critical IGD programs are possible on all campuses and beneficial for all students.

- Even though most participants came to this dialogue course with advanced understanding of their own identities, how oppression operates in society, and their own experiences with both marginalization and privilege, completing the IGD experience did further students' self-awareness, making meaning of their and others' social identities, and systemic oppression.

This supports other studies that show how all dialogue participants are able to have key learning experience from participating in an IGD course. Students grow and learn different things during the IGD experience, depending on their previous experiences,

self-awareness, and identities. However, all students gained meaningful insights into their position and experiences in the world.

- The IGD course was made up of all queer, trans, and other college students with marginalized gender and/or sexual identifies who hold various racial identities and focused on race/racism. Other dialogue programs should consider expanding dialogue offerings to allow for more intragroup and intersectional foci.

Many IGD programs have begun to implement IGD, or dialogues that bring together people from *within* a particular community; however, few programs offer intersectional intragroup dialogues, like the one in this study. The particular configuration of this course—bringing together all students within a queer and trans community, but having students of many different racial and ethnic identities and focusing on race/racism, allowed for a particular intersectional learning experience for all students. Students were challenged to examine the intersections of their identities and, therefore, the ways that they experience both privilege and marginalization. It allowed students to develop understanding and connection with a community (trans and queer community) but also across racial and ethnic differences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Through the process of designing and implementing this research project, I also identified many opportunities related to future research that could expand upon the findings I present in this study. The suggestions below link back to the dimensions of meaning-making and IGD experience that were highlighted in my findings and conceptual model. I present these suggestions in bullet points to ease the way for the reader in identifying specific recommendations that may be relevant to their own research.

Understanding Identities and Social Location

- More research is needed to better understand how queer and trans students' intersecting identities impact their meaning-making processes, experiences on campus, and how college and universities can develop more holistic, supportive spaces and resources for all queer and trans students.

The findings from this study detail the complex experiences of the 11 queer and trans participants and show how their intersecting identities resulted in unique and multifaceted lived experiences. In the absence of more empirical information about how students with marginalized gender and sexual identities make meaning of their other intersecting identities, researchers and educators may inadvertently reduce the experiences of queer and trans students to their sexual and gender identities and/or rely on potentially harmful and limiting theories in their work with students.

Building Relationships and Community

- Future research should be conducted with an intersectional lens to take into account how queer and trans students' other social identities also impact their experiences and sense of belonging on campus.

As I detail above, only three published studies have looked at the particular experiences of queer students and sense of belonging. There are currently no published studies on the experiences of trans students and how they develop and make meaning of their sense of belonging. More research is needed on these marginalized students' experiences in college and if and how they feel a sense of belonging. More intentional, intersectional research on these students' experiences will help us understand how queer and trans students, and especially queer and trans students of color, develop a sense of support on campus as a way of navigating systems that were not made for them.

Forging Social Justice Commitments

- More research is needed to further understand how queer and trans students make meaning of their identities in relation to their social justice commitments.

Just as the practice to support these areas of development for college students, so is research. Conducting studies that focus on the interaction between these two areas of students' meaning-making process could illuminate a more nuanced understanding of students' experiences and how/why some marginalized students chose to engage in social justice commitments.

Intergroup Dialogue Experience

- Future studies could track more closely students' understanding and perceptions of belonging throughout the IGD experience to better examine how the IGD experience may contribute to students developing a stronger sense of belonging.

Perhaps a brief survey could be developed with some questions relating to key belonging factors and distributed before, throughout, and after the IGD experience. This will allow for being able to more thoroughly document change over time in students' perception of their belonging and connection.

- To understand more about how queer and trans students' social justice commitment, future studies could benefit from asking more explicit questions about students' previous experience with taking action for social justice prior to the IGD experience.

Most of what I gained from this study about queer and trans students' social justice commitments was limited to what students learned during the IGD experience and what their *intended* plans were for taking action after the course was over. A longitudinal study could help to document if/how the IGD experience changes if/how participants engage in social justice commitments after completing the course.

Conclusion

When I first imagined this study a few years ago, I thought about the unique opportunity it would be to bring together and study queer and trans students of various racial backgrounds together in a cross-race/ethnicity IGD on race and racism. However, I could never have imagined the complexity of identities, experiences, and understandings that the participants in the study would share with me. The participants in this study held many varying social identities and had very different ways of seeing and making meaning of the world. However, all of them came to the IGD experience with a nuanced understanding of their identities, relationships, and place in the world. The participants embraced a sense of pride and joy in their identities as marginalized people. Each of them had found ways to build a community and support on campus that they were keenly aware was not made for them.

