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“I AM WHO I AM”: LGBTQ+ STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT A BAPTIST LIBERAL
ARTS UNIVERSITY

By

Edwin Carl Pavy Jr.
B.M., Campbellsville University, 2009
M.M., Campbellsville University, 2016

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2022

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 21, 2022

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Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller

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DEDICATION

For my wife, Anna Marie –
with deepest gratitude for your unwavering support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In reflecting upon my journey through doctoral study, I am overwhelmed by the immense volume of encouragement and support I have received during the last four years. When I began my program at the University of Louisville, I decided before ever attending the first class that I wanted to be intentionally perceptive to the impact of others on my educational journey. I have been very fortunate to have a network of family and friends and to connect with peers and professors at the University of Louisville who have not only helped to hold me accountable to the goal of earning a Ph.D. but have challenged and inspired me along the way.

First, to my wife, Anna Marie, and our children, Olivia, Nazareth, Spencer, Noah, and Gideon – you have been my rock and my solace. This has been quite a unique season of life. Our journey through this program has been accompanied by job changes, both parents in school at the same time, moving twice, difficult loss, a global pandemic, the birth of our twins, surviving a tornado, and now preparing for a new adventure. At each step, you have been there with cheers, hugs, encouraging words, and the (more than) occasional ice cream. It has been so special to share this with you – my love to you all!

To my parents, Ed and Kathy Pavy – your example of love and care for others is what instilled within me a desire to serve others. Mom, I saw this as you worked tirelessly to inspire your students to achieve excellence. Dad, I saw this in your heart for collegiate ministry leading countless mission teams with youth and college students. Therefore, I continue to pursue education – to be the best steward of the strengths with

which I have been entrusted in service to others. In doing so, I strive to carry on your legacies.

To a group of my closest friends, affectionately known as “The Porch” – you have been a continual source of enduring joy. You are a veritable powerhouse of wit and intellect, and I am indebted to you for all the ways you have supported me.

To Dr. Marco Muñoz – thank you for showing me the beautiful story within statistics. Your passion is truly inspiring.

To Tracey, Kata, Matt, and Natalie – thank you for the accountability and encouragement along the journey!

To Dr. Kevin Rose – it was in your class that I first began to truly feel like a researcher – thank you!

A special thank you is also owed to my committee:

To Dr. Jeff Sun – thank you for your guidance over the past four years and for challenging me to think more critically and deeply than I knew I could. You have inspired a love of institutional policy!

To Dr. Meghan Pifer – thank you for demanding excellence and not accepting the intrusion of a global pandemic to stifle the growth of your students; the best virtual learning environment, bar none!

To Dr. Joe Early Jr. – for the countless conversations on Baptist higher education and your constant support, I am truly grateful.

To Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller – thank you for drawing out a love of action research and for encouraging me to incorporate my faith into my scholarship. Because of you, I can say with confidence that I am an action researcher!

ABSTRACT

“I AM WHO I AM”: LGBTQ+ STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT A BAPTIST LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

Edwin Carl Pavy Jr.

July 21, 2022

Though studies exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ students on Christian college and university (CCU) campuses are increasingly prevalent, research continues to demonstrate that CCU environments are often unwelcoming. Gender and sexual minority students often face additional challenges or risks in attending a faith-based institution. To drive meaningful change, recommendations need to be tailored to individual institutions. This study sought to make meaning alongside LGBTQ+ students at a single institution – Baptist Heritage University (BHU) – with a decidedly appreciative approach. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s ecology of human development, we conducted an arts- based action research study to gain a deeper understanding of how LGBTQ+ students know themselves, and how they relate to other people and environments. To gather data, we held focus group meetings, individual interviews, and collaborated to compose pieces of music as a way of sharing stories and elevating the voices of LGBTQ+ students.

Analysis of the interviews utilized the Listening Guide approach to identifying and understanding voices within an individual’s story. The data gleaned from the interviews would serve as the basis upon which the musical compositions would be created. We found that each co-researcher had a voice of advocacy and, that although

their campus environment is not perceived as welcoming, they were able to identify employees and peers who have had a positive impact on their LGBTQ+ identity development. Typically, however, it is the expectation of LGBTQ+ co-researchers to anticipate an exclusionary environment. Because of BHU's identity as a Christian institution, LGBTQ+ students may enter college at BHU assuming or expecting to be excluded or marginalized because of their gender and/or sexual identities.

Still, co-researchers demonstrated resilience and remained hopeful that BHU can leverage its connections within the local community, especially those of faith communities, to promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity. In addition to their voices of advocacy, co-researchers are also exceptionally empathetic and compassionate. It is out of this responsibility for others that we collectively composed a piece of music to share with BHU as a resource for generating greater understanding and promoting empathy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love” (Scholtes, 2008 p.385). Lyrics of a hymn penned and composed by Peter Scholtes are based on the words of Jesus Christ, found in the Gospel of John 13:35 which says that the *unconditional* love Christians have for others bears witness to their relationship with Christ. Yet, the long-held evangelical response to gender and sexual minorities has been *welcoming, but not affirming* (Grenz, 1998), which is an exclusionary and restrictive idiom that seems to be in direct opposition to the tenet of unconditional love. The very existence of the conjunction ‘*but*’ immediately creates a barrier. Other phrases, such as *hate the sin, love the sinner* have proven to be harmful microaggressions toward LGBTQ+ persons (Wolff et al., 2017). Recent campus climate data from the Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP) and College Pulse (2021) suggests that *welcoming, but not affirming* is a dichotomy that Christian Colleges and Universities (CCUs) are employing that is driving a wedge of division, rather than creating space for welcome and inclusion. The problem is that even amid a growing body of literature on LGBTQ+ students in Christian higher education, these students are continually indicating that their college environments are discriminatory and hostile.

The transition to college is challenging for most incoming students, but for LGBTQ+ students on CCU campuses, there is added difficulty and potential risk to

mental or physical wellbeing (Oliner, 2021). These students are not only acclimating to new academic and social environments, but they are navigating the complexities of their developing faith, gender, and sexual identities (Vespone, 2016). Common themes throughout research literature indicate that Christian colleges and universities may credit themselves as welcoming to gender or sexual minorities, but in reality, they are failing LGBTQ+ students (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Crandall et al., 2020; Pitcher et al., 2018; Wolff et al., 2012; Wolff et al., 2017). Despite a growing body of literature giving voice to LGBTQ+ student and employee experiences on CCU campuses, these students still perceive their environments to be not just unwelcoming, but hostile (R.E.A.P. & College Pulse, 2021). *Welcoming, but not affirming* is broken. Something has to change, and the study discussed herein brings change to fruition, starting with a single Christian university.

Broad Context

Christian colleges and universities are quite literally at the foundation of American higher education, even since the founding of Harvard in 1636 (Thelin, 2019). They are the original mission upon which the collegiate experience was established. Many of these early institutions existed for the express purpose of training ministers, who were always male.

The term “Christian higher education” represents a vast array of ideologies, missions, and denominational affiliations (Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Non-Denominational, etc.), each with unique, fine-tuned doctrinal beliefs (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2018). One must also consider that not all institutions which were founded with religious or faith-based missions still maintain

them. Benne (2001) broadly categorizes Christian institutions as either those for whom the Christian identity is central (orthodox), or merely an historical consideration (pluralistic). Otto and Harrington (2016) classify these as *umbrella* or *systemic*, noting that umbrella institutions will maintain an historical relationship with their Christian identities, while systemic institutions fully integrate faith as an active component of the campus environment. An example of a pluralistic or umbrella institution would be that of Brown University – founded upon Baptist doctrine and tenets, but is not currently governed by them. Baylor University would be an example of an orthodox or systemic institution. The tenets and doctrine of the Baptist faith can be seen in the mission, values, and daily operation of the institution.

A review of institutional mission statements and literature consistently return a theme of the integration of *faith* and *learning*. Woodrow (2006) notes that, “a philosophy that integrates faith *and* learning is at the core” (p. 317) of Christian higher education. Esqueda (2014) further argues that “the historic bifurcation of faith and learning is indeed a spiritual issue and a consequence of sin” (p. 95). Therefore, institutions who espouse a Christian identity ought to demonstrate the convergence of faith *and* learning.

While the faith mission and denominational affiliations inextricably link CCUs with the church, they maintain very distinct identities. Dockery (2007) says that CCUs are academic entities, expressly *not* churches or ecclesiastical bodies. Rather, CCUs exist to be the functional academic arm of the church (Dockery, 2007). It is important to note that while Christian institutions may see their purpose as supporting the mission of the church (both local and global), they do not operate as a church.

For the purpose of this study, the definition provided by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) will be used to define Christian higher education. A global organization of more than 180 institutional members, the CCCU includes colleges and universities from more than thirty-five different Protestant denominations, including seven with no denomination listed (CCCU, 2018). This is distinct from the seventeen institutions who identify as *non-denominational* or the five institutions who identify as *multi-denominational*. It requires that its members be “Christ-centered, and rooted in the historic Christian faith” (CCCU, 2018). According to the CCCU, Christian higher education maintains three commitments:

1. We integrate biblical truth not just into “spiritual” aspects of the institution but throughout the academic enterprise.
2. We are committed to the moral and spiritual formation of students.
3. We are committed to graduating students who make a difference for the common good as redemptive voices in the world. (CCCU, 2018).

The context of the present study is situated not only within the broad arena of Christian higher education, but also more narrowly in the Southern Baptist tradition. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States (Hook, 2009; Loller, 2020). It was founded following a split from Northern Baptists over the debate on slave ownership – the Southern Baptist camp being in favor of slavery (Harrison & Klotter, 1997). In recent years, the SBC has taken steps toward racial reconciliation with its African American congregants, though its recent denouncement of Critical Race Theory has caused several prominent Black congregations to leave its membership (Silk, 2020).

The SBC's relationship with gender and sexual minorities, however, tends to be even more tenuous. According to the Human Rights Campaign (2018), many LGBTQ+ individuals who grew up in a religious tradition have left their faith beliefs because they have experienced hurt and rejection from their faith community. The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message published by the SBC may be seen as one such example. Specifically, it states that "Christians should oppose...all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000, para. 22). Too often, though, this is enacted as a direct opposition of the person. Wolff et al. (2017) found that the catchphrase, *hate the sin, love the sinner*, evokes feelings of betrayal from the LGBTQ+ community, who feel abandoned and disowned by those in the church who espouse unconditional love.

Recent headlines also demonstrate that a meaningful dialogue on LGBTQ+ inclusion within the SBC and its churches may be very far away. In February 2020, the SBC's pastor's conference featured a female pastor among its headlining speakers, which caused a group of attendees to threaten a boycott of their own conference (Blair, 2020). The fact that women's participation in pastoral roles drew that kind of response provides some indication that issues of gender and sexual inclusivity may not be a priority.

Institutional Context

The institution where this study took place is Baptist Heritage University (BHU), a Christian liberal arts institution in the history and heritage of the Baptist tradition. The institution serves over ten thousand students and includes a main campus in the southeastern United States, and a host of other instructional sites located across its home state, as well as across the country, multiple international locations and online (Baptist

Heritage University Office of Institutional Research, 2021). A recent gender equity climate survey administered in the spring of the 2020-2021 academic year substantiated the presence of gender and sexual minorities on BHU's campus/sites (Baptist Heritage University Title IX Office, 2021) This is incredibly substantial as we have never collected this type of data before. Survey narrative responses also indicated stark, though not unanticipated divisions in beliefs around issues of inclusivity for gender and sexual minorities that range from very traditional to very progressive. For example, those offering a traditional view would often reference the alignment of gender and genitalia, while progressive views included descriptions of gender as identities and expressions that may fall on a broad and fluid spectrum. Even as seen in the current literature, these two disparate (traditional/progressive) camps express views about the other often using very deficit-based language (Baptist Heritage University Title IX Office, 2021).

Valuing diverse perspectives within a Christian worldview is a core tenet of BHU's mission (Baptist Heritage University Board of Trustees, 2021). Recently, in light of the tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, BHU developed the Diversity Policy Committee. It was initially tasked with creating solutions for serving underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities at the institution. However, the committee's diversity initiatives have expanded in recent months to include a task force for gender equity inclusivity addressing issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation, of which I serve in a leading role. The institution is preparing for steps toward greater gender and sexual inclusivity, but the process has been very slow due to the need to navigate concerns of conservative evangelical donors and local churches. The institution is primed to act to bridge the gap for LGBTQ+ students. This study addresses a problem

of practice as it pertains to the way BHU engages, serves, and meets the needs of its LGBTQ+ students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to improve the college experience for LGBTQ+ students at Baptist Heritage University by elevating stories of their lived truth as students at this Baptist institution.

This arts-based action research study convened a small group of co-researchers who are LGBTQ+ students at Baptist Heritage University. Together, we met for a series of focus groups and individual interviews. Following the interviews, I met with each co-researcher to craft and compose a musical composition that uniquely shared their creative musical ideas, elevating their voices and stories as LGBTQ+ students at BHU. The process of musical composition was not only a way to make meaning together but is the “action” portion of the study. The musical work created was given to the diversity and inclusion office at BHU as a resource to be able to share stories of lived experiences with those who may need it.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following review of literature highlights common themes in research surrounding issues of LGBTQ+ students and Christian higher education. Discussions of Christian higher education and the LGBTQ+ population are provided first. These are crucial for the grounding of the LGBTQ+ population within the Christian higher educational context as well as for understanding Christian and Baptist thought relating to LGBTQ+ issues. Additional themes which emerged from the current literature surround issues of challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students attending CCUs as well as needed supportive structures.

LGBTQ+ Population

The literature suggests that LGBTQ+ students may face greater challenges in acclimating to the college environment. Pitcher et al., (2018) state, “Research indicates that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) college students face a hostile campus climate” (p. 117). Many newly matriculating LGBTQ+ students also bring a history of similar discriminatory experiences with them from their high school settings (Joldersma, 2016). These are particularly salient inputs, given that issues related to gender and sexual identities are historically not considered as colleges and universities develop strategic plans for student success (Pitcher et al., 2018).

It is also important to ground the definition of the LGBTQ+ population within the context of Christian higher education. This is often not an easily approached subject, especially in conservative or evangelical realms. However, Rockenbach and Crandall (2016) identified greater acceptance of same-sex marriage among Millennials, which strengthens the need to understand LGBTQ+ students in an effort to improve the overall college experience and efforts toward their success. Specifically, within Christian higher education, LGBTQ+ students are at an increased risk of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and suicide (The Religious Exemption Accountability Project & College Pulse, 2021).

LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning) as defined is inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation. This definition further recognizes that fluidity and overlap exists within these identities and that gender and sexual identities meaningfully interact with other held identities (race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.). Also critical to this definition is the inclusion of the plus sign (“+”). Pitcher et al., (2018) use the plus sign because it encompasses the myriad fluid identities, both gender and sexual, potentially held by students. Too often, however, LGBTQ+ students may find CCU environments to be less accepting and affirming of these identities.

The Christian College or University (CCU) Experience

The college experience is often billed as a highly formative time of self-exploration and development while working in close-knit academic and social campus communities. Renn and Reason (2013) found that for minority populations, this experience and expectation can be quite different. LGBTQ+ students will often face challenges related to identity development, campus environment, and personal health,

which are intimately intertwined. Specifically, gender and sexual minorities face even more intensified challenges when their college experience takes place on a Christian college or university campus (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Snow, 2018; Wolff et al., 2012). Researchers outside of Christian higher education seem to contribute more to the knowledge of LGBTQ+ students at all types of institutions – public, private, and faith-based.

LGBTQ+ Student Challenges

Navigating the shift to the collegiate environment is an inherently challenging process (Vespone, 2016). New crops of students with diverse backgrounds, interests, and needs converge on college campuses each year with the promise of self-discovery and intellectual stimulation. In addition to navigating new academic and social environments – an issue common to every student – LGBTQ+ students who are exploring their gender and/or sexual identities face increased difficulty, potentially inhibiting their success (Bailey & Strunk, 2018). Placing this particular challenge within the religious, social, and academic contexts of Christian higher education creates a whole new level of concern for LGBTQ+ students (Vespone, 2016). When the campus environment is not welcoming of LGBTQ+ students, it is often indicative of “the availability of resources and and inclusive policies for LGBTQ+ students” (Garvey et al., 2017).

Research within the last decade has seen a steadily increasing emphasis on the mental health concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. Intense feelings of social isolation (Wolff, et al., 2017) and experiences of discrimination and harassment because of gender and/or sexual identities puts LGBTQ+ students at substantially heightened risk for depression and suicidal thoughts (The Religious Exemption Accountability Project &

College Pulse, 2021). Vespone (2016) argued that CCUs can be instrumental in identity integration for LGBTQ students of faith, which can be a solution for identities that are often in conflict. However, this is often not the case, which raises substantial concerns for the well-being of LGBTQ+ students. The impetus for these concerns can stem from both external and internal conflict.

For LGBTQ+ students on CCU campuses, tension between the individual and the school is almost inevitable. Bailey & Strunk (2018) specifically identified that gay men on CCU campuses did not feel comfortable coming out and even feared repercussions if campus officials were to find out they were gay. They further note that gender and sexual minorities may seek out conservative institutions to ‘cure’ them (Bailey & Strunk, 2018). This suggests a number of factors worth considering. First, LGBTQ+ individuals may hold faith identities that are equally, or more important than their gender or sexual identities. Second, LGBTQ+ students may be entering college with the assumption that their gender or sexual identities need to be remedied. Third, LGBTQ+ students are willingly placing themselves into oppositional and/or adversarial college environments for the sake of identity salience (Vespone, 2016). This could often result in the suppression of their LGBTQ+ identity. Finally, LGBTQ+ students worry about a confrontational environment (unsupportive peers or faculty, harassment, etc.) which inhibits their ability to fully engage in the holistic learning environment (Sanlo, 2004).

LGBTQ+ students who attend CCUs to mitigate or “fix” a perceived problem with their sexual identity are looking through a disability lens, according to Yarhouse (2018). As a Christian psychologist and counselor, it appears that Yarhouse may be advocating a clinical view of non-normative sexual identity as a disability. Gushee

(2014), noted that this type of response (distress and despair) to one's own gender or sexual identity is indicative of harmful traditionalist Christian teaching. This points to the internal identity conflicts that LGBTQ+ students experience between their faith, gender, and sexual identities at public, private, and faith-based institutions alike. However, Wolff et al. (2012) found that navigating non-normative gender and sexual identities at CCUs creates an intensified challenge. It is also likely that LGBTQ+ students faced additional challenges of discrimination and harassment in high schools prior to matriculating into college (Joldersma, 2016). While many sexual minorities at CCUs are deeply religious (Yarhouse et al., 2018), being raised in a conservative Christian faith may produce extreme inner turmoil and conflict (Hinman & Lacefield, 2020). Many of these students also hold traditional views on sexuality (Yuan, 2016). It has been suggested that when sexual minorities do not have the freedom to explore and even struggle with their sexual identities within their Christian communities they may turn from a traditional to a progressive view of sexuality (Yuan, 2016). Both Yarhouse (2018) and Yuan (2016) write about sexual identities and sexual minorities, but do not address students who identify their gender as being outside of the male/female binary. No studies have looked inward at a researcher's own CCU. Yuan (2016) and Yarhouse et al, (2018) utilize national studies that do not address needed change at the individual institutional level.

LGBTQ+ Student Support

Colleges and universities provide a number of supportive resources for students that contribute to their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual wellness. These may come in the form of counseling services, career coaching, tutoring, or mentoring. Gender and sexual minorities, however, lack tailored services that provide for

the purposeful exploration and/or development of their gender and/or sexual identities (Crandall et al., 2020; Pitcher et al., 2018; Rhoades et al., 2013). Before an institution can provide appropriate services to LGBTQ+ students, their presence must be acknowledged.

LGBTQ+ students may lack a substantial presence within the larger campus environment. Snow (2018) noted that specifically on CCU campuses, LGBTQ+ students often struggle to be recognized as an existent population by administrators. The role of the administrator is critical in the support of gender and sexual minority students. Crandall et al. (2020) calls upon evangelical college administrators to help ease the spiritual burden of LGBTQ+ students who may often experience crises of faith and identity. The Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP) and College Pulse (2021) further expand upon the vital role of CCU administrators and leaders play in examining institutional policies in light of this “vulnerable student population” (REAP & College Pulse, p. 27). CCU administrators can prepare for dialogue on inclusivity by aligning the discussion with potential concerns related to faith and doctrinal statements of an institution or denomination.

Even amid a challenging campus social climate, LGBTQ+ students express the vital support that faculty offer (Pitcher et al., 2018). Consistently, prominent supportive figures among LGBTQ+ students are faculty. LGBTQ+ students identify the importance of faculty allies (Linley, 2016), but also the need to see faculty (and staff) successfully living as “out” on a CCU campus (Crandall et al., 2020). Faculty are essential in encouraging LGBTQ+ students to continue or persist in college (Bailey & Strunk, 2018). However, Linley et al. (2016) indicated that not all faculty may feel comfortable addressing matters related to inclusivity of gender and sexual minorities. Within the

academic setting, faculty should seek to create a welcoming and safe classroom environment for LGBTQ+ students (Dessel et al., 2019; Linley et al., 2016). When there is LGBTQ+ representation, either as allies or other “out” persons (Linley et al., 2016), LGBTQ+ students tend to express a more favorable view of their campus climate. It is also interesting to note that non-gender/sexual minority staff members at Christian institutions have expressed hesitancy in supporting LGBTQ+ students, fearing how administrators may react (Scibetta, 2019). Much like LGBTQ+ students, this desire is often suppressed to save face with the broader community. In these instances, supports are developed and offered to LGBTQ+ students surreptitiously (Scibetta, 2019). Many LGBTQ+ allies on CCU campuses may find themselves closeted like those in the LGBTQ+ community. It is important for faculty (and staff) to be well-informed on issues important to gender and sexual minority students. Faculty can better serve LGBTQ+ students by staying current on LGBTQ+ issues (Linley et al., 2016).

In addition to faculty and staff who function as vital support systems for LGBTQ+ students, the need also exists for engaging with these issues within the curriculum and academic programming. Garvey and Rankin (2015) state that faculty must be aware of the ways in which LGBTQ+ may experience the classroom environment differently. Faculty can offer support in the formal academic environment by addressing heteronormative language within the curriculum (Linley et al., 2016) as well as in co-curricular programming, which promotes sexual identity salience (Hughes & Hurtado, 2018). This goes beyond a mere gesture of support, though. Bolstering curriculum and encouraging a genuine, yet challenging interaction with ideals different

than one's own often yields benefits such as increased levels of empathy (Engberg et al., 2007).

Building on Hughes's and Hurtado's (2018) encouragement to engage in dialogue across differing ideas and beliefs with peers and faculty, the research also suggests that developing an interpersonal relationship, whether as a friend or acquaintance, with an LGBTQ+ person may be mutually beneficial to both parties. Wolff et al., (2012) found that a significant indicator of positive attitude toward gender and/or sexual minorities is knowing a friend or relative who are a gender and/or sexual minority. This also appears to be the case at BHU. A recent climate survey conducted by BHU's Title IX Office (2021) found that participants identified personal experience as a greater influence on their views of gender and sexuality than other factors, including religious beliefs and their own gender or sexual identities. When these relationships with LGBTQ+ persons exist, individuals may express a higher level of intent to intervene and disrupt discriminatory behavior, specifically involving LGBT persons (Dessel et al., 2014). Not only does an interpersonal relationship with an LGBTQ+ person improve attitude toward gender and sexual minorities, but research also suggests it may help in increasing bystander intervention into incidents of discrimination. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships with LGBTQ+ persons may help allay tension and conflict stemming from faith and gender/sexual identities. Wolff et al. (2012) found that "engaging in theological debates, though important, may be less effective than building personal relationships that challenge core beliefs and negative emotional responses" (p. 216).

The need for support does not exist in a silo, but rather is more meaningful when it is also accessible beyond the academic environment. For this reason, Hughes and

Hurtado (2018) identified the importance of “communication across difference” (p. 319) as a beneficial contributor to identity salience among heterosexual and sexual minority students. Pitcher et al. (2018), Rhoades et al. (2013), and Linley et al. (2016) emphasize the need for and value of LGBTQ+ student organizations as substantive support systems for gender and sexual minority students. Further, these organizations provide a platform for facilitating dialogue around LGBTQ+ issues, including topics where various campus stakeholders (faculty, staff, students) may disagree. They may facilitate a mutually beneficial pattern by educating faculty and staff, which in turn encourages students to lean on them for support (Linley et al., 2016). Pitcher et al. (2018) found that LGBTQ+ student organizations were a source of LGBTQ+ students establishing meaningful connections with other campus community members, not only other students. Linley et al. (2016) found that one of the most prominent means of faculty support outside the classroom was as advisors or sponsors of clubs and organizations which increases visibility.

The literature definitely seems to reflect a deficit-based approach to communicating about tension that exists between LGBTQ+ students and Christian higher education. Given that interpersonal relationships with gender and sexual minorities tends to lead to greater understanding and acceptance (Wolff et al., 2012), this is a positive indicator of steps toward reconciliation. Such relationships are the very antecedent Gushee (2014) identified as causal in his shift from a traditionalist to fully affirming position on the inclusivity of LGBTQ+ individuals in the church, all the while maintaining a conservative sexual ethic. Sexual minorities on CCU campuses are looking more for a community to relate with than being told how Christians ought to think

(Yarhouse et al., 2018). CCU approaches should go beyond the old adage of *welcoming, but not affirming* to ensure that sexual minorities are not only welcomed, but wanted (Biola University, 2018). Community-building through support groups, mentorship, and emphasizing healthy relationships is also vital (Yuan, 2016). Other areas may also include broader culture change in the classroom, residence halls, and programming (Yuan, 2016). Christian educational administrators should also assume responsibility for the tension LGBTQ+ students experience within their learning and co-curricular environments (Joldersma, 2016) and lead their institutions to reduce marginalization of these students through the clarification of policies (Yuan, 2016).

While these are excellent recommendations, it cannot be overlooked that a majority of Yuan's and Yarhouse's considerations stem only from and pertain specifically to sexual minorities only. Research generated from within Christian higher education often does not address issues related to transgender students and as such there are no means of support offered or recommended. Most of the literature from within Christian higher education faces the same challenge as research from the outside in that it is conducted on a large-scale. The literature points toward the need for and importance of developing interpersonal relationships with LGBTQ+ students on CCU campuses. Yet, because these studies are designed to capture large, multi-institutional data, we rarely read of meaningful action taken to implement these needed changes.

Guiding Framework

The review of literature returned themes grounded in how LGBTQ+ students navigate different relationships – with self, with others, with institutions and communities. These relationships have the potential to be sources of support or strife. In

addition to relationships, the often-marginalized voices of LGBTQ+ students are also a prominent theme. A majority of studies include interview and narrative components, which places an emphasis on voice. This is an important consideration in the design of a study with LGBTQ+ students as they often feel isolated (Wolff et al., 2017), unseen and unheard (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Pitcher et al., 2018; Snow, 2018).

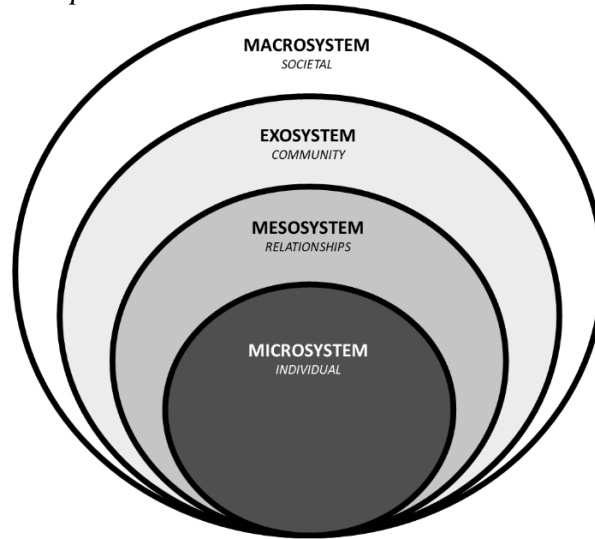
Constructivist frameworks draw attention to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students with the aim of creating meaning together. They provide for the ability of knowledge, identities, and meaning to be created by researchers and participants together (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The literature suggests that this could be particularly salient when studying gender and sexual identities, given the emphasis on the need for exploring or developing these identities with others (Wolff et al., 2012; Yarhouse, 2018; Yuan 2016). By inviting LGBTQ+ students to share their stories, CCUs can take steps toward reducing the marginalization of gender and sexual minorities (Yuan, 2016). The study took place at an institution where the doctrine of *imago Dei* plays an integral role and informs the approach to gender equity issues, education, and programming. *Imago Dei* provides that all of humanity has inherent worth and dignity as an image-bearer of God.

In an effort to uphold the ethic of *imago Dei* while seeking to elevate the voices and stories of LGBTQ+ students at BHU as they traverse numerous layered and complex relationships, I identified Bronfenbrenner's (1977) *Ecology of Human Development* as the guiding conceptual foundation for this arts-based action research study. This framework adopts a holistic view of human experience and situates it within concentric environmental levels (see Figure 1). It is congruent with the extended epistemological assumptions of action research, whereby knowledge is viewed as more than a purely

intellectual endeavor and draws equally upon experiential and expressive forms of knowing (Seeley, 2014).

Figure 1

Ecology of Human Development



The Ecology of Human Development is organized as a multilayered system of environments in which an individual understands relationships (see Table 1).

Table 1

Ecology of Human Development

Ecological Levels	Application to the Study	Description
Microsystem	Individual	Factors pertaining to relation to/perception of self within immediate environments (school, home, etc.)
Mesosystem	Relationships	Factors pertaining close interpersonal relationships within microsystems
Exosystem	Campus	Factors pertaining to other environments that may have an indirect effect on the individual
Macrosystem	Community	Factors pertaining to broad cultural norms and assumptions; not specific contexts

The *first* layer is a *microsystem*. It is made up of an individual's immediate environment in which one holds a specific role (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The relationships represented within this level are foundational to the others. In the collegiate setting these environments could deal with living spaces, classroom, or cocurricular/social settings. Individuals may hold a variety of roles within these environments, such as student, resident, peer, teammate, or mentor while developing their LGBTQ+ (and other) identities. The *second* layer is a *mesosystem* which places an emphasis on interpersonal relationships within microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Within the institutional context of a CCU, this could mean examining interpersonal relationships within a community faith while holding LGBTQ+ identities, even extending to how students reconcile these identities within a church setting. It may also delve into relationships with family members or peer groups. The *third* layer is the *exosystem* (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This environment is slightly more removed from the individual to the extent that its impact is indirect. In the collegiate environment, this could include the scope of the broad institutional community or even other local, state or federal governing structures or organizations. The final layer is the *macrosystem*, which speaks to far-reaching cultural norms and/or societal structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The evidence of such norms or values are revealed through microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems. For LGBTQ+ students at CCUs, specifically within Baptist thought, this could include assumptions about gender roles, sexuality, and the nature of sin or the inherent goodness or sinfulness of humanity. The aim of the study is to elevate stories of LGBTQ+ students within a Baptist university. To do so effectively will require an understanding of how these individuals reconcile their gender and/or sexual identities through each of these

successive environmental and contextual settings. Therefore, the research questions that have guided this research study are:

- What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students at Baptist Heritage University?
 - How do LGBTQ+ students make sense of their identity within the BHU environment?
 - What role do interpersonal relationships play in the LGBTQ+ student experience at BHU?
 - How do LGBTQ+ students relate to the broader campus environment?
 - How do LGBTQ+ students experience BHU's local community?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Methods

Qualitative methods have proven to be the primary method for research studies with LGBTQ+ students. This study used qualitative methods to conduct an action research project. Specifically, I conducted an arts-based action research study within my own institution. This may be referred to as insider action research (Coghlan, 2019). As an employee of eight years and a two-time alumnus of my current institution, I possess a great deal (though there will be gaps) of preunderstanding of the institution's public and private identities, (Coghlan, 2019). While many of the studies represented in the current literature are in fact qualitative, action research is not widely used. This may also be indicative of the fact that many of the studies lack highly individualized contextualization. That is, while studies may be qualitative in nature, they often represent students from multiple institutions and do not work toward presenting solutions in an individual institutional context. I preface this discussion by offering that while I came into the study with my own ideas about methods and a possible progression of methodological considerations, a foundational tenet of action-research requires openness to the input from participants (co-researchers), which was sought at each and every step. Co-researchers need to be involved to the greatest extent possible in the research process (Stoecker & Brydon-Miller, 2013). The individualized context of the study was critically important – students from a single institution acting to create change at that institution.

Action-research offers a congruent collaborative approach that fit the goal of this study to elevate the voices of LGBTQ+ students at BHU to promote meaningful change at this institution. Semi-structured interviews will also be used to illuminate experience through the voices of LGBTQ+ students.

Arts based action-research (ABAR) was particularly well-suited for a study with LGBTQ+ students. The arts are often used as a means of facilitating the expression of stories, and are particularly accessible to marginalized populations as well as being effective at garnering participation. For LGBTQ+ students, making music together and using music as a form of expression can alleviate tension from social isolation and create opportunities for greater empathy (Southerland, 2018). The study would specifically engage musical expression in its methods. This is an underdeveloped area of ABAR. While music is often incorporated into ABAR, it is mostly in a secondary or tertiary capacity (ex: background music in a digital story) and not the primary method of expression. The literature suggests that ABAR utilizes visual arts (photography, art, ethno-drama, etc.) and are at times performative, though not typically musical in nature. Musical expression is also an integral form of Christian experiential knowing and is deeply tied to expressions of faith (Coghlan, 2020). ABAR can be a means of drawing upon individual (Wilson & Flicker 2014) and cultural strengths (Williams, 2014), which is a core element in the study – implementing appreciative inquiry (AI) or a strengths-based approach. Initially introduced in 1987 by Cooperrider and Srivastva, AI takes an intentional positive approach to finding the best in individuals and organizations (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Challenging the typical process of continual diagnosis of problems, AI seeks to understand the best of individuals and organizations and in so

doing promotes creativity and innovation in generating meaningful action toward positive change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Fry, 2014). Using an appreciative approach, the study facilitated the ability to draw upon the strengths of co-researchers and the institution where the study was held. Furthermore, AI proved integral in upholding the ethical principle of *imago Dei* – that every person bears the image of God and owns inherent worth and dignity.

Sampling

Co-researchers were recruited through purposive sampling, using a snowball method. Recognizing that BHU's campus climate is not known for being inclusive of diverse gender and/or sexual identities, I exercised abundant care and caution to ensure the safety and security of gender and sexual minority students that I aimed to reach. Given that the study occurred within my own institution, I utilized my current connections with LGBTQ+ students, known allies, and other networking means –even engaging LGBTQ+ and ally alumni to help recruit current students to the study. While BHU has a Diversity Office, its service to LGBTQ+ students primarily functions in a covert manner. I engaged the Diversity Office leadership, who, with LGBTQ+ students and allies were petitioning and applying for the Alliance Club (LGBTQ+ student group) to receive official recognition as a student organization. Through a virtual presentation, I was able to share about the research study and what would be involved for those wanting to participate. The leadership ensured that this presentation reached all of those participating in the Alliance Club. I also reached out to faculty and staff that I had personal and professional relationships with to both help gauge interest of their respective LGBTQ+ student networks or facilitate connections with students. One faculty member

who teaches and researches in the area of women and gender studies, invited me to five different class meetings to share about some of my preliminary research and to invite students to participate. Finally, a colleague within the Student Services Office facilitated meetings with students she believed might be interested, which also yielded co-researchers.

Determining appropriate sample size is also something that is tailored to each action research study. Building on Patton, (2002) when co-researchers agree that the data is sufficiently thorough and complete, the proper sample size has been reached. The most important consideration is that the sampling strategy align with the needs of the study (Trainor, 2013). I recruited six co-researchers, though one did not matriculate into the study, citing time commitment as a barrier to participation. Still, with five co-researchers, we were able to capture a range of experiences and without leaving them feeling exposed and vulnerable.

Data Collection

The nature of an action research study requires a continual refining of the process through ongoing action and reflection (Coghlan, 2004). This pattern was evident in both macro and micro forms throughout the study and will culminate with a final reflection at the conclusion of the dissertation defense. Data was collected through focus groups, individual interviews, and musical expression and composition.

Focus Groups

First, co-researchers convened four group gatherings. These occurred at least once per week so that all four group gatherings were completed within a month's time. These preceded and helped establish the foundation upon which the individual interviews were

constructed. In an effort to immediately begin building trust and rapport with co-researchers, the *first* meeting was used for introductions, discussing purpose and goals of the research, expectations, roles within the group, and completing a Structured Ethical Reflection (SER) (Stevens et al., 2016) as a group. We adapted our SER to reflect the specific progression of our project (see Appendix A). The *second* meeting was used for co-researchers to develop an individual SER. This opened a discussion of individual core values as well as promoted accountability among co-researchers. Highlighting the core values of co-researchers was integral step in taking an appreciative approach to inquiry with LGBTQ+ students. At the *third* meeting, co-researchers completed a spiritual gifts inventory (see Appendix B). Given that so many LGBTQ+ individuals have been excluded from churches or other faith communities, this prompted a discussion to challenge co-researchers to view their identified strengths as assets for inclusion within a community of faith like BHU. It also identified strengths common to the group and those unique to each individual. For our purposes, completing the spiritual gifts inventory did not require or assume that co-researchers were professing or practicing Christians. If co-researchers were uncomfortable answering any questions on the inventory, they were able to just skip them since the utility of this exercise was to spur dialogue. The *fourth* meeting was when co-researchers developed the interview questions and protocol for the individual interviews. We considered ways in which we could ask questions from an appreciative stance that allowed for co-researchers to respond positively about the best of who they are and the best of BHU. The group centered themes of LGBTQ+ identity and the BHU context, and developed questions asked in an intentionally appreciate manner, aimed at each level of the social ecological model (individual, relationships, campus,

community). We used a mapping tool (see Appendix D) to help us plot our questions to ensure we were meeting our own objectives

Individual Interviews

Given the need for substantive reflexivity within an action research study, I anticipated that a semi-structured approach may be an appealing option for the structure of the individual interviews. After discussing different interview formats, the group decided that semi-structured would be beneficial, so as to promote a dialogue that was organized and organic. This provided the opportunity to explore ideas and concepts shared during the interviews in natural conversation while also meeting the established purpose and objective(s) of the interviews. Co-researchers also determined the date, time, and location of their designated interview. Each of the interviews were recorded and transcribed using an online transcription service called Rev.com. Since the transcriptions were going to be used heavily during the analysis, I felt it was critical to obtain verbatim transcriptions, which included, for example, usage of filler words like “uh” or “um”, and false starts.

Data Analysis

Methods for analyzing data gathered through the interviews followed a similar path of collaborative input from co-researchers. The analytical tool that was especially useful in the ABAR study is the listening guide. This analytical method elevates the voice(s) represented in a given narrative, to include the relationship between voice, and cultural or contextual voices implied, but perhaps not audibly heard (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Raider-Roth, 2014). This tool’s focus on voice has found great meaning with a wide range of marginalized populations (Gilligan, 2015). For this study,

the use of listening guide would also lend itself well to facilitating and/or analyzing musical expression of the voice in addition to the normal spoken voice. This analytical method does not use typical coding methods as found in other qualitative interview analyses. Rather, multiple listenings (either through interpretive reading or literal listening) of interview scripts allow researchers to listen for highly nuanced and layered voices within each person's story (Gilligan et al, 2003). Inspired by the way contrapuntal voices communicate in a musical composition, the listening guide method for analysis highlights the relationship between the heard and the unheard, the apparent and the covert. The first listening is intended to develop an understanding of the plot of the story being shared (Raider-Roth, 2014). The second listening specifically focused on how co-researchers talked about themselves. During this stage of the analysis, I-poems were constructed. I-poems capture first-person statements in chronological order and structure them as a poem (Gilligan, 2015). The final listening identifies the different voices of the co-researcher and analyzes how they interact within the story or narrative. At the conclusion of the analysis, I met with each co-researcher to share what the multiple listenings revealed and to ensure validity and accuracy of their story.

Musical Expression

The action component of musical expression came after the listening guide analysis of interview transcripts. Following the construction of I-poems and identifying the contrapuntal voices at play in each co-researcher's story, they were asked to respond musically to their stories. They had the opportunity to musically express any number of elements from their individual listening guides, whether a salient line from the I-poem or a voice that was identified of which they were unaware. To facilitate the musical

expression, I secured a physical space in varying classrooms at BHU's fine arts building with access to a melodic musical instrument, primarily a piano. Having taught adjunct within BHU's music program for several years, I was able to secure this space easily.

Each co-researcher had individual dedicated time to explore musical sounds through the use of their own voice or through the piano. I quickly realized that giving physical space to them as they explored musical sound was also very important. There were varying degrees of experience either playing or performing music among the group including growing up in singing groups or choirs to never having played an instrument or performed at all. Because of this, making the time and space safe for exploring musical sound was critical. While I had initially planned to be in the room with each co-researcher during this process, I found it much more beneficial to give them that time and space to themselves. After explaining the task, I stepped out of the room for approximately fifteen minutes or until they came and retrieved me. They were asked to compose a melody or sequence of tones/pitches that they feel adequately represents the heart of their story. Each co-researcher also had access to their complete listening guide analysis to consult during this process. Any melodies or rhythmic or pitch sequences created were recorded and transcribed into musical notation.

These base melodies or pitch/tonal sequences served as the foundation for the next step in the musical expression component, which was to compose a vocal work. I was humbled to be able to serve this study as the musical composer. The group was incredibly trusting and allowed for my own creative input into this process in interpreting their stories and visions for the music we would create. Following the listening guide analysis, I developed an idea to create brief musical vignettes or movements, each based

on a co-researcher's story, but that also altogether formed a larger work and representing a broader narrative. I took this idea to each co-researcher, which was received well. They all were excited to have a piece of their own within the larger work of all five pieces collectively. The group also decided on an a cappella (unaccompanied voices) style, which makes the literal singing voice and story that much more prominent. As the composer, I worked with each person individually to discuss how various musical elements will be employed in their composition. These include things like tonality, melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, texture, and form. Following the completion of the composition(s), the students were able to hear the final product and respond to it. The final step for co-researchers was to develop and write program notes or a brief synopsis of their individual inspired musical vignettes/movements. Similar to the way a caption accompanies a piece of art to describe its inspiration and interpretation, these were written so as to paint a vivid picture of how the music complements and aids in the expression of their stories.

Allaying Ethical Concerns

Perhaps one of the primary concerns related to ethics issues in action research lies in the concept of ownership. Especially in an ABAR study where some form of artistic or musical product is created, a decision must be made as to who owns the product and its dissemination. Ultimately, the co-researchers in this study decided on shared ownership of the musical work as a whole, while retaining autonomy over their own movement or individual piece. One such tool that proves beneficial and needed in this situation was the use of Structured Ethical Reflection (SER), which facilitated the continuous reflection on individual and shared ethics and values by the co-researchers before, throughout, and

even beyond a research study (Stevens, et al., 2016). Completing SER throughout this study ensured co-researchers not only had access to the research process, but a literal voice to influence its course. This is critically important when conducting research alongside LGBTQ+ students who may be assuming substantial physical, mental, and emotional risks in order to participate (Gedro, 2014).

Researcher Positionality

Though I may be the individual initiating this study, I fully acknowledge that I am a partner or co-researcher in this process. As such, identifying my own positionality to the study and population is critical. I am a White, Caucasian, cisgender, straight male with ancestral ties to Europe. Since immigrating to the United States in the mid-19th century, my family has settled in the Ohio River Valley, residing primarily in Indiana and Kentucky. Recent ancestral studies of my family have substantiated these facts. Religious beliefs play a critical role in my cultural heritage as well, having grown up in a Southern Baptist household – my father is an ordained Southern Baptist minister having served as a youth pastor as well as a Campus Minister at BHU for over 25 years. As cliché as it may sound, I was in church every time the doors were open and at ministry functions at my church and with my father on the college campus frequently and regularly throughout my childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood. Now, as a husband and father, faith is a foundational tenet of our household and shapes how I love and care for my wife and children.

Both my Christian and my, gender, sexual, and racial identities mean that I have experienced a number of privileges and may have often taken things for granted during my upbringing that others may not have so easily accessed. Southern Baptists are the

most prominent protestant denomination in the United States (Southern Baptist Convention, 2020). Exercising this faith in conjunction with my identities as a White male has meant that I have had a number of resources readily available, and have likely taken them for granted.

Furthermore, as a cisgender heterosexual male, I acknowledge that my gender and sexual identities have also afforded me privileges that are not automatic for others. Over the last decade I have come to see these in light of different cultural contexts and increasingly and continually recognize societal issues of inequity. The intersection of these identities creates a strong compounded privilege in a society that has historically favored White, Christian, heteronormative males. This is something of which I must be keenly aware when seeking to elevate and/or highlight stories of disenfranchised people, especially within the context of Christian higher education where that power differential will be very apparent.

In my context working at a Christian university, I see first-hand the vast disconnect between marginalized populations and those with power to effect change. In a typical bureaucratic structure, the power within the organizational hierarchy is concentrated at the top, with a distinction between those that think and those that do (Manning, 2018). Even with the privilege that I experience, I find it can be difficult to get a seat at the table where decisions are made in an organization with just such a structure.

My personal faith also drives a conviction to seek justice for and to develop and preserve relationships with the oppressed and marginalized. The teachings of Jesus Christ make clear the call of Christ-followers to love God and others. In Matthew 22:36-40 (New Living Translation, 2004), Jesus is asked by the Pharisees what the greatest

commandment is, and he replies, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself”. Much of the current research brings to light how many in the LGBTQ+ community experience harm and hurt at the hands of Christians, or the “church”, wielding their faith and Bible as rod with which to discipline sinners, which is not only failed stewardship of the faith, but actively drives a wedge between gender and sexual minorities and their faith (Vespone, 2016).

In addition to these identities, I am also a qualified professional musician. Having technical training at the undergraduate and master’s levels, I possess theoretical and practical knowledge of musical history, classical vocal performance, choral conducting and musical analysis. I also have a demonstrated record as a highly-effective music teacher and choral technician and have taught music in public school systems in Kentucky and Washington D.C. at the middle and high school levels. I have also taught in adjunct roles in a collegiate music program as a music director of a traveling vocal group and conductor of a men’s choir. I have also composed works for ensembles in each of my teaching placements. I do not share this to be boastful in any manner, but to offer my qualification as justification to facilitate meaningful musical expression as an integral element of this research study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The study involved multiple forms of data collection, drawing from focus groups, individual interviews, and musical expression. The presentation of the data will therefore reflect the character of the method used to collect it. Specifically, focus group data will be shared as one set altogether, while the data from the individual interviews will be written as individual portraits of co-researchers. Data from the process of musical expression and creation are discussed in chapter five.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups sessions were held. The purpose of establishing focus group meetings was to foster connection and build trust and rapport among our co-researcher group. While the intention was not that these be the primary method of data collection, there were several themes and characteristics that emerged in this process that give insight into the LGBTQ+ college student experience at a Christian university. The focus groups also facilitated ownership of both the study and the culminating action.