Through the IGD experience, these 11 students were able to grapple with, question, push back on, and make meaning of new complex questions and insights. The opportunity to hear about the personal experiences of students in the course who held similar and different social identities allowed them to gain rich new insights into their own life and into the lives of others. Being in a space with all queer and trans students allowed them to find a sense of connection and also realize the differences and diversity that exist with their communities. Last, the IGD experience allowed the participants to gain new perspectives on their social justice commitment and the actions they want to take in the future to create change on campus, in their families, and future workplaces.

The experiences of the 11 queer and trans participants in this study, when told collectively—beside, within, and against each other—trouble the limited, one-

dimensional, normative portrait often shared of these students and illuminated the way these marginalized students make meaning of their identities, relationships, and commitments to social justice. I titled my dissertation "Making Meaning in the Margins" due to how this study's findings highlight the important ways queer and trans students made meaning of their identities, sense of belonging, and social justice commitments from their marginalized social locations. I also did so because this study suggests that all queer and trans participants furthered their complex understandings of their identities, sense of belonging, and social justice commitments through participating in the marginalized practice of IGD. It is my hope that the findings from this study encourage and inspire others to understand and uplift the experiences or queer and trans students in new ways through the lenses of critical theory and that scholars and practitioners continue to explore the possibilities present in IGD for supporting the meaning-making process of queer, trans, and other marginalized college students.

PRE-DIALOGUE PAPER GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Pre-Dialogue Paper
Spring 2019
Due: On Moodle by Wednesday, Feb 6, 2018 by 8pm;

<u>**Objectives:**</u>

The purpose of this paper is to reflect back on your lived experiences and your relationships up until this point and how they may have been shaped by your social identities. This paper will help you prepare for your conversations and readings in this Race/Ethnicity dialogue.

<u>**General Instructions:**</u>

This paper is a 3-4 page (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins) self-reflection paper. You should write about your experiences, your thoughts, and reflections. The paper should address each of the specific prompts below but should not be written in a "question-answer" format; try to integrate your ideas in each section into a coherent reflection.

The paper is due on Moodle on Wednesday February 6th at 8pm. You must also bring a hard copy of the paper with you to class on Thursday February 7th.

<u>**Grading Criteria (7 Points):**</u>

You will receive the full seven points if your paper is turned in on time on Moodle, meets the page length requirements, and adequately addresses all the prompts listed below. One point will be deducted for lateness. You will not receive credit if this short assignment is submitted more than a week late.

<u>**Paper Prompts**</u>

Dialogue Course

1) What brings you to this course? What are some of your personal goals for this Race/Ethnicity Dialogue for all Queer & Trans (LGBTQ+) people?

2) In this intergroup dialogue course, you will have the opportunity to participate actively in semi-structured, face-to-face weekly dialogue sessions with students from other social identity groups (i.e Race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, etc.). You will explore your own and others' experiences by participating in interactive activities and dialogues in class, assigned readings, and the writing of reflection logs. Based on what you know about how this class is structured:

   a) How do you feel about participating in dialogues about race and ethnicity in a diverse group?

   b) What hopes do you have? What excites you about participating in this course?

c) What do you anticipate being challenging for you? What are some of your fears or concerns about participating in this dialogue?

Social Identities and Relationships

3) This course relies on an engaged pedagogy approach to encourage meaningful communication, learning and collaboration across differences, which can be rewarding and challenging for everyone. (If you are just joining the class, refer to the reading by hooks on Engaged Pedagogy) For instance:
   a) Have you ever tried to be friends or team up with people from a racial/ethnic background very different from your own?
   b) If so, what do you think led you to cross racial/ethnic lines in these relationships?
   c) If you have not had such an experience, why do you think that was?
   d) How can this week's readings help you contextualize and reflect your experiences? Be specific.
2) Do you feel your racial/ethnic identities have influenced your experiences as a college student? If so, how? If not, why do you think this may be?
3) Do you feel your gender and/or sexual identities have influenced your experiences as a college student? If so, how? If not, why do you think this may be?
4) Do you feel that your intersecting identities (race, sexuality, and/or gender) have influenced your relationships on campus (friendships, dating, mentoring, etc.)? If so, how? If not, why do you think they may be?
5) How do you anticipate this course impacting your relationships with students of different social identities than your own?