Expectations

The initial priority was for the group to get to know one another, so the focus groups began with a time of sharing about oneself and providing opportunity to find traits in common with others. It was essential that our group also build trust with one another by collaboratively developing expectations for the research study. One particular concern

that was raised was being sensitive to the level of outness of those in the group. While each person hoped that being part of this group might help them connect with each other on campus outside of the research study, the request was expressly made not to share information about one another's gender or sexual identity without their consent. This was especially important as it prompted a discussion of trust and confidentiality. Other expectations of the group centered on logistical issues like committing the necessary time to the study and timely and effective communication.

Structured Ethical Reflection

The themes in this initial dialogue served as a springboard into a discussion of core values of the group. We used Structured Ethical Reflection (SER) at the individual and group levels to promote accountability within ourselves and in community with one another. There were five core values our group identified as central to the study: *respect, honesty, empathy, sincerity, and commitment*. To ensure that these values were present throughout the study, we developed questions that would guide each unique phase of the study. Co-researchers identified and categorized these phases in a sequential progression of the study, also considering the implications of what comes after the study has concluded. There were five phases of the study identified: *focus groups, individual interviews* (including follow-up and writing of the story), *collaborative music making, sharing music and knowledge, and moving on*. The group SER can be found in Appendix A. Once the group SER was completed, each subsequent gathering (group and individual) began with a statement of the core values and a reading of the questions to help center those values in our dialogue.

Spiritual Gifts Inventory

The purpose of completing the spiritual gifts inventory with the group was to facilitate dialogue about strengths (or weaknesses) of each person in serving within a faith community, like Baptist Heritage University (BHU). Given the possibility of traumatic or discouraging religious experiences among those in the group directly related to gender or sexual identities, co-researchers were asked to answer each prompt honestly and were permitted to leave answers blank for any prompt that made them feel uncomfortable. In the setting of BHU or similar organizations or entities (churches, ministries, missions organizations, etc.) it is unlikely that LGBTQ+ persons have been invited or welcomed to fully participate, let alone be told that they bring strengths in serving the greater purpose of the institution’s faith mission.

What is particularly striking about the strengths of co-researchers identified through this inventory is that they are each compatible with the character traits of someone who advocates for others. Table 1 outlines the spiritual gifts with the highest and lowest scores for each co-researcher.

Table 1

Spiritual Gifts

Co-researcher	Gifts: Highest Score(s)	Lowest Score(s)
Emmett	Mercy, Exhortation	Evangelism
Erin	Service, Helps, Mercy	Evangelism, Prophecy, Shepherding, Apostleship
Sophie	Mercy	Prophecy, Shepherding
Haven	Knowledge, Mercy	Evangelism
Faith	Discernment, Exhortation, Mercy	Hospitality

Note. Mercy was a common gift/strength among all co-researchers.

All co-researchers scored high in the gift of *mercy*. As those who have experienced exclusion or even been targeted by discrimination because of gender or sexual identities,

it is exceptionally poignant that of all the gifts included in this inventory, they would all identify *mercy* as a common strength. The gift of *exhortation* is also shared by Faith and Emmett. *Exhortation* is the ability to urge and motivate others into action (Wilkes, 2003). *Mercy* and *exhortation* in concert with the gifts of *service*, *helps*, *knowledge*, and *discernment* are vital elements of an advocate. It is also important to note that a majority of the gifts receiving the lowest scores pertain to expressly religious acts. The advocate traits identified as gifts/strengths of the co-researchers seem to be those that transcend religion or theology. It also provides insight into understanding how LGBTQ+ students may experience life at a CCU. The identity of advocate is one that would be reinforced by stories shared in the individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

In addition to that which has already been mentioned, the focus groups also created an interview protocol which was developed within a social ecological framework (see Figure 1). Questions for the individual interviews were written in a decidedly appreciative manner, specifically centering LGBTQ+ identities and the BHU context. The highly individualized context and the appreciative approach to inquiry are particularly important hallmarks of this study. During the final focus group, we workshopped our interview protocol by using a centering framework for developing our questions (see Table 2).

Table 2
Question Framework

Centering	Asking Questions	
	About	In a way that
LGBTQ+ Identity Christian university context	Individual (person/self, own identities, beliefs, sense of belonging)	Identifies what is already working Dreams about how good it could be

Relationships

(interrelationships with friends, peers, faculty, staff, administrators)

Campus (university values, mission, services, academics, cocurricular, activities, engagement)

Community (broader local community engagement – civic and church-related associations).

Considers how to make it happen

I developed a question mapping tool based on this framework to help guide our conversation and to serve as a visual aid for the types of questions we were creating. The questions follow an interesting pattern. As the levels progress away from the immediacy of the co-researcher – specifically the campus and community levels – the questions become more future oriented rather than seeking to identify what may be currently working. That also means that for the levels in closer proximity to the co-researcher – individual and relationships – co-researchers asked more questions about what was already working. The process of developing questions was slow, and often included considerable moments of silence for individual thinking.

Following the interview, a listening guide analysis was conducted. This analytical method involves listening to the story transcript multiple times, seeking to identify the plot, construct a chronological I-poem, and identify voices within each story. The following is a portrait of each co-researcher, incorporating their story plots heavily reinforced with their own words, and a discussion of the voices present in each story. Each story begins with the individual and expands outward through relationship, campus, and community levels.

Haven¹

Haven is a queer student at BHU. To read or hear her story as authentically as possible, you should assume the role of a confident and secure person. They speak in a very straightforward way. Keep this in mind as you consider tone in the text. To the extent possible, read Haven's words at a slightly accelerated pace with bright diction.

Much of Haven's story of knowing self is centered on middle and high school experiences. She first learned about the LGBTQ+ community at a young age, but reflects on the fact that it was,

“Not like in a super positive way. Probably when I was a little kid, and I was told it was an abomination. Um, my super religious grandparents specifically. Um, and then the community itself outside of just individuals who were that probably. When I was older – and then you have the internet, you got like Tumblr and, and TV shows and songs about it. So, a lot of it's like internet subcultures and stuff where you find out a lot about the, the community itself.”

Even in spite of that, Haven continued to explore her identity. In middle school, they began to discover their own LGBTQ+ identity.

“Probably like, so sixth grade. Like young middle school. Like pretty young. Um, it was one of those like, well, ‘I shouldn't, I shouldn't’, you know? It's like, it's like a thought thing, you know? You're like, ‘well, I was told this is wrong’. And then you get to the point where you're like, ‘well, maybe it's not’. And instead, it's like a, like a *them* thing. Um, which is – which doesn't sound like a super eloquent way of putting it. But I was in like sixth grade. And I just remember – I remember that being a very like weird time, you know? It's a weird time for everybody – it's in middle school. But, by eighth grade I was fully out to all my friends and stuff and have been very constant in that.”

Having many queer friends and seeing them come into their own identity had a substantial influence on her.

“Um, I have a lot of queer friends. Um, I was a band kid, so, unsurprising there. Um, lots of them there. Um, and a lot of like their coming out experiences, um,

¹ Haven uses she/they pronouns. These pronouns are reflected equitably in Haven's story.

especially the more flamboyant ones is, has always been like a very like eye-opening thing to just see people coming into their own and like their, like a lot of times it is in a little more colorful ways than like what you see, especially in like a very small town. So, it's always been great.”

Haven shared that when she was able to share in others’ coming out experiences,

“It helped, helped bridge that gap to a certain extent. Um, but it, it makes you feel less alone when you have more people who feel a similar way or face similar subjugation that you do. It's – it's comforting in a kind of a sad way – but comforting.”

As she grew in the security of her identity, Haven began to participate in LGBTQ+ events.

“I remember I went to my first pride, like, um, sophomore year of high school with a bunch of friends and just seeing everybody who's very – like going somewhere and *not* being the minority of a group, like an outward existing minority in which you can like tell is very, uh, relaxing and it just feels like you belong there. And now when I go to like parties with my friends who [attend a public university], most of the time, the room is at least fifty percent queer people. And it's, it's very, it's like a, a very like comfortable space to be in, in comparison to like my every day.”

Her “everyday” that she references includes lack of support and acceptance at home.

Raised in a conservative Christian home, Haven experienced anti-LGBTQ+ religious beliefs and condemnation from family. Like many LGBTQ+ youth who experience a dissonance between their faith identity and their gender and/or sexual identity, they chose to step away from one.

“Instead of like a reconciliation with myself, it was a reconciliation with my religion, which, uh, led to, uh, abandonment of that religion, ‘cause I just don't want...And that has to do with a lot of like other factual stuff that I just agree with now, um, on a scientific basis. But a lot of my leaving that religion was the thought of a creator who would not be happy with his own creation.”

One might wonder whether attending a faith-based university would bring about similar experiences for Haven. However, though she has only been at BHU for a short time, Haven has found a network of affirming peers and employees.

“The first one was probably [Dr. H]. She's super chill. She was the first class I ever had... I mean, I've only been on this campus for about a semester and a half now. Um, but she was just very, immediately, like ‘anyone who comes in here is cool’. You know, a lot of ‘we're going to take a lot of those religious biases as people have towards you and, you know, change those or like reexamine those’. And it wasn't necessarily like, I was like, ‘This is who I am’. And she was like, ‘That's cool. I accept you’. But it was just very much like making an effort to make all of our students feel comfortable in our classroom.”

Finding a faculty member who is accepting and affirming has been important for Haven.

She acknowledged that to feel validated or accepted does not require such overt expressions.

“It's just like a level of like allowing people to exist. And a lot of times it isn't that people are, you know – I don't need someone to validate my identity every like two seconds or something. I just need people who *aren't* going to invalidate it. That's the biggest part. It's like, if you like, make a mistake or like mess up on something, as long as you're not consciously being a bigot, it's not that big of a deal. And that's a lot of what I think, uh, people have, have bad experience with on this campus.”

In fact, Dr. H has had such a profound impact on Haven, that,

“I joined her club. Now, I host her trivia nights. Um, so, you know, it was – it was very much like the first like on-campus experience I had with a staffer, really anyone that was like, ‘Hey, something outside of your classwork that, you know, involves you in this campus.’

Haven shares that she knows other LGBTQ+ students who have had starkly different experiences with faculty who either make no attempt to be accepting or are deliberate in exclusionary practices.

“I know one student who emailed their teacher and was like, ‘Hey, I know what the – what your roster says, but this is the name I go by and these are my pronouns.’ And they purposely said, ‘I will not be using those’. And it's stuff like that. It's like, I personally haven't had my identity invalidated on campus, but I also don't – I also haven't had the, the chance to like really be like, ‘This is my identity, you know? What is your response to that?’ But it's more so like, certain teachers have clearly made a comforting environment for those who might have a different identity from the norm and those who just don't.”

Haven is candid in sharing that while she knows others have experienced campus very differently, she simply is not around as much to feel the weight of what she interprets as the campus's ignorance toward the LGBTQ+ community. Haven has also seen that the LGBTQ+ student representation on BHU's campus legitimizes the need for LGBTQ+ student support through a group like Alliance Club. They have been part of starting Alliance Club this year at BHU.

“I remember talking to Kasey (staff club advisor) about it ‘cause I was – Dr. H was wanting to start up [her club] again and I, I was like, ‘Yeah, um, I'm all for gender equality. Why not?’ Um, and then, and then I was talking to Kasey and she mentioned something about wanting to start some kind of club for, for those, you know, for the LGBT community on campus. And I was like, ‘That would be great. Let me know anything about it’, and when she mentioned it to me...she was like, ‘Yeah, we're ready. We're going to have that meeting this Thursday’. And I was like, ‘That's great! I will be there’. Um, and walking in and just seeing a room full of people to the point where we did not have enough seats was like, I know there's this many, but like this much participation shows the need for this club, ‘cause like there's, there's clubs for literally everything that I am interested in that I'm not going to participate in ‘cause I don't have the time or like just like the, the energy to commit to it. But seeing some people be like, ‘No, this is a club that I need to be a part of and want to participate in’ was very like eye-opening as to what like this campus has been missing.”

At times it seems that her status as a commuter student correlates to a level of connectedness. Yet, similar to the importance of supportive peers in her middle and high school years, finding friends in the LGBTQ+ community helps one another to feel seen.

“I've been to – I've only been to like two [Alliance Club] meetings ‘cause they moved ‘em to Wednesdays. So, I have work on Wednesdays now, so I've not gotten to go to any of the ones this year. Um, but I went to some when that first started and just like seeing people there and now even though I've able to go to those meetings, seeing them outside, I get like waves and like, ‘Hi’. And like – you know that like knowing look that it's like – I don't have a lot of friends on campus ‘cause I don't really live here or spend a lot of time here outside of classes – but just like that like acquaintance kind of relationship that I get to have with people on campus that I like know. And I'm able to associate with, you know?”

Even though students were meeting for Alliance Club during the spring 2022 semester, it had not yet received official status as a recognized student club at BHU, despite meeting all the requirements to be a student organization. Even after meeting with BHU's new president to advocate for LGBTQ+ student support services, Haven said many were left feeling like not enough was being done.

“I mean, maybe make it a club. Uh, [Alliance Club] should be a recognized club. Um, doing anything to recognize the fact that we exist on this campus would be cool. Um, I don't know. It, it was a suggestion. Really just showing any like, doing an event or just any kind of just like little symbol of like, ‘We are aware that you're here and we are, you know, or at least cool with that. We're, we're okay that you exist on this campus and we're going to accept that’ would be nice, but it's, it's not. It's more of like a ignore and, and forget. And perhaps ‘Don't say *gay*²’ would, uh, kind of reflect a lot of what this campus seems to uphold.”

Much of what Haven advocates for is the most basic recognition that LGBTQ+ students exist on BHU's campus – a similar struggle of LGBTQ+ students at numerous CCUs.

Though it sounds like such a simple plea, it is often difficult to obtain. She believes BHU's new president has an opportunity to bridge the gap.

“I mean, the president speaks for a lot of the campus, but really just like any amalgamation of just like the university itself making a statement, being like, ‘Hey, you exist, we, we accept your existence and we're here to support you as like a, as like an actual group on campus ‘cause there's so many of you, you know. You're our students, we should care’. That kind of thing.”

Beyond the boundaries of the campus, Haven sees the need for much change in our community, with the same appeal –

“Allow us to exist. Um, they don't allow any celebration or recognition of it, really aside of like – there's some, there's some small businesses that are, that have put stuff up for pride. But for the most part, like there wasn't, they don't allow any pride parades really. You get a lot – you get so much outcry from people...who have a voice in the community that are typically preachers or like older White pastors. Um, and you don't get to hear a lot from those other parts of, [the community]. Even though there are a lot of people who do identify that way, a lot of them are just younger and don't get a lot of a voice when it comes down to

² Referencing Florida's CS/CS/HB 1557 (2022) *Parental Rights in Education* bill.

like things that the city puts on. 'Cause there's so many events that get put on, on Main Street and get, you know, get done that like show celebration for things. And you just don't get a lot of that with, uh, any of the queer community.”

Though they are planning to only be in our local community for a short time while at BHU, Haven will be an advocate in whatever community they live in.

“Um, but public action I think is one of my biggest important things. Like, I don't, I'm not one to start and run those, but I'm all for following and like putting in effort into those. Um, and I personally don't intend on being here for more than next – heading out after next year. So, while this community may not get much help from me, uh, whatever community I am up in, will be one that I put effort into when it needs it, you know?”

Though BHU still has work of its own to do toward promoting inclusivity and gender equity, Haven recognizes the potential influence the institution can have on the community.

“If [BHU puts] any effort into representing or advocating for their LGBT students, then that would force part of the community to be, to, to at least, part of the [local] community to accept that there are people like that in their town. And I think if the campus does more of that, I think you would see more local churches who might feel comfortable with that or at least more local... establishments and like, um, other small sectors that feel more comfortable presenting that they – that they're, uh, an advocate of that, but you're also going to get a lot more backlash from that, but that's any social change.”

In addition to individual advocacy and the influence of BHU, Haven believes that local churches can play a significant role in bringing about change. It is remarkable that although she has personally experienced harm from a church that would ban LGBTQ+ people, she still sees the potential to be a force for good.

“Um, but the one in particular that my family hails from, um, won't even – like if you, if you openly identify as a gay person, you are not allowed in their church. And something so, so drastic as like banning them from, from entering your building your, your place of faith is, is, is disgusting to me. Um, and having churches – not that one – but having churches that are more accepting will change community views. Cause a lot of people get a lot of their – not, they don't get their opinions, but they form their opinions based on their faith. And when your faith is being interpreted by an individual or group of individuals who have interpreted it

to be very negative towards a certain community, they're also going to hold those beliefs. So, if we have churches, um, and pastors and pastoral teams that are putting an effort to like actively show acceptance and advocacy for the LGBT community, I think on a community...level, you'll get a lot more people who are accepting and, and less hateful about it.

Voices in Haven's Story

There were four voices identified in Haven's story. They are strong and declarative, and include: *pragmatist*, *outsider*, *insider*, and *altruist/advocate* voices. She has a firm sense of identity and is very matter-of-fact in how she speaks of her own experiences and how to improve the experiences of other LGBTQ+ people. They acknowledge that they are involved in some clubs and organizations on campus yet seem to maintain an intentional distance from the institution, aided by their status as a commuter.

Pragmatist. Haven's pragmatist voice makes very assured statements about her own identity and in making practical recommendations for how BHU and the surrounding community can better serve LGBTQ+ people. The pragmatist voice seems to desire for their LGBTQ+ identity to be mundane within the campus community. Haven shares, "I don't need someone to validate my identity every like two seconds or something. I just need people who aren't going to invalidate it. That's the biggest part." This voice was more present at the individual and interpersonal relationship levels.

Outsider. Haven's outsider voice is strongest when sharing about her relationship to BHU as an institution, the local community, and churches or religion. Haven seems careful not to acknowledge too much connection with BHU. She mentioned several times that she has not been at the institution long and will not be for much longer, stating, "I personally don't intend on being here for more than next...heading out after next year."

They use the outsider voice to demonstrate feelings of exclusion within their community as being directly related to the role and influence of local churches. When referring to trying to host pride events in the local community, she said, “You get so much outcry from people who have a voice in the community that are typically preachers or older White pastors.” The outsider voice also appears when sharing about abandoning the religion she was brought up in, which may contribute to how she understands the influence of churches in the community.

Insider. The insider voice represents Haven’s connection and engagement with people or places, usually speaking of BHU’s campus. Her insider voice is drawn out when talking about clubs, classes, and physical spaces where she has been welcomed as well as people who have validated her identity, even if subtly. Haven shared about the first time they remembered how it felt “not being in the minority” at their first Pride event, saying “you can tell it’s, uh, relaxing and it just feels like you belong there.” What is also interesting is that Haven’s insider voice, while typically sharing positive experiences, seems to subvert the expectation of being an outsider. In fact, both the insider and outsider voices are heard in conversation together quite frequently. Often the outsider voice is used to temper the insider voice. One such example is when she shared about making new connections through the SAGA student group:

- **Insider:** “I get like waves, and like ‘Hi’, and like, you know that like knowing look that it’s like (non-verbal acknowledgement).
- **Outside:** (Aside) I don’t have a lot of friends on campus ‘cause I don’t really live here or spend a lot of time here outside of classes,

- **Insider:** but just like that like acquaintance kind of relationship that I get to have with people on campus that I know, and I'm able to associate with, you know?"

Altruist/Advocate. Haven's altruist/advocate voice is perhaps one of their strongest. The altruist/advocate appears at each level of our defined social ecology and dialogues with each of the other voices. This suggests that Haven's commitment to advocacy and caring for marginalized LGBTQ+ people may stem from her own experiences of inclusion or exclusion. She also typically offers meaningful action steps in very clear terms. One of Haven's advocacy refrains focuses the most basic need for others to simply allow LGBTQ+ to exist –

“Allowing people to exist...doing anything to recognize the fact that we exist...hey, you exist, we accept your existence...allow us to exist...they're stuck in a community that like, they don't feel comfortable existing in...being allowed to exist...I just want to exist as I am without having that be an issue.”

Faith

Imagine that you have chosen to participate in a research study where you will be sharing about your journey and experiences as an LGBTQ+ student at a Christian university. It is an exciting opportunity, but you are not entirely out, so while you see the need to share your story and have a genuine desire to do so, it also makes you a little nervous. Still, you choose to be courageous. This is Faith. Faith is a bisexual student at BHU. As you read her story, empathize with Faith as one who is still seeking to find those whom she can trust with her identity on her journey of growing self-acceptance.

Faith centers much of her story of coming into her own LGBTQ+ identity within her family context. The first story seems to suggest a general curiosity about marrying someone of the same gender, which was met with quick opposition from her mother.

“Well, the – the earliest memory that...well not my earliest memory like of all, but just a – a early memory that I had was when I – I was like in the car with my parents or something and I was like, I just asked my mom like, ‘Can I marry a woman? That just popped in my head for some reason. And she was like, ‘Nope’.”

It ended that conversation for a long time and made clear to Faith what her parents believed. In middle school, though, the issue once shot down by her mother, would resurface.

“Um, it was in middle school. I was – I think I was in seventh grade and I was, um, I was in a choir group and, um, I started realizing that I liked girls. So, um, from then on I – I kind of tried to suppress it for a long time but finally I did just say, you know, this is who I am. This is – this is who I’m...who I’m meant to be. And I just accepted myself.”

She felt like she had to suppress her identity because her family was very conservative, and she would often hear homophobic comments from her parents and members of her church.

“I was – I mean I was raised in a, a very conservative...well, not very conservative but conservative, um, family. So, y – y – yeah hearing a lot of, um, just homophobic things growing up, you know, that was kinda rough. You know, like especially after I realized that I was part of the LGBTQ community. And then like just hearing my parents and my church and people say...these things. ...That was just really discouraging for me, I guess.”

There was little affirmation from her family or church, causing Faith to weigh whether she could, in fact, be LGBTQ+ *and* Christian.

“That’s – that’s – that’s a huge thing too. Like that – that I feel like growing up, I – I – that’s – that’s how it was. It was either you’re one of the other and there’s *absolutely* like no overlap.”

Faith's acceptance of her own LGBTQ+ identity came after confiding in her sister, who was supportive and encouraging.

“Right before I decided you know ‘this is – this is who I am, I’m gonna accept myself’, you know and...I kinda just con- consciously made that decision at one point. But, um, leading up to that I’d been talking to my sister a whole lot about – and we – we were both kind of like on the same page. Like, kind of like, we were think – we were talking like ‘is like, is it okay to be like a Christian and be- and be like LGBTQ whatever?’ And we were – we’d been talking about that for a while. And finally, um, my sister was just like, she was – she was saying you know like I think – she was like, ‘Elizabeth, you – this is who you are, you know. There’s – there’s no sense of like hiding it’, and like – and like and I don’t – I personally don’t think God would want me to suppress who I am.”

Faith's LGBTQ+ and Christian identities are important to her. Contrary to Haven, however, she found a path forward where she was able to hold both identities as agreeable. It was also witnessing the example of other LGBTQ+ Christians that was formative for Faith.

“And I – I really – I didn't meet any, um, LGBTQ, um, Christians until I was in like, later in high school or even like college. And so that – that also really helped shaped my experience. Like just seeing them and seeming them live their lives authentically and live out their faith.”

Indeed, Faith has found acceptance and support as a first-year student at BHU. In addition to finding other Christian LGBTQ+ peers, a faculty ally has also been influential for her.

“I can think of one time. Um, when – it was actually when, um, the – the, um, this study was first introduced to me from Dr. H, and she, I – already – already knew she was already like, she was an ally, she's – she's great, you know? But, um, so I just kinda – so [it] was kind of, um, kind of affirming to hear her like that – that she is like accepting and is an ally and you know to hear, just to... because I hadn't really had that from anyone else much on – from- from the staff on campus.”

She notes how much of a relief it was to know that this faculty member is an ally and that she did not have to hide her identity. Dr. H is the same faculty member Haven identified as one who has helped them to feel welcomed and accepted. It is interesting that both

Haven and Faith shared that Dr. H was the first person to make their LGBTQ+ identity to feel included or accepted on campus. Perhaps being at a Christian university, Faith anticipated having to suppress her LGBTQ+ identity more – but she has found faculty and friends who have been very accepting.

“All my friends, honestly, have been really accepting. So, they – so that has made the whole experience you know, has made it a whole lot better. Um, I – I don't live on campus, you know? I live off campus but it still – it has the...same, um, feeling you know of just kind of general like, I don't know, just understanding you know, I guess. That kind of accepting but they actually do like, love you for who you are and yeah, that's – that has been great for me to see. It's good to see people that actually do care, like I said, you know? And – and – and seeing people who do care like, they're not just like kinda being like, 'Oh, bless your heart', you know?”

Though able to find support and care from individuals, finding acceptance within groups and access to these groups has proven to be a bit more challenging.

“I'm only a freshman now so, um, I haven't had a ton of different things happen because, well, for one, um, I – I wanted to go to [an Alliance Club] event but that – I – it didn't work out and they never have those it seems like. Um, but I, um, honestly yeah, having this whole research study actually just made me realize like 'hey, maybe people are kinda actually wanting to change stuff here and like, actually do care', you know?”

Faith points to the opportunity to participate in the research study as a way that she has felt engaged and connected in a group at BHU. The way she relates to the campus level seems a bit distant. She is aware of ways she can be involved in student organizations or ministry opportunities, but there are barriers to both. Information about Alliance Club meetings is scarce, though she would like to attend if she could find out more about the club. She would also like to possibly get involved in Baptist Student Ministry (BSM) but is unsure of how welcoming they are to LGBTQ+ students.

“I hope [Alliance Club] does meet more. That would really be – be most helpful for me, I think. And then two, like I...I'm not completely sure how everyone is on this obviously, but like in the [BSM] stuff you know like they – I know some

people who are LGBTQ and who are in it and I've gone a few times to some of their things but, um, I don't really know like exactly like how accepting they really are.”

The concerns of acceptance and inclusivity are also important for BHU to address as institution-wide priorities.

“They – they have – they have kind of a accepting vibe, you know, where they're not – they – like I say you know they're not really- like they'll – they'll take you in and whatever and they're like ‘well, this is just how you are, okay’, you know. And they – but they don't really like feel – have like – they don't really value you as a person completely.”

Her recommendations all center on things she is not/not yet part of (housing, student organization, student ministry, etc.). Though she has not yet gotten involved, she is very perceptive to the ways in which the campus can create greater access and engagement for LGBTQ+ students.

“Well, one thing that comes to mind actually is like the dorms and how, um, they are just, you know the whole situation with that and they're – they have like a whole – a whole sectioned off area for like LGBTQ students or if they wanna- if they don't feel comfortable being in the, um, dorm that they're, like if there – it's not their assigned gender you know? And so, it just – I don't know it kinda feels like you're segre – segregated a little bit you know. Um, so I think they could – they could like, really, if they would just loosen up a little bit.”

Similar to Haven, Faith shares that the LGBTQ+ community at BHU deserves to hear from senior leadership.

“And then just, I don't know maybe hearing like – hearing more affirmations from like upper-level people you know? The – they – that they – if they are accepting you know but they – I mean they aren't really usually so, like that would be the top thing. I mean like actually having them like you know be like...yeah actually speaking up on things. Actually just, um, just caring that you know we exist and – and you know and we're not gonna be like just silenced and pushed away, you know?”

Beyond BHU's campus, LGBTQ+ voices also struggle for representation within the local community. Faith observes that our local community seems to operate like a

church. She cites a particular incident at the local library where a panel was held on LGBTQ+ mental health and there was much public outrage from the community.

“That just kinda made me think of the – the whole, um, incident at the library trying... they – when they tried to have a panel...discussing LGBTQ issues and they were just completely shut down and just people were saying awful things and...but I just remember hearing about it, and being like ‘oh my gosh’ because it was – it was a huge problem but like I really appreciate that they did try. And I think we need more things like that to – and maybe if we do start having more things people will just you know just be like, at least – at least have a little tolerance, you know?”

This event, like most LGBTQ+ events, was advertised covertly – a similarity Faith describes in how she sees Alliance Club advertise for their events at BHU. In addition to more LGBTQ+ events within the community, she believes if BHU could demonstrate how to be welcoming and affirming that others may follow suit. However, this change may require leadership change.

“Well, I think, um, since [BHU] has such a huge, huge influence on the community, you know, um it would take a lot of – it would take a lot of change for [BHU] itself and I don't know what that would involve exactly but a lot of people would have to you know open their minds and just change their mindset really or like we'd have to get new people in charge of things...I'm just- I'm really hoping like this next generation will be like you- like way more open and like-like even like the leaders here at [BHU] like – like everyone will just be more open, you know? But I don't know if that's – how achievable that is right now.”

Not only can BHU leverage its influence within the community, but local churches can also spur change. Faith insists that while it is important for churches to talk about LGBTQ+ issues, it must be accompanied by action. She is referencing a biblical principal essential to authentic faith from second chapter of the book of James³.

“Um, I think a lot of it- it- a lot of it would come down to the- the, um, the bigger churches being more inclusive you know and if they were more inclusive I think it would probably – it would either drive a lot of people away for one thing and but then it would also welcome a lot of people in at the same time, which I mean is-

³ James 2:17 – “So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.” (New Living Translation)

needs to happen...My pastor has said some stuff about that, you know but like they also don't do a whole lot of stuff in the- to like advocate though...So that also kind of, I don't know it kind of undermines...saying all that.”

Faith also sees herself as an agent of change and strongly states she specifically wants to be able to advocate for adolescent kids who may be learning about their own LGBTQ+ identity.

“I really hope to like when I'm – when I'm older to continue to be like, advocating and just as much as I can for – especially for like younger people because I feel like that's – that's like especially like when I – I mean when I was first, um, realizing that I was bi and I was like twelve or thirteen you know and that's just a really hard time of life, you know? So, I wanna – I really wanna help, um, younger people that like around that age specifically. And I – I don't know completely how yet that I would do that in the community but I do really wanna help that somehow.”

Further, for those who may be exploring or trying to understand their gender and/or sexual identity, Faith offers these words of encouragement:

“I would probably just say like, you know don't be ashamed, don't – don't try to hide it, don't... and then too like, as a Christian I feel like open communication with God too is – was important. Like, and like – like I – I should've like prayed about it more. I should've talked to God about it more, you know? But I didn't 'cause I was just like, ashamed. So, I would if – if you are a person of faith, you know, I would suggest just being as open as you can to God about it. And just don't – just don't I mean, there's no reason to be ashamed.”

Voices in Faith's Story

There were four voices within Faith's story: *questioning*, *assured*, *suppressed*, and *advocate/hope*. While her LGBTQ+ identity is not necessarily new to her, Faith is only partially out. Some of the uncertainty that accompanies not being fully out can be heard in the dialogue of these voices.

Questioning. Faith's questioning voice contains multiple contexts in which the questioning means something different. Her questioning voice may literally ask questions about her own identity. When she was young, in a spirit of curiosity she outright asked

her mother if she could marry a woman. As she began to discover her own LGBTQ+ identity, she would talk with her sister and ask whether it was okay to be Christian *and* LGBTQ+. Faith also sees that the local community treat many public spaces like churches and ponders why that is. There are also times when the questioning voice may represent second-guessing or possibly regret. In reflecting on her own journey of self-discovery, Faith shared, “I should’ve prayed about it more. I should’ve talked to God about it more, you know?” Her questioning voice is also prevalent when talking about access to programs and information on BHU’s campus. She stated that she knew of the LGBTQ+ student organization but had difficulty in finding information about meeting times and locations. Faith also shared that she had an interest in being involved in student worship services or other Christian organizations on campus, but could not be sure that she would be welcomed as an LGBTQ+ student.

Assured. Faith often expressed the assured voice when her LGBTQ+ identity had been validated or accepted. Many times it was through the example and actions of others that she felt assured. While not receiving acceptance for her LGBTQ+ identity from her mother, her sister was very supportive – this was when Faith decided she was going to accept her own identity as bisexual. Faith also cites seeing others live out their Christian faith and LGBTQ+ identities in harmony had a substantial impact on her – “And so that also really helped...shaped my experience; like just seeing them and seeing them live their lives authentically and live out their faith”. On BHU’s campus, Faith has found accepting faculty who have identified themselves as LGBTQ+ allies and has friends who have been very accepting. She said that being part of this research study has provided her a place where her LGBTQ+ is validated. She also shares assuring words for those who

may feel like she felt, “Don’t be ashamed, don’t – don’t try to hide it”. It is interesting that in this offering of assuring words, she discourages doing something negative (*don’t, be ashamed*) as opposed to encouraging a positive action. This seems to be congruent with her own experience of coming to acceptance of her LGBTQ+ identity.

Suppressed. Faith’s suppressed voice is present throughout her story. It seems that while she is partially out, the suppressed voice may provide greater understanding as to why she might not yet feel ready or comfortable being completely out. At the beginning of her journey of discovering her LGBTQ+ identity, Faith often heard homophobic comments from her family and her church. She experienced a great deal of struggle between her faith and LGBTQ+ identities, often thinking she could only choose one, “It was either you’re one or the other, and there’s absolutely no overlap”. This made Faith feel ashamed, and like she was the target of dismissive pity for having the sinful burden of being bisexual – “Oh bless your heart”. She feels that churches and BHU can have a strong and positive influence in promoting change in the local community culture around LGBTQ+ issues. However, the good that can come from beginning to talk about these issues will be completely undermined if there is no advocacy through action to back it up. Faith’s suppressed voice is also present when sharing about having difficulty in accessing programs or resources of support for LGBTQ+ students, leaving her feeling a bit isolated and doubtful that change can or will happen. This voice is often heard with the advocate/hope voice – her own experiences of suppression seem to spark how she advocates for other LGBTQ+ students.

Advocate/Hope. Overall, Faith remains hopeful that the experience for LGBTQ+ students will improve at BHU and within the local community, to include churches. She

shared tangible actions that BHU could take to begin meaningfully engaging with its LGBTQ+ students. The dorms, she noted, are often not safe or comfortable spaces for LGBTQ+ students, especially for those whose gender identity does not match their birth sex. Further, Faith said that BHU's administration needs to acknowledge and engage with LGBTQ+ issues because they are important to their LGBTQ+ students. In one statement, she juxtaposes the advocate/hope voice with the suppressed voice:

- **Advocate/Hope:** "I'm really hoping that this next generation will be like...way more open, you know?"
- **Suppressed:** "But I don't know how achievable that is right now."

This statement in her suppressed voice amplifies the expectation and current reality of experience at BHU. By contrasting these voices, it can be suggested that lack of a response or acknowledgement from BHU administration may lead to the assumption that LGBTQ+ voices are being silenced. Yet, Faith believes that BHU's example would prove powerful in the local community and to churches.

Emmett

Emmett has a genuine desire to serve and help others. He is sincerely humble and puts others ahead of himself, even if that means his LGBTQ+ identity is minimized. His faith is also foundational to him, and he seeks to be involved in student ministry opportunities however he can. Emmett is a transgender male student at BHU. To read and listen to his story is to accept a posture of care and humility. It is also crucial to consider how Emmett's literal voice must physically change as his story progresses. For genuine understanding, you should allow for this auditory perception as you read his story, in his words.

Emmett began to learn about and explore LGBTQ+ identities and who he was in middle school. He has always had a heart for wanting to learn about others so that he knows how he can help them. So, he sought out to learn about different gender and sexual identities.

“I found out, um, about the LGBTQ+ community when I was in, I wanna say seventh grade, um, which is a long time ago. Um, and like I heard like some things about it before then, but I actually like dove into it like in, in seventh grade. And um, it's like, I want to know more about the community before I like have any strong feelings about it, you know? So, um, I learned about it and it's just like, they're people too, like we're all human. It's just like, we – we're all here on earth. Like we're here to like, just do, like be ourselves and it's just like, yeah. It's like, let them be them.”

As Emmett was learning about LGBTQ+ identities, he discovered that his own experiences might fall within this community.

“So, um, each letter like stands for a certain like, uh, community and I was going through like, letter by letter, like learning as much as I can. Then I got to, uh, the trans, uh, letter and I'm like, ‘wait a minute’... 'cause like I – I've never been, uh, I was assigned female at birth, so I knew I was never like the feminine type.”

The process of learning about these identities was one that required Emmett to be resourceful as it would not have been supported at home.

“So, um, when I learned about it, I actually like had to go to like my friend's house and like look all this up. And like I went to the library too, 'cause my family is like strictly against...um, like the community. So, I literally had to do pretty much everything I could just to learn. And um, it, I would probably say two and a half to three months later, I like – I like said that's how I identified because like, just like I said, it just felt right. Like it felt like me, like I actually knew who I was for once.”

Though this resonated with Emmett, his mother was quick to dismiss the notion that he may be trans.

“And...my mom was just like, ‘Oh, you're just a tomboy’. Like, ‘I was like that too.... It's normal’. I'm like, ‘I think it's more than that, but okay’. So, I like decided to, uh, read more into it and like read other people's stories and I'm like, there are some stories I could place my name – at the time I was going by Erin – um, I put my name in like place of their name and it just felt right. Like their story

matched mine, but not completely, but like, it just – it just felt right. And I like, this is like who I am.”

The moment Emmett realized he was trans was deeply profound and he experienced it with a close friend.

“Like...I literally remember crying in the courtyard in seventh grade, 'cause I figured it out. And, I told a friend and she was like, literally like hopping all around me, like celebrating. I'm like, like it's a core memory.”

Emmett also holds a very deep Christian identity and has found that his faith and trans identity can coexist – one does not have to be sacrificed, though it has not always come easily or without opposition from within the church.

“I'm a Christian...So, um, before I even knew that I was part of the community, I was – I was like in the church, like I grew up Christian, like I'm the only one that went to church in my family. And then up to seventh grade I realized that, uh, well in seventh grade I realized like who I am and then I'm like, ‘but you can't be both, honestly’. So, um, I still went to church and everything, but I didn't like tell anybody that I like identified as something different than what I was born. Um, and 'cause I was struggling. I'm like, ‘How, how can you be both?’ ... What I grew up with is like, ‘you can't, you have to choose one or the other’ or like it's a choice to be like a part of the community.”

It was the example of a friend he met in high school whom he witnessed live out their Mormon faith alongside their pansexuality that made Emmett think that perhaps he would not have to sacrifice either his LGBTQ+ or faith identities.

“So, we began uh – uh, began being friends. Like I know like, uh, Mormon aren't like straight Christian, but like it's, they kind of coincide with each other. So, it was just like, it was nice having that like friend to show me that you can be like a believer, like a Christian or a Mormon, um, and still be a part of that community be because like, it doesn't matter, like God still loves you. Like, no matter what, like that's what he does.”

Though he has not often seen eye-to-eye with his mother about his transgender identity, his mother tends to be a central figure in his story of developing identity. This continues even now that Emmett is a college student at BHU. In fact, Emmett continues

to face challenges to his identity while at home, so he will often look for ways to avoid going home when school is not in session.

“Like, there's like every single time I go home, like I have to like be called my birth name, like the wrong pronouns and everything like that. So, every single time, like it, like I have to, like, we're supposed to go home from like school, I do everything I can to stay on campus or like go with a friend or like try to do something 'cause I'm like, even if it is just for like two or three months, it's still two, three months of like not wanting to like be around family, which is really, really sad. But it's also like... I – I literally like they know, like I told them in 2020, June 2020, and they're like, they don't care because my mom's like, ‘I gave birth to you, so I know what you are.’”

Another element to consider in Emmett’s decision to seek to stay on campus is that in stark contrast to his home situation, his relationships with others at BHU have mostly been very supportive. While on a mission trip, Emmett recalls the acceptance and support he received from a BHU employee.

“So, Kasey, she knew like knows how I identify and like she knows my pronouns, all that stuff. But um, Tony with [student] ministries, um, he knows, he calls me Emmett, which is great, but he still uses the wrong pronouns. So, um, everyone that knew like knows me, uh, called me Emmett, which is great, but it was literally half and half. Like he, him pronouns and then like she, her pronouns.”

Even though the leader of the student ministry program uses Emmett’s chosen name, he will not use the correct pronouns. Kasey, the same person named by Haven, was on this mission trip with Emmett and took any opportunity to advocate for him.

“So every single time Tony said like ‘she/her’ Kasey would be like, ‘yeah, he’ ...and, and then try to correct him, which would like kind of made my heart like, ‘thank you’. But, 'cause like I hate confrontation. I really do. Uh, and I don't wanna like say, ‘Hey, I don't go about these’. I'd rather have like not – I wouldn't rather have someone else do it – but I just like, I hate confrontation. I hate letting people down. And I feel like if I said something, I would like be letting him down even though not my, but anyway. Yeah. Um, but yeah, she like kept correcting like pretty much everyone that uh, used the wrong pronouns.”

As the trip progressed, Emmett would continue to encounter situations that ignored his trans identity.

“And then, um, there was this one day we went to, um, a women's refugee, like, um, center to like just go like hang out with the girls... Uh, and um, it was like, the girls group went... there, and the guys group went to, um, some Nepali, uh, missionaries in the area. And Kasey like made sure like she was with me like the whole time. And like at the end she was like, ‘I know like this was kind of like not how you expected the day to go’, because I expected it to be with the Nepali people, but she was like, ‘I’m so glad you’re here’. Like, ‘Are you okay?’ Like, or like, ‘Need anything?’ It’s like – it’s like, ‘Yeah, I’m – I’m good.’”

Even amid such a challenging situation, Kasey’s empathy and care for Emmett helped him to feel validated and accepted.

“Honestly it felt like... this is gonna sound weird, but it kind of felt like she was kind of being more of a mother than my mother... 'cause that’s like – your mom’s like suppose to take care of you and stuff like, and that’s like what [Kasey] did like then 'cause like she didn’t ask in front of everybody. She like took me through a whole other side of the building to ask, just like to make sure I was like safe and like no one heard... Um, and uh, it just made, made me feel like seen and like at the end she was like, ‘I just want to know like you to know that like I’m here for you’. Like, um, ‘I, uh, I appreciate and accept you and like I see you, I know who you are’ – all that. And I’m just like, ‘That was nice.’”

It was through this interaction with Kasey that Emmett learned about Alliance Club at BHU. Being part of Alliance Club has helped Emmett to meet other LGBTQ+ students with whom he has been able to build friendships.

“So, I’ve like been a part of [Alliance Club] ever since. And it’s kind of cool because... okay, this is gonna sound kind of weird. I could tell there are some other people like in the community on campus, whether they were out or not to me, like personally, but going to the actual meetings, it’s like, there are a lot of people in here I didn’t even know.”

This is a similar revelation Haven had when joining Alliance Club. Emmett sensed that perhaps there were more LGBTQ+ students at BHU than what he initially thought. He has used the friendships made through this group to befriend others.

“I actually, um, met like two or three other people that also like, are gender nonconforming or like trans or non-binary, um, or just another part of the community. And uh, they were pretty much all sitting alone in the [cafeteria] and I like invited them to sit with my friends 'cause like not a lot of people like have friends, because not a lot of people accept things, especially at like at Christian

university, you know? So like, yeah. So now we're friends with like, uh, two or three other people, um, who are also in the community, which it's pretty cool. 'Cause having friends is one thing, but like people that actually understand and like, um, can like validate each other is pretty cool.”

In addition to Kasey, Emmett feels he has been fortunate to have very accepting and supportive roommates. Though he still lives in a female residence hall because of institutional policy, he says all of his roommates have been so understanding and have always made sure that he is comfortable around them. Much like Kasey, one of Emmett’s roommates has become an advocate for him even in times when his mom comes to visit.

“There were some times when my mom had to come like – like get some stuff from my room or like come drop something off or whatever. She would use the wrong pronouns, not my roommate, but my mom. Um, and then, uh, my, uh, roommate would be like, ‘Yeah, yeah’. And then at, when she left my mom, uh, my roommate's like, ‘Yeah, *he* would, yeah, *he* would’. I'm like, ‘Yeah,’ just like, like a rebuttal, but like not in front of my mom, 'cause that would cause a huge scene and I wouldn't want that. But, and like, there was one day it happened. She literally just went on the rest of the day. I just like started laughing 'cause I'm like, ‘I thank you,’ but I'm also like, ‘it's – it's been like four or five hours since she's been here.’”

This lack of acceptance and affirmation from his mother, which he tries to avoid by only going home when necessary, has now infiltrated his campus environment – a place of solace for Emmett.

In addition to Alliance Club, Emmett has also been involved in BSM. The different ministries of BSM present multiple opportunities to serve and help others. Faith also shared an interest in being involved in BSM, but could not be sure of how accepting the group is. This does not seem to be an issue that inhibits Emmett from being engaged with BSM. In fact, Emmett even sees himself as part of the BSM leadership team.

“I am interested [in being on BSM council]. I'm actually going to apply tomorrow. Um, I just have to write my testimony, which is gonna be hard because I've never done that before. And I feel like some things about that testimony, not a

lot of people on the council or like who's like looking at them will be okay with, but I know Tony knows me, so hopefully it'll be okay. But yeah, I – I do wanna be on council one day and also do want to do the [ministry] crew thing in the summer.”

Emmett also recognizes the efforts of the new president at BHU to be present for students – not just the title of “president”. He thinks the LGBTQ+ community at BHU can be an integral part of the process in petitioning university leadership to advocate for the needs of this community on our campus.

“I would like to...either go to like the board of trustees, people like the other higher ups, maybe even with other students, like in the community to like talk about that group, uh, like [Alliance Club] and the community as a whole, rather than like just him. 'Cause I feel like if you have people who are actually in the community, it'll like help like build a stronger stance, you know? It would help them to see that there are real people behind these concerns.”

Emmett also identified residence life as needing a better approach to LGBTQ+ students living in the residence halls. He urges BHU to remove barriers for LGBTQ+ students to feel safe where they live.

“Like, I know it's a predominantly Christian university, but just as it is, doesn't mean that there aren't like Christians who are in the community; like, I'm a Christian I'm in the community. Um, and there's people who are like in the community that aren't Christians, but I feel like no matter like what their religious beliefs are or like their, um, they should still be able to, um, feel like safe and like wherever they stay, like, I feel like, um, I feel like they should be able to stay wherever they feel like comfortable in like how they identify. 'Cause I – I understand like there's rules, like, because it just safety reasons honestly, but it's also still like, it's not degrading, but it kind of is.”

As passionate as he is about advocating for LGBTQ+ students on BHU’s campus, Emmett sees the great need for supporting LGBTQ+ people in our local community and believes BHU has a central role to play, namely by officially recognizing an LGBTQ+ student group.