APPENDIX B

POST-DIALOGUE PAPER GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Final Paper
Spring 2019
(20 points total)
Section 4

Due: Monday, April 22, 2019, by Noon

General Instructions:
An 7-9page (typed, double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins) self-reflection paper is due on Monday April 22nd, by 12:00 pm (noon). **Please submit your final reflection paper on Moodle by noon using word (.doc or .docx) format.**

Should you wish to earn 1 extra credit point toward your grade please deliver **two hard copies** on Monday April 22nd by noon **to S136 Furcolo Hall**.

Objectives:
The purpose of this paper is for you to reflect on your experiences in the intergroup dialogue and integrate your learning from all aspects of the course, including the assigned readings, testimonial, log assignments, class activities, Intergroup Collaboration Project (ICP), and dialogue sessions. This paper also supports your reflection on your lived experiences and relationships up until this point and how these may have been shaped by your social identities and experience in this intergroup dialogue course

Grading Criteria (20 Points):
Because students learn different things in different ways, there are no "right or wrong" answers. Papers will be evaluated on content, depth and quality--not on one's opinions. A thoughtful, well-written paper will include:

- Coherent and well-organized writing that integrates your learning from all aspects of the course;
- Specific examples and detailed descriptions of learning experiences or specific content from printed or video resources that were important for your learning;
- Reflections on your changes in thinking (if any) while you went through the dialogue;
- Description and analysis of your experiences and learning through conceptual frameworks of social identities, socialization, privileged social groups, targeted social groups, systems of privilege and oppression, action continuum, personal and social change among others;

- Clear and precise connections between **readings, concepts, and examples from dialogue.**

There are four sections to this paper **and the paper is worth a total of 20 points**:

- Each of the four paper sections is worth 4 points, which totals **16 points**. To earn all 16 points, you should clearly and thoroughly answer all of the questions in a section.

- The remaining **4 points** are allocated for successful achievement of the following:
  - o Meeting the minimum page-length requirement
  - o Citing course readings using APA format (and including a reference page)
  - o Submitting a coherent, well-organized and clearly written paper
- Finally, **you must use and discuss at least 6 different course readings** throughout the paper. You may refer to video or film clips, but you still must refer to 4 readings at least. You will lose a total of 6 points should you fail to incorporate any readings/videos (that is, you can lose 1 point per each missing selection).

Late submissions: Papers turned in late will result in the following consequences: 1 point will be subtracted from your grade if your paper is 1 day late; 2 points if your paper is 2 days late, 3 points if your paper is 3-6 days late; 5 points if it is more than a week late. **Unreadable e-files submitted on Moodle will be considered late until a readable file is submitted.**

Extensions: Should you need an extension for medical or other reasons, please contact the teaching team by **TH April 18** at educ202-xzuniga-2@courses.umass.edu to clarify next steps.

<u>Guiding Questions:</u>

Re-reading your logs and the log comments from your facilitators will help you think about the following questions. However, we do not want you to simply re-state things you wrote before but to provide some new analysis on those past thoughts and feelings. **Your paper should be a <u>comprehensive essay</u> that reads coherently and smoothly rather than relying on a "question-answer" format. Each of the four topics is equally important, and hence, contributes equally to your final grade for the paper.** Therefore, it is important to address all <u>four</u> topics below, as well as each sub-section marked by a., b., c. and d.

1) **You and the Race/Ethnicity Intergroup Dialogue for all Queer & Trans (LGBTQ+) People (4 points)**

a) What brought you to enroll in this Race/Ethnicity Dialogue for all Queer & Trans (LGBTQ+) people? What were your personal goals for the course? How did you met or did not meet those goals, and why?

b) What hopes did you have this intergroup dialogue experience? What challenges, if any, did you anticipate facing and why? How were these hopes and challenges met or not met and why?

c) How did your own participation in this class (including the exercises, structured conversations and dialogues, and ICP) affect the group's dynamics? Or vice versa?

2) **Learning about social identities and systems of oppression (4 points)**

a) Describe your understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity(ies) before you entered the class, and how you understand it now that the class has ended.

b) Describe your understanding of your own sexual/gender identiy(ies) before you entered the class, and how you understand it now that the class has ended.

c) What has been the impact of this semester's dialogue on your understanding of what it means to be a person of your race/ethnicity on campus and in your community? (for example: your feelings, perspectives, actions, and vision for the future)

d) What has been the impact of this semester's dialogue on your knowledge and views about what it means to be a person of your sexuality and gender on campus and in your community? (for example: your feelings, perspectives, actions, and vision for the future)

e) What did you learn about how systems of privilege and oppression (racism, white privilege. cissexism, heterosexism) impacts biracial people, multi-racial people, people of color and/or white people. Please provide examples and supportive evidence from printed or video resources.