“When they make [Alliance Club] approved, like as an actual group, then, um, the community will we see like times are like progressing. Like we, you don't have to

say ideology of like, um, how you were like raised days kind of. And I feel like if we do have [Alliance Club] then, um, like official, um, that would show like if a Christian university could have, um, a group like that for their students, then why couldn't other places, you know? So, I feel like...not everyone would be on board and yeah, I feel – I feel like if, like I said, a Christian university could take those steps, then a lot of other places probably would too, like just follow.”

One such way he thinks the community could respond is by creating a resource for LGBTQ+ people in our community. He even said he had a dream about LGBTQ+ advocacy within the community the night before our conversation.

“Um, I actually had a dream about this last night. I'm not gonna lie. So, you know what the Boys and Girls Club is – so I – I feel like we should have one of those, but like a community center, like, um, for everyone. But I feel like there should be like a section in there, like solely based on like, uh, the LGBTQ+ community. Um, like obviously everyone else can come too, but I feel like, I'll say like publicity is like everything. Like, um, if it's out there more, it'll be like more of a common norm, like you said. And it's like, I feel like if we have like a place, like just where we can be ourselves, like the diversity [office] on campus. Um, even if it's small, like, oh, well like it's like the center, like, you know, you can go to and like be safe.”

More than just an idea, Emmett feels like he could even see himself heading up a project like that – he enjoys being in charge and this would a great way to help others.

“Honestly, I would like, like I love like helping people, so I would help as much as I can, like as much as they wanted me to. Um, I could like help start it, like, like build it from the ground up. Like that would be pretty cool. Um, I don't know, like I like to be in charge, but it's also, uh, stressful sometimes, especially like, if it was like something like that in a moderately conservative town. So, but I feel like, um, I feel like I probably would like to be in charge of something like that or like at least like have like a co-partner or something...like, I feel like that would be pretty cool.”

A prospective barrier to community support may be local churches. Even though Emmett has found a couple churches where he has been able to get involved in their different ministries, he sees many churches as potentially resistant to the idea of something like this, but if they were to be supportive, it could mean creating welcoming and affirming church spaces for LGBTQ+ people.

“I feel like that would definitely like get more people in the church 'cause I know there's people here that are in the community who have nothing to do with religion because of like it being religious and like how either they grew up like in the church and like, it's just like, they received so much backlash from up and I feel like if they were inclusive, then that would definitely like, uh, probably get their foot back in the door. ...But I feel like to, to be a church, you kind of have to like accept one another and like love one another in the first place. But if you actually like become more inclusive and like actually like walk the walk and just instead of talking, like just saying, ‘yeah, I love everyone’. Like you can say that, but it doesn't mean you actually do, but I feel like, um, if they actually took steps to, um, actually like love and like care for everyone, then this town would definitely be like a hundred times [better]. But I feel like if the churches were more inclusive, then a lot of more people would be in church on uh, Sunday and Wednesdays and going to more events, honestly, 'cause like I said, publicity is everything for literally everything. So, like if, um, more people are at a church, more people are gonna be talking about things going on at the church and more people will be brought in like see like it – it, it's a whole circle.”

Emmett echoes what Faith shared about the need for churches to translate their words about being welcoming into sincere action. He also touches on concerns that were part of Haven’s story of leaving the religion she grew up in – LGBTQ+ people who want nothing to do with religion because of the backlash they received from a faith community.

Voices in Emmett’s Story

Emmett’s story includes six voices: *helper*, *Mom’s voice*, *actualization*, *non-confrontational*, *second-guessing*, and *defended/affirmed*. Two were very apparent during the interview, even prior to the listening guide analysis, as Emmett shared traits about himself. Specifically, he identified how much he loves helping others and that he is non-confrontational.

Helper. The presence of Emmett’s helper voice is not surprising. In addition to him sharing during the interview how much he loves helping others, during our focus group discussion on the results of the spiritual gifts inventory, he also shared how helping

aligned with the strengths of mercy and exhortation. Emmett also uses his helper voice frequently with the actualization voice, which suggests that expressions of wanting to help others may facilitate self-actualization for him. In demonstrating his concern for the wellbeing of others, Emmett felt that he should and could step in to fill the role of male leader and protector in his house, since he has not seen his father since he was five years old. He also demonstrates a posture of care in relating to his roommates. Since he is a transgender male required to live in a female residence hall at BHU, he is very sensitive to making sure his roommates are comfortable with him.

Emmett's helper voice is also how he expresses his passion and ideas for advocacy, both on BHU's campus and in the local community. He wants to develop an LGBTQ+ and ally delegation of students and employees to facilitate dialogue across institutional departments. He also sees this extending through the governing structure to reach BHU's Board of Trustees. As a helper, Emmett wants BHU to be open to serving the local community by providing access to resources and even has a vision for establishing a community center with LGBTQ+-specific resources. He also engages his helper voice to be a leader in these enterprises – "I would help as much as I can...like build it from the ground up. I probably would like to be in charge of something like that".

Mom's Voice. What came as a surprise for Emmett was the identification of "Mom's voice" in his story, and how prevalent it was. This voice stems from words spoken to Emmett directly by his mother, which have often been unaccepting or dismissive. When Emmett first shared with his mom that he believed he was trans, the message he received was, "Oh, you're just a tomboy" or "I gave birth to you, so I know what you are". It has been difficult for Emmett to gain acceptance from family because they are strictly against

it. This voice is present in many places in Emmett's story. Specifically, Mom's voice can also be heard when Emmett shares about times at BHU that he has been deadnamed⁴ or when others intentionally use the wrong pronouns. In his love of helping others, Emmett has been on multiple mission trips through student ministry opportunities. During one such trip to Atlanta, the campus pastor who was leading the trip, split the group in two, sending the guys' group to work with Nepali missionaries and the girls' group to a women's refugee center. Emmett was sent with the girls' group. In sharing about the campus pastor, Emmett said, "He knows, he calls me Emmett, which is great, but he still uses the wrong pronouns". Emmett is resilient in his desire to continue to serve and help others. Mom's voice has also literally been brought to BHU's campus by his mother when she visits Emmett and will continue to use wrong pronouns around Emmett's friends and roommates. This voice is one that Emmett must contend with frequently, and at times completely blindsides him.

Actualization. Emmett's voice of actualization follows his journey of self-exploration and discovery and is often heard in conversation with the helper, Mom's voice, and non-confrontational voices. Even in spite of the fact that Emmett's trans identity was not accepted by his mom or family, he sought to learn as much about the LGBTQ+ community as he questioned his own identity. He shared about having to almost sneak around to find information, either by going a friend's house or the library to learn as much as he could. This helped Emmett to know who he was, and who was not. He also uses his actualization voice when sharing about his identity as a Christian and being

⁴ According to Merriam-Webster: "the name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning" (2022). Emmett's recollection of being deadnamed is when an individual used his birth name rather than "Emmett".

validated through the example of others who are LGBTQ+ and Christian, which demonstrated to Emmett that it was possible to be LGBTQ+ *and* Christian. Emmett's actualization voice also has movement in looking toward what lies ahead. Emmett sees himself as part of the leadership council for one of BHU's leading student ministry organizations. He is also in the process of seeking out a full legal name change. Each name that he has chosen has a very special meaning and represents something about him – this is a process for which Emmett is very excited!

Non-confrontational. This voice was also one that Emmett identified in sharing his story. The role this voice plays in Emmett's story is interesting. Typically, the non-confrontational voice appears after an event where Mom's voice is heard or felt. This voice may represent times when Emmett utilizes avoidance to prevent having to hear Mom's voice. He shared that he will actively avoid going home from BHU during breaks or when class is not in session so that he is not subjected to non-affirming and unaccepting family. Emmett's non-confrontational voice also shows when he makes concessions in times when others intentionally or unintentionally use the wrong name or pronouns. He feels that by correcting them or asking them to use the correct name and pronouns he is somehow letting them down. In the prior example of the mission trip to Atlanta, Emmett acknowledged really wanting to correct the campus pastor and to go with the guys' group but did not address it. It is also worth considering the impact it has on Emmett for his mom to bring Mom's voice to the literal and physical campus, and perhaps into the most private and secure place for Emmett, his room. This is the place and space he has identified as his solace from having to go home. Even if it means feeling degraded, he tends to stay away from any potential conflict as a result of validating his

trans identity. While his non-confrontational voice is always in response to Mom's voice, it is nearly always met with a supportive response by fellow friends and allies.

Defended and affirmed. This voice is heard when Emmett is protected by others, from others. Even though he was made to go with the girls' group on the Atlanta mission trip, a fellow BHU employee came to his aid. She would correct wrong pronouns when she heard them used by others, and regularly checked in with Emmett to let him know that he was seen. Her words comforted Emmett, "I know like this was kind of like not how you expected the day to go, but I'm so glad you're here". His roommates have also stepped in to validate him after witnessing his mom use the wrong pronouns in their dorm room – "And then...when she left (my mom), uh, my roommate's like 'Yeah *he* would, yeah *he* would'. She literally just went on the rest of the day", even hours after his mom left. When his friends intercede on his behalf, they will typically make a point of interjecting and emphasizing the correct pronouns with whomever they are speaking.

Second-guessing. Emmett's second-guessing voice is quite isolated. In fact, there is only one appearance of this voice in his story, but its use and character distinguished it from the other voices. Before finding the example of other LGBTQ+ Christians who had reconciled and lived out both identities, Emmett questioned whether he could be LGBTQ+ *and* Christian. This voice appears just after he acknowledged that he realized his LGBTQ+ identity in seventh grade. He also shared that he was the only one in his family that went to church and struggled to make sense of both identities.

Sophie

For Sophie, her bisexual identity is one that is fairly new to her. To hear her voice when reading her story, you must commit to empathize with the burdens Sophie carried

while discovering her sexual identity and then coming out to friends and family. You should equally share in the deep relief she feels in knowing that she is loved and accepted. The timbre of Sophie's voice is very calm and mellow. As you read, approach her words with a sense of quiet strength.

Sophie has only recently realized her LGBTQ+ identity, specifically citing a critical period of reflection during the pandemic as foundational. Much like Haven, Faith, and Emmett, witnessing first-hand or knowing the stories of other LGBTQ+ people was highly formative.

“Uh, a lot of my friends in high school are part of the LGBTQ community, and so, um, it was just kind of normal, I guess, just to be around people that are a part of it. Um, and I didn't realize I, myself was a part of it back then, but I think being introduced to it and like hearing other people's stories and kind of what they've gone through and what they've experienced, it – it kind of helped open my eyes and kind of made me think a little bit more about myself, I guess in that way. Um, so I guess that was really the first time. And it was kind of different I guess, because I went to a Catholic high school.”

Sophie's Catholic identity played a central role in her family and educational lives.

Because of this, issues pertaining to LGBTQ+ identities or inclusivity were not often discussed.

“So, it wasn't like discussed in school at all, but it was just like my friends that went to the school. Like I had never been taught about anything, like I've always gone to Catholic school, so never by school or never by my parents or anything or so.”

Even though she has always had LGBTQ+ friends, it was not until college, during the COVID-19 pandemic that she began to consider that she may be part of the LGBTQ+ community.

“I think, well it was actually in quarantine for COVID. And a lot of self-reflection during that time. Not a lot else to do. So, really just a lot of thinking and, um, just I had gone through some bad relationships in the past and just kinda started thinking maybe there's a reason, you know, those didn't work out. But, um, yeah –

just that time to actually sit and think by myself, not really have to worry about running to school or running to volleyball or that kind of thing, you know. Because it doesn't really happen a lot where I get time to just think to myself.”

Just as hearing others’ stories was an important influence in shaping Sophie’s self-realization of her LGBTQ+ identity, the acceptance and support since coming out has been crucial in validating and affirming her identity.

“Um, I think being around people that support me no matter who I am is a huge thing, because when I first realized, I was absolutely terrified to say anything to anybody. And, um, my family but everybody has been super supportive. And that has been a really big part in my just feeling comfortable to come into myself. 'Cause it – it feels almost like there was like this little – little door, you know, I didn't know about and it's like I finally unlocked it kinda thing. And, um, yeah. Just having people that don't really care, honestly. You know, it's like you're just you're still you kinda thing.”

Since discovering her identity, Sophie has had the support of friends and family, which has often come as a surprise. Even when preparing to come out to her parents, she recalled a middle school class assignment that had a lasting impression.

“Uh, it's been really shocking, honestly. Just not like...that I have a bad family or anything, but I grew up Catholic and going to Catholic schools, I always like I just remember vividly like in seventh grade or something we did a debate about gay marriage and like, I told my parents about it that like we had, my team or whatever had been chosen to support it. And they were like, ‘Well why would you do that? Like that's horrible’. And I mean, they've come a long way since then.

This memory was powerful in shaping how Sophie thought and feared her parents might react. As she mentioned, LGBTQ+ topics were not talked about in her family, so the fact that there was such an adverse reaction to a class assignment in seventh grade may have been even more amplified.

But that was, um, really scary 'cause that..kept replaying in my head and I was like I know they're not the same people anymore. Just like I'm not the same person. But it's really been a blessing because, um, because Erin – she's my girlfriend – ...but um, just having like, not having to worry about like bringing her home and then meeting them and worrying about like ‘oh they're gonna hate her just because she's a girl’ and that kinda thing. And, uh, it's really taken a lot of

weight off my shoulders, especially in the beginning when I first realized it. Um, and even like, I didn't tell my extended family. I said, 'Mom, like I can't do that. That's – I can't go to every single person. I have a big family. Like can you just mention it, you know, just throw it in there somehow.' And just to – and she's like, 'Yeah, sure, whatever.' Like, it was just really nice to know that like, they love me, you know?

After coming out to her family, she was relieved to know her parents still loved her. One of the things I find so compelling in Sophie's story that she is continually willing to face the possibility that others may not accept her if it means she can live authentically in her LGBTQ+ identity. In many instances it seems as though she may not expect positive, accepting, or supportive responses, but she persists, nonetheless. Fearing how her parents would react and respond, there is a moment of deep relief in Sophie's voice when they demonstrate that their love for her is unconditional.

As with Faith and Emmett, Sophie also experienced a tension between her faith and LGBTQ+ identities. As she worked toward reconciling the two, it brought further refining of her faith beliefs.

"In the beginning it was kind of rough to mesh the two together in my head. And this is when I was all figuring it out. And, um, 'cause I – I think I transitioned more to just like not super strictly Catholic to more just like Baptist, I think. And, um, I think that transition also helped me with it because Catholic, what I grew up is very strict and very, I mean Catholic- it's great. It's a great – it's, it's good, just not for me. Um, and the church, I've been to...here and [is] just so open and welcoming and I think that kind of helped me a lot with reconciling the two. 'Cause it was a battle at first and then I was like well, God will love me. So, and I can't change anything about it."

Having navigated the journey to discovering her LGBTQ+ identity since being in college at BHU, Sophie has found strong supporters in peers, teammates, and staff. One employee in particular, Chasity, who is her girlfriend's (Erin) residence hall director (RD) has been especially welcoming.

“Yeah. I love her so much. Um, there's not really been like a specific time, but just little like when I first – when we first started dating and, and she's the soccer...RD, so I was over there all the time. And it was just nice to not be like, ‘Oh, you're dating?’ like kind of thing. And just...because I didn't know her, and she just accepted and welcomed me in. And, um, it just made it a lot easier of a transition I think to have like not have fingers pointed at me and like ‘oh, that's not okay’ and, um, just to have that support always there in the background has been – been a really big thing.”

Sophie also gives some insight as to why Chasity’s response has been so meaningful.

“Yeah, it, um, it was really nice because that was the first time I think, [she was] the first person besides my family, um, well I'll say adult, not someone my age [who] kind of like knew about it, I guess. And it was just, uh, it was like a really warm feeling, just like ‘not everybody is gonna hate me.’ Like I've heard stories, you know. And not everybody's gonna be like that and it's nice to know that there are people who, um, are religious but also accepting. And – 'cause I mean I myself am religious *and* a part of this community, so, it's nice to know that there are other people who can empathize with that.”

Chasity unconditionally and automatically showed Sophie that she was welcomed from the first time she met, which was when Sophie was introduced to Chasity as Erin’s girlfriend. To know that Chasity, someone who is also very religious, could support her so much has had a tremendous impact on Sophie.

Finding support from her friend group and teammates has also proven to be especially meaningful in developing and accepting her own LGBTQ+ identity. Sophie emphasizes how her friends have helped her to feel that dating a girl is normal.

“Um, well I think it was hard in the beginning the first few years, I think it is for everybody. Um, finding the right people. Um, but now that I have found the right people and when, um, I came out and they were just like, ‘Okay, like cool.’ Um, and it's meant a lot to me and nothing has changed like in our – my friendships with everybody and, um, it was a little more scary I think with the people I'm not so close to on my [volleyball] team. Um, 'cause that's a little bit of a different environment than just, you know, hanging out with my best friends. Um, but even then, like I didn't necessarily come out and say it, there was just one day where I was like, ‘Yeah, that's my girlfriend.’ And they were just like, ‘Okay.’”

Haven, Faith, Emmett, and Sophie all share like accounts that they want their LGBTQ+ identities to be so fully assimilated into an environment that responses to diverse gender and sexual identities is met with mundane responses as basic as ‘okay’ as Sophie shared.

“So, it is nice to know like, to have people that it's just okay, you know, it doesn't really mean anything. It's not like – like super good or super bad, it's just neutral, I guess. And, um, I was kind of worried about that at first, um, because this is a religious school. Yeah. And I mean I have really religious friends here and not so religious friends here. And I was worried about...how each group would react to it. Um, but I mean there's been no problems or drama or anything like that with it. It's just been kinda like natural, like how one of my friends would say, ‘Oh, I have a boyfriend now.’ It was – it was just normal almost, which was shocking to me, but um, relieving also for sure...Like, that's just normalized in society. And I think there is a shift now more towards this being normalized. And um, it's really, um, encouraging to see, for sure...But yeah. I was – I was shocked to find that here, honestly.”

One of Sophie’s primary sources of support is the volleyball team. Even with those she may not be particularly close to, there is a shared sense of supporting one another. Now that she is growing in the security of her LGBTQ+ identity, Sophie is also hoping to get involved with Alliance Club.

“And I'm- I'm really looking forward to that being a bigger part, I think. Um, but I think as – as school as a whole, it does kind of feel like it's kept hush-hush. Um, I don't think necessarily on purpose, but it's just not something people go out of their way to talk about because they don't want to feel uncomfortable, or they don't know how other people will react to it. And, um, I think that is a big part of our culture today. Like people becoming more aware and accepting of this community and I think it is important to talk about it here on a religious school for the same reason you're doing this study”.

In an effort to bring LGBTQ+ issues into more regular dialogue at BHU, Sophie thinks engaging these topics in the classroom and through student clubs would improve college for BHU’s LGBTQ+ students.

“Um, I think, uh, a big thing would be just being able to have conversations about it and not just me, but with faculty members and I know there are that you can go talk to. But, um, I feel like if it was more kinda broadcasted...that it is okay to talk about it. And it's not like, um, like a – a secret topic or something that should

be kept away. But, um, something that's normal today. And maybe having like, I don't know, like a weekly, I mean Alliance Club will probably do something like this, but like just meetings with not just students, but I think with, um, faculty members as well being included in that. I think that would be...a big thing just to know that the adults here also like, um, not approve but like it's okay; that they – they think it's okay too to talk about.”

Sophie joins the voices of Haven, Faith, and Emmett to call for greater engagement of LGBTQ+ issues across all levels of the university. She also touches on the covert nature surrounding Alliance Club, reinforcing the most basic need to feel safe to speak about these things – not even asking for BHU to take an affirming stance, simply allowing conversation to happen.

This conversation also needs to expand to the local community. Sophie sees the potential for BHU to be a resource for LGBTQ+ in the broader community – perhaps even expanding Alliance Club to support non-BHU LGBTQ+ people in the community.

“If they open [Alliance Club] up to more than just people on campus and like they, you know, like, um, advertised for it throughout the city, and 'cause then I'm sure there's people outside of this campus in [town] that are also part of this community and maybe they don't have any – any other place to go or anywhere to talk about it. And, um, if they saw that, then maybe they would feel more comfortable and be like, ‘Okay, like, I'm not the only one.’ You know, and maybe even if they – they don't feel comfortable enough like coming to something like that, if they just know that there is something like that and there are people like them, like that could be a comfort in itself.”

To bring about such change, Sophie wants to take an active role and help however she can. Though she does not have many connections in the local community, she said she could use social media and other methods to advertise such resources and would even be willing to speak to groups.

“But honestly, any way that I could help at all because I know how it feels to be someone out there that doesn't really have a resource. Um, or people – or feel like you have someone to talk to or relate to. And it's not a great feeling. So, any way I could support other people like that, I for sure would.”

While Sophie has found a local church that is welcoming to her LGBTQ+ identity, she knows it is not the case in all churches. Like the needs she sees at BHU, the most basic interactions at church have the potential to be transformative.

“But, um, even the conversations that the congregation will have, you know, amongst themselves outside of church, um, it is – it is a big deal 'cause that can effect ... I mean group think is a big thing, and, um, it can – it can be negative and it could also be positive though. And I think if, um, churches here just become a little more- a little more modern, I guess. You know- you know, you don't have to forget tradition, you don't have to...throw it all away, but if you just kinda – if they open up their eyes and see what's happening around, um, and speak about it is the big thing. If – they have to acknowledge it, I think, to make a difference. Then that – that could change the people that go to church there... the way they think, get them thinking about different things, and having conversations at home, in restaurants, and someone else overhears it. Like it would just be a big snowball I think.”

Voices in Sophie's Story

Sophie had five voices present in her story: *helper/optimist, newcomer, reflective, religious, and relief*. As her LGBTQ+ identity is still somewhat new to her, Sophie's voices represent how she has navigated that path to self-discovery and how she seeks to grow and help others. They also point to the ways in which an LGBTQ+ might expect to experience college life at BHU.

Reflective. The reflective voice is one that is quite strong for Sophie. As the voice which seems to prepare the way for her self-realization of her LGBTQ+ identity, much of her story is rooted in self-reflection. Sophie shared that during COVID shutdowns, she had time to be with her thoughts without the distractions of school or volleyball. Having heard the stories of others who realized their LGBTQ+ identity caused her to reflect on her own experiences. Of her period of self-reflection, Sophie said, “Just – like I'm not the same person” and she is secure in her identity. This voice is also one that offers affirmation for Sophie. She noted how meaningful it has been to have friends that have

accepted and affirmed her as well as coming to her own conviction that people can be LGBTQ+ and religious.

Religious. The religious voice, while not one of the more prominent voices, seems to be especially important and foundational to Sophie. The expression of this voice is only ever an internal look at her own faith identity. She centers the issue of religious identity with reinforcing statements about being of the Catholic faith, having grown up Catholic, or attending Catholic school. However, her religious voice also indicates that Sophie is on a journey moving away from Catholicism to other beliefs, perhaps Baptist, as she shared.

Newcomer. The newcomer voice primarily highlights elements specific to Sophie being new to her LGBTQ+ identity, though it is also present when she talks of being new to college. Having spent time in self-reflection during COVID, Sophie reemerged with this new bisexual identity. This is a process she has experienced since being in college at BHU. Coming to full terms with this identity also meant telling family and coming out. Sophie shared, “When I first realized, I was absolutely terrified to say anything to anybody”. She recalled a class assignment in seventh grade where she was assigned the position of “in support of” gay marriage for a classroom debate. When she told her parents they were very upset. “That was, um, really scary ‘cause that...kept playing in my head.” Having grown up Catholic, Sophie also struggled to reconcile her faith and LGBTQ+ identities, having heard from others that it’s impossible for the two to coexist. “Finding the right people” was difficult for Sophie – to know who she could trust and be accept by. This voice also empathizes with others who may be coming to terms with an LGBTQ+ identity – “I know how it feels to be someone out there that doesn’t really have a resource...or feel like you have someone to talk to or relate to”.

Relief. Much of Sophie’s experience is expressed through the voice of relief. This is a powerful voice and is very present throughout her story. This voice often comes in response to a concern, and usually centers a subverted expectation. The relief voice is a strong indicator of Sophie’s expectations of living out her LGBTQ+ identity among family, at BHU, and in the broader community. In response to her newcomer voice sharing about being terrified to tell family, the relief voice answers, “but everybody has been super supportive...it’s been really shocking, honestly”. Recalling the story about how her parents reacted to telling them she was assigned a position to support gay marriage in a seventh-grade class, Sophie was concerned how they would react when she came out to them. The voice of relief in this scenario is perhaps one of the most poignant of any statement she made – “Like, it was just really nice to know that like – they love me, you know?”

Sophie’s relief voice is also heard when sharing about feeling acceptance at BHU, from friends, teammates, and employees. One employee in particular is a residence hall director named Chasity who was the first person outside of her family who knew about her LGBTQ+ identity. Sophie found Chasity to be welcoming and accepting, a stark difference from the judgment she was anticipating because of Chasity’s identity as a Christian. It was eye-opening for Sophie to see someone who could be religious and accepting. Her teammates and friends have also been very accepting, “which was shocking to me”, Sophie said. “I was shocked to find that here, honestly.” Again, this helps provide some insight into what Sophie might have been expecting to experience as an LGBTQ+ student at BHU.

Helper/Optimist. The helper/optimist is Sophie’s advocate voice. In striving to continually improve herself and help others, she remains consistently optimistic and determined to see the good in people. She is hopeful that the role Alliance Club has in campus culture will expand and that BHU will continue forward in making LGBTQ+ issues normalized for future generations. Part of the reason Sophie mentions this specifically is that she feels the culture on BHU’s campus is one where LGBTQ+ issues are concealed. Beyond campus, she sees the potential for Alliance Club to be a resource for LGBTQ+ people in the local community – that it may help others to know they are not alone. Having grown up Catholic, Sophie knows that churches have the potential to help promote the cause of LGBTQ+ inclusivity. For church leaders to approach these issues, it could, “get them [congregation] thinking about different things, and having conversations at home, in restaurants, then someone else overhears it. Like, it would be just a big snowball, I think”.

Erin

Erin is a gay student at BHU. She has a strong sense of her identity and centers the value of open-mindedness in how she relates to new ideas and new people. As you read Erin’s story, allow her words to speak with decisive clarity. In addition to how she comes to know herself as gay, consider also what Erin may have been feeling as she left her home in England for the chance to play soccer at a decidedly Christian school like BHU.

As with all other co-researchers, Erin grew up in a conservative home where LGBTQ+ issues were not engaged. Rather than being able to talk about it, she learned through various forms of media and around her in her public spaces.

“Um, I think it was like watching it on like TV shows and, um, seeing it through that kind of platform, because I grew up with my granddad. So...like, I was in a very conservative kind of background. Um, it wasn't really something we ever spoke about. It was kind of something more that, um, I saw on the TV and then in my community. Where I live, we actually have like, um, like gay bars and like a gay strip where like, there's like, um, drag shows – all that kind of, that kind of community there. And that was kind of like where I discovered all of it and started looking more into it. I mean, I was probably like around about fifteen when I went into town and I kind of saw it. Obviously, I couldn't go in any of the bars or anything, but I kind of saw it and I was like, ‘Wow, like, that looks like a lot of fun. Like, they just seemed like really carefree people’. I was like, ‘I wanna be like that.’”

Without the opportunity to learn about LGBTQ+ issues from within the home, Erin, as with all other co-researchers, become responsible for educating themselves. They have actively sought out resources to become informed on LGBTQ+ identities and issues.

Unique to Erin, the conservative values in her home were not driven by religious traditions or faith beliefs.

“I mean, there's a lot of things I knew from a young age that – there's a lot of things that like, weren't spoken about in the household. There was a lot of things that, um, I knew my granddad wouldn't agree with and all that. I also knew that he was very, he was hard 'cause there was a lot of things that he disagreed with, but he always told me and my sister to keep a very open mind. So, he kind of made me who I am, but also, it's very old-fashioned at the same time. So, it kind of conflicted a bit, but yeah.”

The encouragement from her granddad to be open-minded is what initially helped Erin to consider that she might be gay.

“Um, I think it's more the way I felt towards a certain...person. Like, um, I knew from a very young age that like my attraction to men wasn't really there. And, I think for a long time that I kind of denied it. I, I thought that I was like the weird one that it kind of like, as I grew up, it kind of would come to me, but it never really did. So, like, it was more my friends that kind of said like, ‘Well, you know, what, if you're into girls’ or something like that. And I was kind of thinking it's not something I'd ever thought of, but when I kind of opened my mind to it, I realized that actually was more comfortable with them. And like, in my own skin, I was more comfortable with them. Like with men, I was very uncomfortable, like the whole time.”

When Erin was old enough to explore the gay strip in her community, she went with friends to a local gay bar. Though initially going just for fun, Erin was encouraged by one of the drag queens in the club.

“Um, when I turned eighteen, me and my friends went, 'cause a lot of people go 'cause they are such a good time. And, um, I actually had a drag queen come up to me and she was like, ‘What are you doing in here?’ And, and I was just saying, ‘Oh, I’ve come out for a night out with my friends.’ And, um, she was just asking stuff about me. She was really, really open and she just kind of said to me, she went, ‘Well, this is a place where we don’t judge.’ And she said, ‘It’s just a little bit like a utopian world. Like you come here and you’re in a little bubble.’ And I remember thinking like, ‘I kind of wanna stay here.’”

Here again, the value of open-mindedness can be seen as a core value of Erin’s. It was the intentional openness of the drag queen and the environment free from judgment that resonated with Erin and made her to feel seen and safe. This was a truly liberating experience for Erin. Though certainly never excluded by her friends for being gay, being the only gay person within her friend group led to feelings of isolation.

“I was really worried 'cause, I mean, I never – none of my friends were ever considered being gay. Like it was never a thing for them. So, I made myself feel like I was the weird one and the odd one out. Not that I had, I mean I never had a trouble fitting in, but I did always stand out from like my friends.”

The concept of open-mindedness is even seen in Erin’s acceptance of her own LGBTQ+ identity.

“‘Cause you can’t change who you are. And I think once you accept who you are, the quicker you’re happy. ‘Cause as soon as I accepted who I was, I was so much happier, and I didn’t really care what anyone else had to say about it.”

Receiving affirmation and validation of her LGBTQ+ identity from those close to her, whom she cares deeply for, has proven to bolster Erin’s self-acceptance.

“Um, I think coming [to BHU] has been a big one for me. Um, 'cause I started dating Sophie when I got here and I think, um, I kind of knew who I was beforehand, but I think for everyone, they – kind of like for me, especially I think realizing that someone could love me, it was like, I could finally love myself as

well. And I think that was a big one for me, 'cause like I was so happy with who I was like, I never struggled with any of that, but I think there's always part for a person where they feel like maybe they can't be loved until they are actually loved and realize that they are worthy.”

Not only has Erin found love and affirmation from her relationship with Sophie, but she has also grown very close to Chasity, her RD. Chasity had a reputation of being very religious – also serving as the chaplain for the women’s soccer team. Though Chasity has cared for and supported Erin, this was not what Erin was initially expecting.

“Chasity has been the biggest one for me. Coming here, like I got my soccer scholarship was signed very, very late. So, I only had like a month to prepare coming and I didn't do a lot of research into the university just 'cause I knew that I wanted to do America, and that was what I set on and I came, and I then saw how religious it was. And I remember meeting Chasity and coach had told us a bit about her and said how religious she was. And I remember thinking like, ‘I've gotta stay away from her’. Like, ‘She's gonna hate me.’ And the first conversation I had with her was really good and she kind of looked at me and she went...not in a personal way, she kind of just asked me who I was and I kind of told her and she went – she went, ‘I don't care.’”

Chasity’s response was not dismissive, but rather a way to help Erin know it was okay to let down her guard. This immediately began to break down barriers for Erin in connecting with Chasity.

“Cause she knew that I could, she could tell that I was very closed off to her and she was like, ‘I don't care’. She went, ‘My mom was LGBTQ’. She went, ‘I don't care’. She went, ‘I love you for you.’ And I remember that was like the biggest thing for me, 'cause I probably had like already set what I thought she was gonna judge me as just because she was religious. But, she was, she's been the biggest support for me. Like she got me on into this [research study] and, um, she's just always loved me so much. And she doesn't care who I am. Like she's, she'll tell me every time she sees me that she loves me so much and that she's so happy and she's seen me and Sophie together and she always says how cute we are together and how happy she is for us. And I think she was probably the biggest one for me 'cause I know I could go to her in any crisis and she'd help me.”

Chasity has become so important to Erin that she is like a mom to her.

“ I think that was the first time that I kind of thought I can really be myself and, it also, you know, I didn't grow up with a religious background at all, but it kind of

made me think maybe that, I mean, I have my own belief, but maybe that I should be more involved in it and I shouldn't be so closed off to that kind of part of life. And I do that. I mean, I had a very, I have a, a very weird relationship with my parents, but just her treating me the way she did. Like she's like my mom, like she's like a mum figure to me. And like, she helped me more than she could even know.”

Chasity’s example as someone who holds her Christian identity so deeply and is yet so welcoming and supportive to LGBTQ+ students has caused Erin to think about exploring religious beliefs where none have existed before.

“It changed everything. It changed my whole outlook on religion. It changed my whole outlook on, um, being gay in a religious environment. Um, 'cause I know that there's still people that are religious that probably judge me, and I've never really given a second thought to it. I don't care 'cause I am who I am, but I think just her accepting me 'cause she's the one that matters to me. That's what was important to me.”

Erin joins the voices of Haven, Faith, Emmett, and Sophie in sharing that the times when her LGBTQ+ identity is received as normal is when she feels most included. In addition to how she perceives this as an individual, she also feels this in her relationship and is sensitive that Sophie may experience it differently than her.

“Like, we're just who we are and no one's really judging us. And I mean, you get certain people looking, but the majority, no one cares and that's nice for us 'cause I know for me, I don't care. I know for Sophie it's all a little bit newer for her. She does care a little bit more. Um, but I kind of have to just tell her like, ‘We are who we are. And if people don't like it, then that's their own problem.’ I just think that we've come so far in so many things that it should be normal to see two women holding hands and walking together and kissing, like it's just like any other relationship...but I don't see why it should be judged [as] any less than any other relationship.”

As a member of the BHU women’s soccer team, Erin’s teammates have been very supportive of her and her relationship with Sophie. Having LGBTQ+ and other international teammates means Erin can always find someone to empathize with. Erin

feels that her relationship with Sophie, who is on BHU's women's volleyball team, has helped to develop friendship between the two teams.

“Um, we have a lot of international students on the team anyway, so I'm not the only person on there that is gay, which is nice, 'cause that means that I've got someone to relate to, but none of the other girls care anyway, like Sophie's best mates with all the girls on the soccer teams and I'm best mates with all the girls on the volleyball team. Like I think us dating has brought like soccer and volleyball together, which is so much nicer 'cause we'll go out together and we'll do stuff together. So it just broadens everyone's like friend group, which is a lot nicer. But I think just having people that are similar to you has helped and also people that just really don't care, like you're just there, and you are who you are and they, they love you and they love who you're dating.”

Chasity and the soccer team have been excellent examples of how to be welcoming and supportive of LGBTQ+ persons. Erin acknowledges that outside of this network, however, the broader campus community is less engaged with LGBTQ+ issues, if not intentionally distant.

“Um, I think it's still a very secretive topic on campus. I think for a very international campus, there's obviously a lot of people that are LGBTQ, but it's never spoken about. So, it's there, but it's almost hidden as well. Um, so I think just, I mean I'd be happy with just a poster saying it's okay to, to be who you are. Like, I'd be fine with that. Like, but just a little bit it more to say that we are here, and we shouldn't just be here, we are *allowed* to be here. You know, like it is part, it should be part of the university, not just people that come and then leave the, the camp...campus should wanna make everyone feel inclusive.

All of the co-researchers expressed concerns that LGBTQ+ issues are often suppressed on BHU's campus. Erin also feels that the campus needs to engage more with LGBTQ+ issues. She suggests using the weekly chapel services to help begin addressing these issues.

“I think it's just little things. I mean, I think one thing that I'd love to do is like obviously we have to do chapel, I think just maybe one week having someone come in and have someone different from the norm of the people that they get in, have someone that comes in and they talk about them being LGBTQ or something. So, it just makes it a little bit more like this is a topic we can talk about. It's not a topic that needs to be on the down low. Like we can talk about it

and it still be normal and still be in a religious environment...Probably just, uh, making it more visible, making it like a lot, like everyone knows it's here. I think it's just maybe putting up a gay flag here or, and just saying to people like it's here and we, we're proud to have it here.”

To Erin, BHU is a microcosm of the larger community that also struggles with LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Since becoming more open to exploring religious beliefs, Erin weighed the difference that inclusive churches could make in the local community.

“I think it would change everything. I think people would stop looking at others to purely judge them. Um, I spoke with Chasity about going to church 'cause I told her I was very, really open to it. And she said that she'd just changed [churches]. And she said the [it] was so much more open. No one looks at you, no one judges, you like, everything they teach is about everything that's going on in society right now. And, um, I kind of said to her, like, I'd love to go to church, but I'd heard from other people that had gone to [some], like if you walk in and you, you are not there every Sunday, then people will look at you, be like, why are you here? So, I think just, just being open and just realizing that actually this is the society we are in and you can't change it 'cause it's only moving forward. So you either get left behind or you catch up.”

Erin wants to be a role model for others who may be questioning their identity.

Navigating an LGBTQ+ identity in a place where religious beliefs or traditions are prevalent presents a unique challenge. Just as Erin and the other co-researchers have looked to the example of others in developing identities or reconciling beliefs, she wants to be that same example

“I think I'm just not ever gonna stop being me. I think that means that whoever I pick up on the way, whoever they are, it means I can just help them more with if they're struggling 'cause I know everyone struggles at some point...And I think just being me, I...just say to people like, ‘If you're not you, then you're not happy and no one else should be able to judge you enough that you stop being who you are to suit someone else's needs.’ Like life is so short. There's no need to ever live to someone else's standard.”

Voices in Erin's Story

In Erin's story, four voices are heard: *I am, champion/advocate, open-minded/caring, and skeptic*. They represent her journey toward her LGBTQ+ identity, instilled values, and affirmation of self and care for others.

I Am. Erin's I am voice is named for a common phrase she uses throughout her story, "I am who I am". It is an indicator of acceptance and affirmation of self, of others, and from others. In the journey for self-acceptance, Erin realized that she felt like she couldn't fully love herself until she was loved by someone else – a girlfriend she found at BHU. This has made Erin to feel like she is also worthy of being loved. The love and support she has received from others have helped to build enduring friendships. Erin also identified the same residence hall director as Sophie as someone who has shown her unconditional love and support. Sophie said, "Like, she's like my mom – like she's a mum figure to me, and like, she helped me more than she could even know". Erin is very secure in her LGBTQ+ identity and makes declarative statements about it – "I'm here, and I am who I am...I don't feel like I have any reason to be sorry...for who I am". Erin is committed to staying true to herself, without apology, though she is sensitive to how it may be received by others.

Champion/Advocate. Erin's champion/advocate voice ultimately calls for BHU and the local community to see LGBTQ+ identities just as ordinary and common as she sees her own. She identified the need for BHU to give voice to LGBTQ+ issues. Erin sees the need to bring gender and sexual inclusivity into the broader campus dialogue and out of obscurity – helping LGBTQ+ students to know that their presence is not merely tolerated, but is accepted and welcomed. She also recommended incorporating LGBTQ+ issues into the regular and required chapel services, to help bring these important topics out from

being hidden or avoided. Erin demonstrates her commitment to advocacy by living out her truth, and leading by example – helping whoever and however she can along the way.

Open-minded/Caring. The value of being open-minded is one that was taught to her by her Granddad, who raised her. Erin said that even though there were many things he may have disagreed with, he always encouraged her and her sister to keep a very open mind. This value is heard in Erin’s open-minded/caring voice. After a friend suggested that Erin might be into girls because she was never attracted to men, Erin shared, “when I kind of opened my mind to it, I realized that I actually was more comfortable with them”. Erin’s own open-mindedness is often facilitated by the example of others. Seeing others be open-minded helped her to be open to new things.

It was the example of this residence hall director, Chasity, that caused Erin to be open to learning more about religion and faith beliefs as well. Erin did not grow up in any particular religious practice or tradition, but for her it was the first time she had considered that she could be LGBTQ+ and religious. Erin also demonstrates a posture of care in not wanting to make others feel uncomfortable. In this sense she is open-minded and concerned for the wellbeing of others, though they may not be accepting of her LGBTQ+ identity.

Skeptic. The skeptic voice is the least prominent of Erin’s voices. As in some of the other voices, this voice is at times represented by the skepticism of others. Erin mentioned that her Granddad, though encouraging her to remain open-minded was often very harsh and disagreed with being gay, not really ever engaging with LGBTQ+ topics in the household. Though it may not establish a causal link, it remains that Erin never really considered that she might be gay. Even when she did come to terms with her identity, she

would often make herself to feel like the odd person out in her friend group. As shared earlier, she was unsure that she was worthy of being loved, until her girlfriend showed her that was. It was also in the example of her residence hall director that Erin's predetermined thoughts about her as a religious person and some concerns about church or religion were allayed.

Conclusion

During individual interviews, co-researchers shared their stories, specifically pertaining to their own self-perception and realization of their LGBTQ+ identities and how they have experienced the interaction of those identities with other people and environments. Each co-researcher was found to have a voice of advocacy and shared many similar experiences in their LGBTQ+ identity development. All co-researchers identified family environments that made it difficult or impossible to discuss LGBTQ+ identities or issues, whether due to religious or other conservative or traditional values. The stories shared by co-researchers are compelling and have the potential to facilitate connection and empathy with other LGBTQ+ students as well as impact positive change in promoting inclusivity and affirmation among employees and students at BHU. To accomplish this, we next explored different elements of music sound and expression and infused their stories into pitches, melodies, harmonies, timbres, dynamics, and rhythms.

CHAPTER 5

THE CREATIVE PROCESS FOR COMPOSING MUSIC

Introduction

Aside from my role as researcher in this study, I was also fortunate to participate as the composer challenged with bringing the conceptualizations for each piece to musical fruition. In this chapter I will describe what the creative process looks like for me when I compose a piece of music as well as the music decision-making process for this project. This will include general considerations and stylistic influences in my approach to composing as well as a discussion of how and why I made specific musical decisions in expressing the stories in the manner prescribed by each co-researcher.

Approach to Composing

For me, composing choral/vocal music is an exercise in creating the most meaningful outward expression of text, with the full range of sound the human voice can make. I am particularly drawn to sacred a cappella music. Composing itself is a sacred process for me. Even when not setting particularly religious or sacred text, the act of composing is one that I feel draws me into closer communion with God.

I often explore the concept of space in my works. This “space” can be thought of in many ways – space expressed as time between musical phrases, space between pitches (open intervals), space within the timbre (tone color) of sound, and space as the physical space where a piece will be performed. Especially in a cappella music, I view the expression of silence as just as important as the vocalization of pitch and it must be

considered within the musical landscape. Similarly, I consider the physical space surrounding a musical performance of an a cappella work as an additional voice. Often performed in highly resonant chambers or halls, with a cappella music, the space within the room is an element with which I compose as well.

It may seem a bit obvious, but text for choral works is a defining characteristic. Selecting a text to set or writing my own text is perhaps the most challenging part of the process. It is the structure upon which the rest of the composition balances. When a text is secured, I often spend a great deal of time reading and re-reading the text numerous times. This helps me to get a feel for inherent rhythm of individual words and collective phrases. When I am ready to begin writing a melody or scoring different parts, I always let the text speak to me. I tend to approach the composition process with the assumption that a melody already exists within the text, it is just up to me bring it out. The process of composing each of the five individual pieces for this project was unique and immensely enjoyable. I am humbled to have had the opportunity to participate in this way.

Translating Story into Music

Following the interview and listening guide analysis, co-researchers were asked to respond musically to the stories they shared as highlighted through the listening guide analysis. Some co-researchers had prior experience with performing music either as part of a school band or choral program, while others had little to no experience either creating or performing music. After reading through and discussing the listening guide analysis of their stories, each person was asked to consider how they might respond musically in a way that would represent their story. Each co-researcher was brought into a room with a piano. They were given time alone in the room to get acquainted with the

piano and to begin exploring sounds, rhythms, pitches, dynamics, or articulations that helped them communicate.

Since a central element of this study is the voice, in its literal, metaphorical, individual, and collective forms, the group decided that an *a cappella* (unaccompanied voices) work for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass (SATB) was appropriate. The result would be one collective musical work with five individual movements, one for each of the five co-researchers. Each individual movement would be a sort of musical vignette – a brief musical story, told through the words and inspirations of the co-researchers themselves. The following descriptions express the elements co-researchers identified as critical to the telling of their stories through music. Sheet music can be found in Appendix F. The individual movements of this work ordered as follows: Haven, Faith, Emmett, Sophie, and Erin. Haven and Erin bookend the work as the two individuals with the strongest security in their LGBTQ+ identities. Emmett’s story anchors the work in the middle as someone who has known his identity since seventh grade, but is even still experiencing newness in his identity as he continues to transition. It was important for me to then set the stories of Faith and Sophie between the others. Their LGBTQ+ identities are newer to them, so to have Emmett as the anchor and Haven and Erin as the stronger outer walls of the musical work help to support and buoy Faith’s and Sophie’s identities.

Haven

Haven was drawn to three pitches, *A*, *C*, and *D*, noting specifically that they liked these pitches in this particular sequence. It is interesting to note that the pitch sequence Haven composed is a similar range of pitches represented by her natural speaking voice.

Haven also described the tempo of her piece as *andante* – a walking pace (approximately 76 beats per minute) – not too fast, not too slow.

The piece begins in a hymn-like fashion in a major key, representative of the fact that she was raised in a conservative religious home. Haven speaks in a very matter-of-fact and pragmatic way. Not only does the text she selected support that, but I wanted to create melodic and harmonic pragmatism around her words. I did this by minimizing the repetition of text. Specifically, Haven identified three quotes from her story that they wanted to be included as the text of the piece:

1. “Not everyone’s perception of reality is going to apply to the way you live your live – and you just have to accept that.”
2. “Whatever community I’m in will be one that I put effort into when it needs it.”
3. “I just want to exist as I am without having that be an issue.”

Each of these phrases has a different character and represent three distinct sections within Haven’s movement.

Following the hymn section, Haven shared that she wanted the tone of the piece to shift to be much more solemn. This would be accomplished by modulating to a minor key and making this section quieter. The pitch sequence Haven identified lends itself to the keys of D-major (modifying the C to a C-sharp or C#) and A-minor. Within the minor section, they stated the importance of singular voice in singing the given lines of text. These concepts of solemnity and singular voice evoked chant-like melodies, which I used to bring out the text in measures (mm.)12-32.

Beginning in m.33, there is a building up of the third phrase, with much emphasis placed on the repetition of the words “as I am”. In Haven’s story, use of the words ‘I am’

was very declarative, and the reiteration of these two words in mm.33-43 seeks to emulate that.