3) **Intergroup Relations (4 points)**

a) How do you understand the impact of your race, ethnicity, and the system of racism on your experiences as a college student? What, if any, role has this course played in that understanding?

b) How do you understand the impact of your gender and/or sexual identities and the system of heterosexism/cissexism on your experiences as a college student? What, if any, role has this course played in that understanding?

c) Do you feel that your intersecting identities (specifically your race, sexuality, and/or gender) have influenced your relationships on campus (study groups, mentoring, friendships, dating, etc.)? If so, how? If not, why do you think they may be?

4) **Looking back, Moving Forward (4 points)**

a) How did listening to other people's experiences impact your understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity(ies)? What about your sexual/gender identities? How did the readings, films, and/or video-clips assist in understanding these identities?
b) How do you feel taking this dialogue course has impacted your relationships with students of different social identities than your own? Do you envision this continuing over time?
c) Looking ahead, how do you see yourself applying the dialogue skills you learned to your personal life, community life on campus and society at large? Describe a specific situation in which you hope to apply these skills and/or where you have already begun to apply these skills outside of the class.
d) Thinking about your Intergroup Dialogue project (ICP), what lessons about collaborating across differences and taking action did you learn? Looking ahead, what type of action might you feel comfortable taking? What steps would be involved in bringing the idea to taking action to life?

POST-DIALOGUE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Background information for the Interviewer

The main purpose of our interview protocol is to explore thoughts and feelings related to specific participants' experiences in the dialogue group. Individual interviews will take approximately one hour.

I am particularly interested in identifying what students learn when participating in the race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue.

The main topics covered by our interview protocol are:

A.   SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND INTERSECTIONALITY

B.   COLLEGE EXPERIENCE AND SENSE OF BELONGING

C.   INTERGROUP DIALOGUE COURSE EXPERIENCE

D.   WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES AND TAKING ACTION

Part I: Introduction

Greet student by their first name and introduce yourself.

Interviewer Opening Statement (in your own words)

Thank you for coming today and agreeing to be interviewed for the research study. You may know that this interview is part the study I am conducting as part of my dissertation at UMass Amherst. Your interview will be part of the data that I will use to understand the experiences of students who participated in the race/ethnicity dialogue for all queer and trans people, which will ultimately help contribute to advancing our knowledge of the impact of participating in Intergroup Dialogue courses on college students in general and, specifically, for queer and trans identified students.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions in this interview, because the questions ask about your personal experiences. Please also know that we are not just looking for the "good" answers, and don't want you to feel like you should say only positive things. We are interested in learning about the whole range of experiences that people have in intergroup dialogue and on campus, including the good and the not so good. It is most important that we understand your experiences as completely and accurately as we can. Therefore, it is essential that you feel free to be completely honest in this interview.

Your honesty and willingness to be specific and detailed in your answers would be most appreciated.

As a token of appreciation for participating in the interview today, I want to give you a $40 gift card to Target. Know that, even if you choose to stop the interview at any time the gift card is yours to keep. [give participant gift card]

I want to reassure you that your grade in the class or how you will be evaluated will not be impacted in any way by how you answer the questions in this interview. No one who was connected to your dialogue class grade as a facilitator or course instructor will have access to your answers. Your confidentially will be maintained and your identity will be protected by having your name and other identifying information removed from any documents produced from this research. No names will ever be attached to any of the interview transcripts or to any quotes from the interviews that may be used by the research to illustrate the different types of dialogue experiences people have. Therefore, your responses to this interview will remain completely confidential throughout the research process.

In order to help ensure that your responses remain confidential and anonymous, your facilitators and instructor are not a part of the interview process. I will not discuss your interview with anyone, because I have also committed to keep all the interviews I do completely confidential.

(Insert review of consent form issues – need to tape record, freedom to stop interview, not answer questions, etc. Be sure that participant signs consent form before proceeding.

Before beginning, ask a series of questions to check in on how informed the participant is of their rights:

•   Do you understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you can drop out at any time?

•   Do you understand that this interview is being digitally audio recorded?

•   Do you understand that there are follow-up processes and resources to contact to get more information at a later date.

Over all, make sure that the participants' rights are fully explained and understood, allow space to ask questions, and double check that they know there is contact information for follow-up questions or concerns.)

Ready to begin?

Part II: Interview

A. Introductions

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?