Faith

Faith's expression of musical ideas was very developed but more conceptual. After exploring at the piano, Faith found specific chords and types of chords that she wanted included in her piece. She specifically identified C-major and F-minor chords and noted that she really liked the sound of diminished chords and wanted those incorporated as well. Rather than stating exactly which text she wanted to use, she identified a storyline consisting of the themes of *family*, *self-acceptance*, and *advocacy* as the designated progression of her story and asked that I pull text and quotations from her story that aligned with each of these phases. Faith also wanted to be sure that dissonant chords and pitches were used and that the piece would move from light to heavy and dark. For her own voice, Faith said that when she had sung in choirs that she had sung alto (lower female voice) – this would be the voice where Faith's first-person statements would be written. Finally, she specified that the end needed to sound unresolved, symbolizing that her story is not finished, and that there is still more advocacy work to do.

Faith's movement opens with a scene from the story about asking her mother about whether she could marry a woman while her family was in the car. The tenor and bass voices represent the dad, somewhat in his own world just driving down the road. Faith's voice enters in m.3 in the alto line. I imagined the curiosity of a child trying to get her mother's attention yet being a little nervous to ask the question. When she finally asks the question, it is not any set rhythmic time, but when the question concludes her mom

responds in the soprano line with frequent repetitions of “Nope”. Faith described her mom as quickly shutting that conversation down. Meanwhile, dad continues to drive the car, but somewhat aloof.

A stark contrast begins in m.16 when Faith shared how discouraging it was hearing words of disapproval or homophobic language. Though feeling down, repetitions of ‘for me’ is a way of maintaining focus on Faith and seeking empathy. This section culminates in a bit of clustered chaos in m.24. This measure contains texts of isolation and struggle to make sense of her own identity. This measure is performed entirely out of time (no strict rhythmic adherence) and features layered entrances beginning with the alto. Each voice has different text and when they are all sung at the same time is meant to convey a sense of cognitive dissonance.

Once this ends, it is replaced by a refrain of a conversation Faith (alto) had with her sister (soprano) – the first time she was able to accept her LGBTQ+ identity. This gradually builds until all of the voice parts that were once bombarding Faith with negative words are speaking/singing in affirmation of her. The final phrase is Faith’s plea to those who may be struggling to accept their LGBTQ+ identity, “Don’t be ashamed. Don’t try to hide it”. Faith wanted the piece to end in a way that did not feel entirely resolved to represent that the work for inclusivity is not finished! To express that while also making the end a bit subdued, I added a dissonant note in the highest soprano voice, which will only be sung loud enough to be faintly heard. The hope is to draw the ear of the listener to something that is not quite settled, while not being entirely certain where it is coming from.

Emmett

Emmett composed a foundational melody of approximately four measures, which also included a specific rhythmic progression. Similarly to Faith, Emmett shared themes of his story that he wanted represented in his piece, but deferred much of the selection of text to me as I composed. The themes represented in his piece are those of *learning about the LGBTQ+ community*, *hiding/Mom's voice*, and *actualization*. Specific quotes that were particularly meaningful to him for inclusion in this composition were:

1. "I am Christian."
2. "I am part of the community."
3. "I feel."

The melody Emmett composed brought out an F-pentatonic scale, which is the foundation of the first section. He also wanted this piece to be flowing, so the alto, tenor, and bass voices sing an arpeggiated pentatonic scale, leaving the soprano as the only voice on text for mm.1-14. The opening text is a reflective statement Emmett used when talking about suppressing his trans identity.

This immediately gives way to the scene Emmett described when he realized he was trans and the relief he felt. The statement 'I feel' was a common repeated phrase for Emmett in his story. He shared that he felt those two words were incredibly important and wanted the repetition to be evident in the music as well. The role of voice is a very physical element of the trans experience for Emmett, as his own voice has changed since he began transitioning. To draw this out, he wanted there to be a very clear passing of the melody from the upper soprano and alto voices to the tenor and bass voices. I decided to use this phrase to show the transition of voice from female to male. Beginning in m.19, the soprano and alto sing this phrase. In m. 21 the tenor introduces Emmett's

transitioning voice with the text, “I’m a Christian and I’m part of the community”. As the ‘I feel’ phrase continues to shift downward through each voice part, we hear Emmet’s mom’s voice sharply cutting through with those dismissive words (mm.29-33). The ‘I feel’ refrain ends with only the tenor and bass voices to conclude this section and the text transforms from ‘I feel’ to ‘I know who I am’.

The final section strengthens Emmett’s voice through his declarative words, “It just felt right. It felt like me...Like I actually knew who I was for once”. During Emmett’s interview, he shared about a story he read of another trans male and described that it echoed his own experience so much that he could put his own name in place of the writer’s. After a brief pause, he looked at me and simply said, “Me, yeah”. It was quiet and subdued and the perfect way to include as the ending to his piece. Emmett’s piece ends with a staccato unison on the word ‘me’ to echo exactly as he said in his interview with subtle surety.

Sophie

Sophie also composed a brief melody while at the piano that she described as representing her coming of age and sense of self. She described the progression of her piece with themes of *journey to self-discovery*, *being helped*, and *feeling more confident*. She deferred the specific text to me to choose while I composed. Overall, she wanted the tone of the piece to be felt as hopeful. To represent her story, she used the concepts of “low to high”, “heavy to light”, and “quiet to loud” in how the piece developed. These concepts pertain to pitches, dynamics, or content of the text being expressed. Sophie also wanted the piece to sound very warm, specifically using dissonances and chord clusters for a rich sound, with the piece culminating in a powerful and declarative finish.

Sophie's original melody can be heard in the opening four measures of the alto line. To begin the journey to self-discovery, I selected a text that highlights Sophie's anxiousness. With only the soprano singing the primary melody in m.5, one can sense the isolating feeling of being "terrified" to come out. In m.7 all voices join in singing "absolutely terrified" to give the text some depth and weight.

As the sopranos and altos begin to sing "it was a battle" in m.8, the open intervals create a heroic sound, hinting that while Sophie may be struggling with full acceptance of her LGBTQ+ identity, that she will ultimately triumph. Again, the idea of being terrified creeps in, which is heard in the dissonant progression of mm.14-15. Just as Sophie shared in her story, the next phrase is perhaps one of the most poignant moving text Sophie shared. When deciding to come out to her parents, she could not be sure how they would react, but her commitment to self is met with deep relief, as she said, "It was just really nice to know that, like, they love me".

Unison voices on this text provide clarity and give space to Sophie's relief to know her parents loved her. The musical expression of this phrase is written to replicate the way Sophie shared in conversation. The affirmations of love from parents and from God in mm.17-19 build toward Sophie's own words of advocacy that carry from mm.20-41 with self-acceptance interspersed (mm.30-32, mm.36-41). The piece ends with a rhythmically augmented statement of "I know who I am" and layers in parts from soprano down to bass, culminated in a declaration of confidence, wrapped in warm harmonies.

Erin

Erin insisted that her piece reflect the happiness that she feels in being herself. In this sense, it stands in contrast to the other movements, which tend to be a bit more solemn and austere. Her inspiration was also primarily conceptual, musically speaking. She described that she wanted three specific themes/sections within the piece: *happy/carefree*, *powerful change*, and a *happy ending*, though not necessarily big and boisterous.

One of Erin's common refrains was the phrase, "I am who I am", which she identified as vital to her story. Therefore, I made it vital to this movement. I decided to incorporate a lot of repetition of this phrase. The altos and tenors open with several repetitions of this phrase (mm.1-10, sung a total of three times) with melodic and harmonic chromaticism, utilizing small pitch changes to create different tone color. The idea of small change in the melody and harmony further drives the emphasis of repetition, though never boring. The second voice to enter is the bass. She also wanted to include text about how she made herself to feel like the odd or weird one within her friend group. Erin was drawn to two pitches, *F* and *G*, which she felt sounded like footsteps – a melodic representation of her walking on her own path. These two ideas meld together to create the bass line in mm.1-10. Finally, when the sopranos enter on the third repetition of mm.1-10, they sing the text about being the odd person out, but with the happy/carefree feeling to demonstrate that it may have been where Erin once was but is not where she is now.

The rhythmic syncopation also brings out the happy and carefree feeling Erin was looking for – almost jazzy even. The second section beginning in m.13 continues the same rhythmic drive, now setting Erin's champion/advocate voice, singing, "I'm just not

ever gonna stop being me”. This text is sung in the alto voice, which most closely represents Erin’s natural speaking voice. The rhythm is also tied to the inherent rhythm in the way Erin spoke this phrased during her interview.

Erin’s idea for the ending was that it would be happy, but not conflated with being big and loud. In mm.18-22, the sopranos and altos sing text about when Erin realized she could love herself because she was first loved. The piece continues to progress toward a powerful change, which comes in m.22 – a musical epiphany that almost catches Erin off-guard, deliberately slowing down the line “I can really be myself”. The piece closes with a single, slightly understated final repetition of the phrase, “I am who I am”. This text, which was used to open the piece, not only closes Erin’s movement, but concludes the larger work with the two words shared by Haven, Faith, Emmett, Sophie, and Erin – “I am”.

Responding to the Musical Composition

The opportunity to bring stories of co-researchers to life through very intentional and defined musical concepts was an incredibly rewarding process. Setting their specific texts and themes in this a cappella work further emphasizes the centrality of voice in this study. The goal was to make as plain as possible the voice of the individual storyteller. Once the initial composition was completed (consisting of five smaller movements), co-researchers were given an opportunity to listen and respond through the creation of program notes, or vivid written descriptions of their individual pieces (see Appendix G). In so doing, they continue the cycle of reflection and action, maintaining the need for reflexivity in the study.

Conclusion

As a co-researcher in this group, being able to create musical compositions alongside others was an exceptionally meaningful experience. It challenged me as a musician to think in new ways of how I incorporate different musical elements to express the stories of others. It also challenged me as a scholar to think about ways that musical expression and creation can be leveraged in new ways to facilitate shared meaning making and experiences among groups, particularly those underrepresented or marginalized. The full weight of setting the stories of my co-researchers to music was realized when I scored the very first pitch. Going back to the group to share what I had composed with their inspiration felt very much like I was bearing my soul to them. I was not fully prepared for the vulnerability I felt just before I started playing the pieces for the group. Each co-researcher was affirming and felt affirmed by the pieces we composed together.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter provides a discussion of the findings by delving deeper into the ways this study has built upon and expanded current research and lays the groundwork for additional research to continue. An exploration of the BHU college experience as it relates to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecology of human development will demonstrate many similarities in the stories of co-researchers as they relate to themselves, others, the campus, and broader community.

The discussion will then center the four unique hallmarks of this study. *First*, the study was highly contextualized, occurring within the setting of a single Baptist institution. *Second*, co-researchers explored the use of musical expression and creation through arts-based methods in action research. *Third*, research was conducted about Christian higher education from *within* Christian higher education. Finally, the study articulated an intentionally appreciative approach to inquiry.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of implications and direction for continued research. An aim of the study was to be able to generate meaningful recommendations for BHU, directly from the stories of co-researchers. It is clear, that to act on these recommendations only furthers the faith mission and core values of BHU. There are also additional implications for other CCU practitioners and administrators as well as faith communities, churches, and families.

LGBTQ+ Student Experiences by Ecological Level

The stories shared by co-researchers illuminated several themes to help answer the question of understanding the LGBTQ+ student experience at BHU. The highly contextualized setting of this study has proven substantially beneficial to co-researchers and has generated tailored recommendations from BHU's own LGBTQ+ students. It has also already spurred action from the co-researchers, who, in collaboration with the lead researcher, composed music to tell their stories and elevate their voices. The primacy of voice, in its literal and metaphorical forms, has been a hallmark of this study. The culmination of the project was a musical composition for unaccompanied voices, emphasizing the centrality of 'voice' and demonstrating individual and collective candid vulnerability. The use of musical expression as a way for co-researchers to share their stories is indicative of their commitment to advocate for other LGBTQ+ students at BHU. Despite finding an unwelcoming environment at BHU, co-researchers demonstrate exceptional resiliency in the continued development of their gender and/or sexual identities, and in some cases finding ways to reconcile the two.

As co-researchers shared their stories, they would often begin by sharing about experiences during adolescent years that had a profound impact on the development of their LGBTQ+ identities. The narratives then centered the college experience by describing relationships with peers, faculty, and staff as well as clubs or other social groups. While they could often name individuals or groups that were accepting or inclusive of their LGBTQ+ identities, the experience within the campus at-large and in the local community was very different. The themes that have emerged from the stories of co-researchers are therefore organized into the four different levels of the social

ecological framework: *individual, relationship, campus, and community* (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Though often used to explore risks to LGBTQ+ students, such as bullying (Hong & Garbarino, 2012; O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017) or suicide (Hong et al., 2011; Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001), the current study extends the research on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model in better understanding how LGBTQ+ students experience the entirety of the collegiate environment.

Individual

There is a reason that the individual is at the core of the social ecological model. Especially when considering identities as important as gender, sexuality, and/or faith, the individual is the foundation from which emanates meaningful relationships and power to promote change in broader environments and communities. Within Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model, the perception of self within the most immediate environment was explored at the individual or microsystem level. Co-researchers hold common individual strengths and used similar voices within their stories. Navigating their LGBTQ+ identities within their families was a shared challenge, as was the journey to make sense of their gender and/or sexual identities

Shared Spiritual Gift

During the third focus group session, co-researchers completed a spiritual gifts inventory (Lifeway Christian Resources, 2003). Typically, these are used within churches to engage the strengths of members toward fulfilling the mission and goals of an individual church and to edify the larger body of Christian believers – the global Church. Christians believe that they are endowed with one or more myriad spiritual gifts. The biblical foundation for this belief stems from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in

Corinth, stating, “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ” (New Living Translation, 2004, 1 Corinthians 12:12). The body he is referring to is not the physical body, but rather the global church. Though CCUs are definitively *not* ecclesiastical bodies, they are communities connected through a common vision of faith-based higher education. BHU, therefore, is also considered to be a faith community.

The purpose of completing the spiritual gifts inventory was to facilitate dialogue about ways that the co-researchers could engage their strengths as LGBTQ+ students within the faith community of BHU. Co-researchers found that the gift of *mercy* was a strength common to all of them. Given that their experiences with religion have mostly led to exclusion, discrimination, or suppression, it speaks to the resiliency of these LGBTQ+ students for mercy to be a trait they all possess. They spoke of the need for greater inclusivity within faith communities, namely churches. At BHU, they felt their strength of mercy could be used to help care for and compassionately support other LGBTQ+ students.

No research exists which explores the spiritual gifts of LGBTQ+ individuals. Though not directly related to the spiritual gift of mercy as described in the Spiritual Gifts Survey, Gabriele-Black (2020) found that LGBTQ+ students at Catholic Mercy higher education institutions exemplified the mission and values of the Sisters of Mercy by participating in activism on their campuses. This is certainly worth considering because the concept of mercy is understood similarly in the Protestant and Catholic traditions. Among both faith traditions, mercy can be understood as acts of sincere and deep compassion and empathy toward others (Francis, 2015; Wilkes, 2003). Therefore,

the traits of empathy and compassion as indicators of the spiritual gift of mercy also align with the Catholic Mercy values of spirituality, community, service, and social justice (Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2021).

Shared Voice

With similar spiritual gifts identified, I was curious as to whether evidence of this would be found in the stories that each person shared. What we discovered was that each co-researcher had a voice of advocacy, which can be seen as an outcome of mercy. Specifically, within the context of Catholic higher education, Gabriele-Black (2020), found that “queer students embodied the vision of the Sisters of Mercy largely through their activist work on campus” (p. 179). This study extends Gabriele-Black’s (2020) research by validating that LGBTQ+ students at a Baptist university also embody the concept of mercy through advocacy. The advocate voice presented itself in unique ways for each person. Sophie and Faith often shared about the hope they have for the future, while Emmett and Haven emphasized the importance of action – helping and doing good for others. Erin assumes the role of champion – an outspoken voice for the inclusion and rights of LGBTQ+ students. For the gift of mercy and the voice of advocacy to both be shared traits among all co-researchers suggests that they are directly connected.

This idea that the concepts of mercy and advocacy are related is also supported by biblical scripture. In the book of Micah, the prophet details exactly what God’s expectations are for His people, “No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right⁵, to love mercy, and to walk humbly

⁵ Other translations of the Bible use forms of justice in place of “to do what is right”.

- a. New International Version – “to act justly”
- b. New American Standard Bible – “to do justice”
- c. King James Version – “to do justly”

with your God” (New Living Translation, 2004, Micah 6:8). In this instruction, (advocating for) justice and mercy are not merely connected, but are, in fact, inseparable. The *love* of mercy does two things. It compels action to seek out justice and it holds us accountable to maintain a posture of humility.

Another interesting parallel to biblical scripture comes through two simple words: “I am”. This is a name ascribed to God by which the Israelites know him⁶. When conducting the listening guide analysis to listen for all first-person statements to construct the I-poem, they were often found to be of a passing nature – statements like “I think”, “I mean”, or “I don’t know”. By focusing on the “I” pronoun, I was able to closely listen and analyze its use by each co-researcher. Doing this, “provid[es] the listener with the opportunity to attend just to the sounds, rhythms, and shifts in...usages of ‘I’ in [others’] narratives (Gilligan et al., 2003). Considering this, the use of the statement “I am” stood out to me for two reasons. First, every co-researcher used these two words when speaking of their LGBTQ+ identity. Second, when spoken, the phrase was markedly different than many of the other passive I-phrases. There was ownership behind these ‘I am’ statements and they were delivered with declarative conviction. Even for Sophie and Faith, whose LGBTQ+ identity may be a newer discovery, there was still a strong sense of security in their identity.

Ownership of Learning

In addition to the full ownership of their own gender and/or sexual identities, every co-researcher was responsible for their own learning regarding LGBTQ+ identities and issues. When LGBTQ+ topics were not engaged within the home, every co-

⁶ Exodus 3:14 – “God replied to Moses: ‘I Am Who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” (New Living Translation, 2004).

researcher sought out resources to learn on their own. They all grew up in a conservative environment. Erin was the only person who did not identify religious beliefs as the basis for conservative views in her home. Raised by her granddad, Erin felt as though the conservative values stemmed more from him being “set in his ways”. Haven, Faith, Emmett, and Sophie all describe religious beliefs and traditions as the foundation of conservative values.

Regardless of whether the basis was cultural or religious, none of these conservative households would engage dialogue about LGBTQ+ issues. This is experienced through dismissive statements like when Emmett’s mom would say things like “Oh, you’re just a tomboy” or even as blatant as Haven being told that LGBTQ+ people were “abominations”. In any case, no co-researchers had a home environment conducive to asking or learning about LGBTQ+ issues. Because of this, they took learning about LGBTQ+ identities and issues into their own hands. This supports elements of Yuan’s (2016) assertion that views on sexuality may be affected when individuals do not have the freedom to explore or even wrestle with these identities within a Christian environment. Certainly, there is a link to claim that co-researchers’ views of gender and sexuality shifted because they were forced to learn outside of this environment. More than just changing one’s view from a traditional to progressive stance on sexuality, the study extends Yuan’s (2016) research to understand how LGBTQ+ students seek to learn about their own identities. Erin went to explore the gay strip and attended a gay bar on her eighteenth birthday. Emmett had to covertly go to a friend’s house or the library to be able to use the internet to search for information about the LGBTQ+ community. Access to media through television, the internet, or social media

platforms also proved useful in finding information about LGBTQ+ identities. Harper et al. (2016), found that for gay and bisexual males, the internet facilitated access to identity development, connection with other gay and bisexual people, and a platform for coming out. This study extends this research by identifying why co-researchers relied upon the internet or other media for information on LGBTQ+ identities as well as its application to LGBTQ+ students. All take ownership of learning about LGBTQ+ identities and issues as a direct result of a strict prohibition or avoidance within the home.

Reckoning of Identities

The oft tenuous relationship between LGBTQ+ and faith identities brings about an inevitable reckoning between the two. When faced with this challenge, co-researchers have had to decide whether to continue exploring both identities or determine if both can or should mutually exist. Haven's abandonment of her religion was influenced by the narrative of an angry God who could not be happy with His creation – a common response she would hear to LGBTQ+ topics. This story echoes those shared by the Human Rights Campaign (2018) of LGBTQ+ individuals who have left their religious or faith traditions due to harm. Though they cite other scientific bases for no longer maintaining a religious belief, Haven's decision was influenced in part by her LGBTQ+ experience. Emmett, Faith, and Sophie have found that they need not sacrifice one identity for the other, holding that they maintain their LGBTQ+ identities *and* their deeply held faith beliefs as mutually *inclusive*. These three have reached what Vespone (2016) describes as identity integration – the reconciling of faith identity with an LGBTQ+ identity. Erin, who admittedly had reservations about how religious people at religious school might react to her being gay, grew up without a religious tradition or

belief. Since being at BHU, Erin has begun to ponder what it means to be gay (or LGBTQ+) within a religious or faith-based environment. Having already held her LGBTQ+ identity, she is now introducing the possibility of religious belief into her life. This also demonstrates an outcome of what can happen when an individual can meaningfully explore their LGBTQ+ identity within a faith community (Yuan, 2016).

Relationship

The second level of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) model as adapted for the study focused on the relationships. The impact of interpersonal relationships is perhaps the most salient factor when considering the experience of LGBTQ+ students at BHU, or other CCUs. Extending the research of Linley et al. (2016), Bailey and Strunk (2018), and Pitcher et al. (2018) BHU employees have proven to be powerful allies for LGBTQ+ students. Research demonstrates that knowing someone who is LGBTQ+ improves attitudes toward gender and sexual minorities. Wolff et al. (2012) found that among evangelical students at a Christian college, knowing an LGBTQ+ person creates greater empathy, understanding, and affirmation toward gender and sexual minorities. (Wolff et al., 2012). Further, having a relationship with an LGBTQ+ person is what Gushee (2014), a leading Christian ethicist, cites as the impetus for his own change of heart and mind. At CCUs, an inclusive environment can be difficult to find, but likely exists in covert networks. This study uncovered stories about the positive impact of supportive peers and employees on LGBTQ+ students at a Christian university. Additionally, LGBTQ+ students want to be agents for change in promoting inclusivity at BHU.

Responsible for LGBTQ+ Students

It seems that a substantial part of the LGBTQ+ student experience at BHU is feeling sincerely responsible for the wellbeing of other LGBTQ+ students. This supports the presence of the strong voice of advocacy in each person's story. Co-researchers not only call for more inclusive policy and practice at BHU but demonstrate that they could potentially be highly effective in helping BHU to make other LGBTQ+ students feel accepted and supported. Emmett specifically offered the suggestion of creating an LGBTQ+ delegation to work in collaboration with administrative offices, student groups, and even university leadership, including the Board of Trustees. Co-researchers have already taken steps to support other LGBTQ+ students on BHU's campus by befriending them, inviting them to participate in Alliance Club and its activities, and, through this study, have created a resource (musical composition) to provide enduring support through the sharing of stories. Perhaps not surprising given the shared identified spiritual gift of *mercy*, this value plays out in a sincere concern for the wellbeing of others. By taking an active role on campus, co-researchers assume the role of activist in advocating for their LGBTQ+ peers. Gabriele-Black (2020) and Gabriele-Black et al. (2021) found that LGBTQ+ students at evangelical and Catholic institutions engage in advocacy and activism to help bring LGBTQ+ students together on their campuses out of a desire to provide safe spaces, share stories, and promote structural change. Our study extends the understanding of this advocate/activist role, further grounding it in the co-researchers' deeply held personal responsibility of care for other gender and sexual minorities at BHU.