2. What brought you to enroll in this race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue for all queer & trans (LGBTQ+) identified people?

PROBE: have you taken social justice education courses before? Are you involved in student organizations? How do you know (the person who refered them)? What made you select this particular section of the course?

B. SOCIAL IDENTITIES

3. A good portion of this course focused on social identities.

a. So in terms of race, ethnicity gender, and sexuality how did you identify yourself in this class?

PROBE: what do these identities mean to you?

b. are there other social identities that you feel are a big part of who you are?

PROBE (if not mentioned above): what about your (dis)ability identity? Your class? Your religion? Your nationality?

4. How do you feel your identities as __ (name previously mentioned identities)__ shape your life and experiences?

PROBE (if not answered above) Tell me more about why you felt this way?

5. When you think about your salient social identities, what role do you think systems of oppression in shaping your experiences as a college student?

PROBE (if not mentioned above): what about the system of racism? How about cis-sexism? Or heterosexism? Or Abilism?

C. COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

6. Now, let's turn to hear more about your experiences in college

a. Can you tell me more about your experiences in college?

b. Can you tell me about a time during college when you have felt supported?

c. What about a time you felt unsupported?

7. A way some scholars think about support is through the concept of sense of belonging. Sense of belonging can be defined as a "student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued, and important to others on campus" (Strayhorn, 2012).

a. How often do you feel that on campus?

PROBE (if not answered) where? When? With whom? How?

PROBE (if not answered) why do you feel that may be? Can you say more about that?

b. what about in other places in your life?

IF YES, PROBE (if not answered) where? When? With whom? How?

IF NO, PROBE (if not answered) why do you feel that may be? Can you say more about that?

8. in reflecting about what we just talk about, How do you feel (if at all) this dialogue experience shaped your thinking about or sense of belonging on-campus?

a. if so how? In what ways?

PROBE: Can you share 1 or 2 examples?

b. what about the course may have contributed to this impact?

D. Intergroup Dialogue Course

9. You mentioned you came to this IGD course because _(refer to what they said earlier)_ . Can you tell me more about that?

a. Can you talk a bit about how your experience in the IGD course has met your need/goal/hope?

If met-PROBE: how so? What specifically happened during the course to support that need/goal/hope?

If not met- PROBE: why do you think that may be? Is there anything in particular that you think hindered this?

10. How do feel this course supported the development of knowledge or understandings that you already held about yourself and the world?

a. Students often describe gaining new knowledge and understanding in this type of IGD courses. Is this true for you? If yes, can you describe new knowledge/information and/or understandings you gained of yourself or the world?

PROBE: what aspects of the IGD course provided opportunities for this new knowledge/understanding?

11. As you know, the IGD course included many different readings, videos, activities, open dialogues, sharing of personal experiences, and practicing dialogue skills. What particular aspects of this course would you say had the biggest impact on you and your learning?

PROBE (if not answered): Is there a particular__ (reading/video/moment/story)__ that you can recall? Tell me what it was like for you to __(read/watch/hear/share/experience) that? What do you feel you took away from that moment?

E. SKILLS IN WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

12. Many participants describe learning specific skills in intergroup dialogue to work with people different from themselves.

a. What did you learn in the dialogue or your ICP about working with people from different identity groups?

PROBE (if not answered in a):What are TWO specific skills that you have learned or sharpened about working across differences? What in the dialogue process helped you gain those skills?

PROBE (if not answered in a):How have you applied those skills in the dialogue?

b. Do you feel that you have applied these skills/learnings in other aspects of your life?

c. Moving forward, how do you see yourself applying these skills outside the dialogue group?

13. Your ICP group assignment also gave you an opportunity to try to plan and implement a collaborative action project seeking to promote social change.

a. do you have prior experience taking action to create change?

PROBE: was this individual? Collective?

b. what did you feel you learned from the Intergroup Dialogue course or your ICP group assignment about taking collective action?

c. moving forward, do you see yourself taking action for social change?

IF YES, PROBE: what kind of action? With whom? For what cause(s)? Tell me more about why you feel that is important?

F. CLOSING

14. It is now time to wrap up this interview. Before we close, was there anything else about your dialogue experience that you wanted to discuss that we didn't get to talk about? Thank you.

Part II: Closure and Closing Comments

Thank you again for your participation is this interview and for sharing your dialogue experience with me today. I want to reassure you again that your responses will be kept completely confidential and that your name will never be attached to any of your responses. If you have questions about the research study, you can contact me at NTG@XXXX. Thank you again for your time.

THANK YOU!

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