Stories

Within the literature, it is the stories of LGBTQ+ that are often centered in an effort to promote positive change in attitudes toward gender and sexual minorities. Knotts Engberg et al. (2007) and Gregorio (2011) and found greater empathy and more accepting attitudes following the sharing of LGBTQ+ stories and facilitating interpersonal connection. This study extends the knowledge of the impact of stories on the development of LGBTQ+ identities. We found that stories of other LGBTQ+ individuals were important in the development and self-realization of the co-researchers' own identities. This extends the work of Bailey and Strunk (2018), Harper et al. (2016), and Vespone (2016) in that LGBTQ+ people become more confident and secure in their own identities when they can connect with others in the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to stories being powerful motivators to promote positive attitudes toward gender and sexual minorities (Knotts & Gregorio, 2011), they helped co-researchers to connect with other LGBTQ+ individuals in the development of their own gender and/or sexual identities.

The desire of co-researchers to make their stories accessible for other LGBTQ+ students at BHU stems from the power that others' stories have had on them. The exchange of stories has proven to be integral to the journey toward self-realization for each co-researcher. For some, like Haven and Sophie, the stories were those literal accounts of acquaintances or close friends. For others, it may have been a story they read in an article or a book – for Emmett, it was stories he read about people coming into their trans identity and felt like he could put his name in place of the author. Stories seem to be powerful in finding shared experiences. The role of stories for Faith and Erin was a bit more indirect. Faith describes feeling much more confident in the confluence of her

LGBTQ+ and faith identities after witnessing other LGBTQ+ Christians live out both while in college. Erin's discussion with drag queen at a local gay bar in her hometown had a profound impact on her accepting her own identity.

Knowing that others may have had similar experiences helped co-researchers to feel less isolated and often propelled them forward on their own path. The examples of other LGBTQ+ Christians live out their gender/sexual identity alongside their faith was formative for Faith as she weighed whether she could be LGBTQ+ *and* Christian. The examples of allies have been powerful for co-researchers, especially within the context of a faith-based institution. In Erin's case, the example of Chasity, her residence hall director, in being welcoming and accepting while also deeply religious, has caused Erin to become open to the possibility of religious belief – not that Chasity pushed that on her, but because of her example of acceptance and support to Erin.

Power of One

While BHU's campus culture may not currently be overtly accepting or welcoming of LGBTQ+ identities, each co-researcher has had profound interactions with allies who may be peers, faculty, or staff. Among the five co-researchers, there were common employees who have had a positive impact on their college experience. Haven and Faith both identified Dr. H. This is a faculty member who embraces their classroom platform to engage LGBTQ+ issues, challenge gender norms, and promotes inclusivity. This supports the research of Linley (2016), Pitcher et al. (2018), and Dessel et al. (2019) in identifying the importance for faculty to be allies and to create supportive classroom environments. Sophie and Erin both identified Chasity, who is Erin's residence hall director, as someone who has validated their identities. As for Faith and Haven, the need

for intentional validation of their LGBTQ+ identities is not as important as ensuring an environment where their identities will not be actively invalidated. Emmett identified Kasey, who, somewhat in contrast to the others, had to be a bit more apparent in her support for Emmett, frequently emphasizing the correction of pronouns. While on a mission trip with Emmett, Kasey would frequently and openly correct others in the group, including Tony, the BSM leader. She would do this by casually restating something that may have just been said, but inserting Emmett's correct pronouns.

Contrary to Scibetta (2019) who found that CCU staff often suppress allyship for LGBTQ+ for fear of repercussions, BHU employees who are allies for LGBTQ+ students seem to have been able to offer support in very open and apparent ways. The impact of these allies has facilitated the growth of interpersonal relationships and has helped the co-researchers to become more engaged at BHU. Haven joined the club Dr. H sponsors and now even hosts trivia nights for the club and got connected with Kasey in helping to start Alliance Club. Dr. H's example and support encouraged Faith to join this research study. Sophie and Erin's relationship has deepened, and their network of supportive friends has grown across the volleyball and soccer teams. Emmett joined Alliance Club and has been an active member since Kasey advocated for him on the mission trip to Atlanta.

While it is encouraging to know that BHU employees are advocating for and actively practicing inclusivity of LGBTQ+ students, the peer support networks of co-researchers seem to be substantially larger. It is also interesting that while both LGBTQ+ students and allies value advocacy for greater inclusivity, LGBTQ+ students may perceive greater risk in advocating as opposed to allies. When talking about friends or peers who are accepting and supportive of their LGBTQ+ identities, it is often within a

larger context of a friend group or several friends in a common group/activity at BHU. In addition to CCU employees, Bailey and Strunk (2018) identified the positive role of supportive peers in helping LGBTQ+ students as they make sense of their identities within the CCU context. For co-researchers, these are usually teammates or friends through student groups or clubs (Alliance Club, BSM, etc.). Regardless of whether peer or employee, this level of support and acceptance does not necessarily reflect the BHU campus as a whole.

Campus

The campus level represents a substantial shift in the dialogue. At the individual and relationship levels, there is personal human interaction, even with self. The exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) of the campus level is where individuals engage factors pertaining to other environments that may have an indirect impact on the individual. The way co-researchers interact with the campus level is more about the campus culture or environment at BHU. In a way it feels a bit more distant from the individual, but no less important. The perceived environment at BHU stands in stark contrast to the support found from the sparse employee and peer support networks.

LGBTQ+ Community is Suppressed

Haven, Faith, Emmett, Sophie, and Erin all feel that the LGBTQ+ community at BHU is suppressed, at best. In many ways, they feel like simply talking about LGBTQ+ issues is taboo and has to be done in very secretive or “hush-hush” ways. While individual allies have demonstrated an openness in communicating their allyship or advocacy, larger organized efforts still seem to be covert. According to Scibetta (2019) employee allies at CCUs, like many LGBTQ+ students, are also likely to suppress their

support or affirmation of LGBTQ+ students for fear of reprisal. Most co-researchers cited the recent struggle of Alliance Club in gaining official status as a recognized student group. In prior years, there have been several attempts to start an LGBTQ+ student group at BHU, which were always quashed by the (former) president. With the prospect of new executive leadership, LGBTQ+ students formed Alliance Club and went through the official process to become a recognized student organization – application, drafting a constitution, establishing officers, and identifying potential sources of funding. Despite this, Alliance Club still has not yet received official approval. This has been a source of much frustration for Haven, Faith, and Emmett and for them is indicative of the broader campus culture surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

Co-researchers also recounted instances where LGBTQ+ identities were deliberately ignored. Although Emmett loves participating in ministry opportunities hosted through BSM, its leader, Tony, will not use his correct pronouns. He will use Emmett’s name, but not his pronouns. Haven shares a similar story where a trans friend asked a professor to use their correct pronouns and they outright refused. These types of blatantly exclusionary actions may be indicative of other types of harmful microaggressions (Wolff et al., 2017) that BHU’s LGBTQ+ students experience.

Given these types of stories, it stands to reason that LGBTQ+ students may not feel comfortable living as out on BHU’s campus. This supports the findings of Gabriele-Black and Goldberg (2021) that LGBTQ+ students at conservative Christian institutions find it “easier...to avoid being ‘out’ and visible” (p.317) rather than subjecting themselves to discrimination or harassment. Furthermore, co-researchers sense that the LGBTQ+ community on BHU's campus is much larger than they realize. Emmett and

Haven have encountered people on campus who signal, such as “alt-dressing” or gender non-conforming apparel, that they *may* be part of the LGBTQ+ community. While Alliance Club has brought in nearly fifty students, co-researchers believe there are more LGBTQ+ students who may not be ready to join or who may not yet know that the group exists.

Another barrier is access. Information about supports for LGBTQ+ students is not well known at BHU. Faith, as someone who has attended Alliance Club gatherings, shared concerns about how difficult it was to find information about meeting times or events taking place. Not only does the suppression of information about Alliance Club inhibit LGBTQ+ students from establishing meaningful connections with other campus community members (Linley et al., 2016; Pitcher et al., 2018), but indicates that beneficial efforts in intentionally promoting dialogue across differences (Hughes & Hurtado, 2018) may not occur soon or quickly. This type of campus culture is akin to the environments many co-researchers grew up in – excluding LGBTQ+ people in the name of religious belief.

Low Expectations

Even though co-researchers experience the BHU campus environment much differently, they further Vespone’s (2016) argument that CCUs have the potential to be a crucial element in identity integration for LGBTQ+ students. This study extends the research of Vespone (2016) and Sanlo (2004) in that co-researchers not only willingly place themselves in an environment where they worry about confrontation due to their LGBTQ+ identities, and found that the expectation of co-researchers is exclusion. When co-researchers found individuals or groups who welcomed and accepted their LGBTQ+

identities, they were often surprised and relieved. BHU's identity as a Christian institution in the Baptist tradition may be an indicator to current and prospective LGBTQ+ students that the campus environment is unwelcoming. For co-researchers to find a sense of welcome or acceptance seems to be the exception, rather than the rule. When Erin heard about how religious Chasity was, she intended to keep her distance, thinking she would judge her. Sophie has been "shocked" to find acceptance at BHU. The collective portrait being painted of the campus environment does not simply show that BHU can be unwelcoming to LGBTQ+ students, but that these students expect to encounter this type of environment when they choose to attend BHU. This is now much more applicable to this single institution. While Bailey and Strunk (2018) and Pitcher et al. (2018) have found the expectation of exclusion to be a common theme in the larger dialogue of LGBTQ+ students attending CCUs, we now know definitively that BHU's students believe this to be true. Because BHU is a Christian university, LGBTQ+ students expect to be excluded – to be dismissed, discounted, othered, silenced, and suppressed.

Goals

Even in the face of such a challenge, co-researchers remain optimistic and hopeful that BHU will become more inclusive and accepting of LGBTQ+ students. They also take an active role in bringing that change about by calling for action from BHU's senior leadership. Here again, we see the evidence of the spiritual gift of mercy enacted through advocacy and activism (Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021). Their ideas include two actions. First, simply acknowledge that LGBTQ+ students exist on BHU's campus. Similar to Snow's (2018) content analysis of blogs of LGBTQ+ students at CCUs,

BHU's LGBTQ+ students struggle for the most basic recognition. Second, approve Alliance Club as a recognized student organization. It would seem that these are among the most basic requests, yet acknowledgement is a challenge LGBTQ+ students face in many CCUs. Co-researchers highlight the need to engage administrative stakeholders to include vice presidents, the president, and the Board of Trustees.

To effect enduring change will require BHU to prioritize inclusivity in all facets of university operations. When this happens, another goal of co-researchers will be closer to being met: for LGBTQ+ issues to be mundane to daily life at BHU. This goes beyond the ability to meaningfully engage with LGBTQ+ issues and casts a vision of a campus where diverse gender and sexual identities are a fully assimilated, normal part of the landscape.

Within the Campus level, co-researchers demonstrate their interaction with the campus environment. Though they expect and experience the suppression of their LGBTQ+ identities at BHU, they remain committed to advocating for inclusion and acceptance. Co-researchers recognize there is tension often felt between faith and LGBTQ+ identities and that to acknowledge LGBTQ+ students and provide them with a club or space to connect with others in the LGBTQ+ community can help alleviate that tension and actively promote identity development. Only then, can BHU's example chart a course for positive change within the broader community.

Community

The community level or macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in this study represents the environment most removed from co-researchers. There is also need for LGBTQ+ identities to be normalized in the broader society. In fact, every co-researcher shares a

common belief that BHU can be a leader in promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity within the community. As a prominent fixture within the local community, BHU has the potential to leverage significant influence among local business, churches, and organizations.

Perhaps even more significant to community change efforts are local churches. The power of local churches can be felt across the community. Yet, co-researchers believe that BHU can also be influential with local churches to promote inclusivity. Faith shared about how closely connected churches are within the community, stating that at times it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. With BHU and local churches being highly influential faith communities, it is necessary to reflect on Yuan's (2016) recommendation that these types of entities need to provide space for LGBTQ+ students to navigate or wrestle with their gender and/or sexual identities. The experience of co-researchers within local churches varies quite a bit. Haven shares that church she grew up in would turn someone away if it were found out they were gay. Faith's church has talked about some LGBTQ+ issues, but does not take action to promote change or inclusion. Erin and Sophie have found a welcoming and affirming church, with the help of Chasity. Emmett serves in youth ministries at a couple different churches, though one is under the leadership of Tony, the ministry director at BHU who does not use the correct pronouns for Emmett.

An integral component to change within the local community surrounding BHU is the engagement of local churches. While co-researchers have a range of experiences within the local community and in its churches, they all tend to perceive the religious identity as being tightly knit throughout the civic and faith activities within the community. As such, the partnership between BHU and local churches could serve as a

means for facilitating support and engagement of LGBTQ+ college students and could spark change in the community.

Hallmarks of the Study

This research drew upon a number of unique factors which, when enacted together, validate the need of such a study. The study was highly contextualized, seeking understanding and shared meaning of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students at a single CCU, Baptist Heritage University – also placing the study within one denominational tradition. Through focus groups and interviews, co-researchers shared their stories which were ultimately expressed through musical creation and composition as a means of creating a resource for other LGBTQ+ students at BHU. It is also important that this study was generated from a researcher currently working within Christian higher education. Together with co-researchers, our group developed a protocol that was intentionally appreciative in its approach to developing interview questions.

Individualized Context

With regard to the existing literature, this study elevated stories of LGBTQ+ student experiences within the context of Baptist higher education, specifically a single Baptist institution with the goals of improving their collegiate experience and the experience of other LGBTQ+ students. Setting the study within this bounded environment extends the research literature on LGBTQ+ student experiences at faith-based institutions while fulfilling the need to create more context-specific data. This includes the specific institution where the study was conducted, as well as the Baptist denominational context within Christian higher education. Crandall et al. (2020) stated that “future research should also be directed at...ways that sexual minority students can

be affirmed in Christian higher education” (p. 207). Tetreault et al. (2013) further ground the need for context-specific research, asserting that while national surveys can be useful in understanding the Christian college climate for LGBTQ+ students, “to understand the climate at particular types of institutions, this information must be supplemented by studies of individual campuses” (p. 3). This study extends the research from large-scale studies to a single institutional context, an area of need in this field of research (Tetreault et al., 2013). This study also situated the lived experiences of currently enrolled (Bailey & Strunk, 2018) LGBTQ+ students within a Christian university in the Baptist tradition.

Musical Expression in Arts Based Action Research

With the integration of musical expression into the ABAR study, there may be implications for vocal, choral, and general music educators to continue to research how and why performance arts are accessible to gender and sexual minorities. While music has often been used in arts-based action research, it is far less common for it to be the central means of expression and meaning making. The primacy of musical expression in the study extends the knowledge of music as a method for creating shared meaning and expressing ideas in ABAR, and provides implications for other forms of musical expression beyond the voice (instrumental, rhythmic, timbre, etc.).

Researching from Within Christian Higher Education

This study also addressed the need for research that is generated by individuals who work in Christian higher education. Most of the literature about LGBTQ+ student experiences at CCUs comes from researchers who do not work in Christian higher education. Nearly 90% of the studies cited in this research project were conducted by individuals working outside of Christian higher education. Recommendations often do

not account for unique institutional faith identities that may be a barrier or could be leveraged to promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

Appreciative Inquiry

Finally, this study used appreciative approach to inquiry. First, it must be understood that LGBTQ+ students are not a problem to be solved on CCU campuses, nor at this specific Baptist university. Additionally, neither Christian higher education nor the specific institution is a problem to be solved. Rather, by drawing from the unique strengths of this Baptist university and elevating the diverse perspectives offered by LGBTQ+ students, we can enable a “communication across difference” (Hughes & Hurtado, 2018, p. 319), facilitating the potential development of meaningful relationships (Wolff et al., 2012), leading to greater understanding and empathy for one another (Knotts & Gregorio, 2011).

The process of developing an appreciative interview protocol was challenging. Co-researchers generally do not perceive BHU’s campus environment to be welcoming or accepting of their LGBTQ+ identities. As a result, writing questions to facilitate a dialogue about the strengths of BHU was difficult. We worked through each level of ecological model (individual, relationships, campus, community) as we developed questions. It is interesting that as the levels became further removed from the individual, that the focus of the questions shifted from thinking about what may already be working to thinking about how good it *could* be and what can be done to make it happen.

Summary

The combination of these four hallmarks has facilitated the contribution of new research to the fields of Christian higher education, LGBTQ+ experiences at CCUs, and

arts-based action research. Its individualized context and shared meaning making through musical expression generated purposeful and practical actions for BHU to take in support of its LGBTQ+ students, which also align with institutional mission and values. The discussion now shifts to a consideration of the many applications and recommendations of the research to promote greater LGBTQ+ inclusivity across faith communities and families.

Implications

This study has implications for entities and individuals. Recommendations unique to BHU are taken from the direct advocate voices of the co-researchers. Beyond those actions specific to BHU, there are broader applications for CCU leaders and practitioners. It is also important to consider the impact on families and faith communities, since both have critical roles within the stories of LGBTQ+ students.

BHU

BHU should answer the call of LGBTQ+ students to create an inclusive environment. It seems that a possible barrier to committing to gender and sexual inclusivity is that it may not be in alignment with BHU's mission and core values. Would BHU have to sacrifice its Christian identity to serve LGBTQ+ students? Unequivocally, no. BHU's mission statement defines its Christian mission as being dedicated

“To academic excellence solidly grounded in the liberal arts that fosters personal growth, integrity, and professional preparation within a caring environment. The university prepares students as Christian servant leaders for life-long learning, continued scholarship by linking discovery research to knowledge at the doctoral level, and active participation in a diverse, global society.” (Baptist Heritage University Student Handbook, 2021, p. 3)

Acknowledging the existence of LGBTQ+ students and recognizing Alliance Club as an official student organization would only seem to further the mission of BHU. Providing

access to an LGBTQ+ student group would facilitate personal growth and demonstrate a caring environment – a needed change from the current state. Taking these actions would also increase preparedness to engage an ever-diversifying global society.

It is also worth examining BHU's core values to identify whether taking the requested actions will minimize or inhibit their effectiveness. BHU has five core values:

- “To foster academic excellence through pre-professional certificates, associates, baccalaureate, and graduate programs through traditional, technical, and online systems;
- To achieve academic excellence through rigor and relevancy in undergraduate, master's and doctoral level programs;
- To provide an environment conducive for student success;
- To value diverse perspectives within a Christ-centered community
- To model servant-leadership and effective stewardship.” (Baptist Heritage University Student Handbook, 2021, p.3)

As with the mission statement, I see no core value that is not strengthened by taking steps to support LGBTQ+ students. Providing an opportunity for open engagement within a community of LGBTQ+ students promotes the values of academic excellence and relevancy. It would also provide an environment where students could share their diverse perspectives with one another and strengthening their opportunity and likelihood of achieving success. To provide an inclusive campus environment for LGBTQ+ students is not just passively agreeable with BHU's mission and core values, it actively fulfills them.

In its consideration of taking action toward LGBTQ+ inclusivity, BHU should also fully consider what it means for LGBTQ+ students to *choose* to attend BHU.

Though the expectation is to find a campus environment that is unwelcoming or unaccepting, LGBTQ+ students continue to choose to attend BHU. Even in spite of anticipated hardship because of their LGBTQ+ identities, these students choose BHU. In

making the campus more welcoming and supportive, BHU should strive to rewrite the low expectations of LGBTQ+ students.

BHU leadership should also consider its many other instructional locations and platforms. While the experiences reflected in this study represent some of its LGBTQ+ students, they all attend its flagship location. With many instructional sites or campuses spread across the state and nation, BHU needs to consider the differences in experiences for LGBTQ+ students at different locations as well as online.

Therefore, I recommend BHU to fulfill its mission and uphold its core values by demonstrating inclusive excellence to its LGBTQ+ students. Grant these students the inherent dignity they deserve by acknowledging the LGBTQ+ community at BHU. Further, grant Alliance Club the proper status as an official university student organization, thereby increasing access to supportive resources for LGBTQ+ students.

CCU Leaders and Practitioners

The implications for BHU could also extend to other CCUs. Acknowledging the presence of the LGBTQ+ community and validating that acknowledgement by providing access to an LGBTQ+ student group are among the most foundational considerations in promoting gender and sexual inclusivity. Additional considerations for CCUs focus on how institutional faith identity is reconciled to gender and sexual inclusivity.

CCUs need not sacrifice their faith identity in order to be inclusive and accepting of LGBTQ+ students. These institutions should weigh the meaning of *imago Dei* in how they serve their students. Do *all* students, including gender and sexual minorities, possess inherent dignity and worth as image-bearers of God? They absolutely do. I would not go so far as to say that intentionally supporting LGBTQ+ students comes at no cost for an

institution. Rather, I think many CCUs could potentially face backlash or criticism from faith leaders and donors. Engaging these stakeholders in the quest to meet needs of LGBTQ+ may help minimize such a reaction.

Additionally, LGBTQ+ students may be experiencing dissonance in their identities. CCU's should engage in conversation about LGBTQ+ issues, providing a safe space for students to contemplate and even wrestle with identity, or any other issue. As an academic institution, the Christian university ought to be a place that intellectually engages difficult issues and diverse worldviews. Just as in the family settings of co-researchers, if CCUs do not or will not engage LGBTQ+ issues, then they must be prepared to consider the alternative. Rather than making space for courageous conversations and civil discourse, LGBTQ+ students would be forced out from the Christian campus to external environments. To the contrary, CCUs have vast opportunities to engage LGBTQ+ topics through multiple platforms. Many Christian institutions have a form of required chapel or convocation services. Engaging LGBTQ+ issues openly through chapel would be a stark contrast to how many students have experienced pastors or ministers talking about LGBTQ+ issues from the pulpit. Furthermore, CCUs should explore the opportunity to address gender and sexual inclusivity through academic and cocurricular programming and policy as well.

Under Title IX, the definition of sex now definitively includes discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in light of the *Bostock v. Clayton County* decision (Exec. Order No. 13988, 2021). For those CCUs, like BHU, who do not hold or claim an exemption from Title IX, they must demonstrate compliance with this rule. Some institutions may continue to seek an exemption but should consider the effect

of claiming a religious exemption on LGBTQ+ students. The expectation is already that LGBTQ+ students may not find welcoming environments on CCU campuses. Holding a Title IX exemption may further exacerbate that perception. Organizations like Campus Pride maintain an index of religious institutions that claim exemptions, usually signaling an unwelcoming or discriminatory environment. Even still, LGBTQ+ students will continue to attend CCUs that claim and do not claim Title IX exemptions. Supporting LGBTQ+ students is not just a matter of legal compliance, but can, in fact, resonate with the Christian missions of faith-based institutions.

A final recommendation for CCUs is to enable faculty, staff, and coaches to be open about LGBTQ+ allyship. The power of singular individuals has proven to be exceptionally meaningful for co-researchers in this study. Making the Christian campus a space that is safe for employees to be allies and advocates for LGBTQ+ students promotes greater visibility of allies and facilitates access to networks of support. We often think of LGBTQ+ inclusivity as something only affecting those within the community, yet employee allies who may have access to supportive resources may be able to more effectively deploy those services to LGBTQ+ students in a welcoming or inclusive campus culture.

Families

Family units, especially those with any given religious belief or tradition, must be willing to engage in meaningful dialogue about LGBTQ+ issues. It is simply unacceptable to dismiss or avoid the topic. When these issues are pushed aside, those who may be exploring or developing their LGBTQ+ feel pushed aside and discouraged. The message sent is not only that LGBTQ+ issues are not worth discussing, but that the

person owning the LGBTQ+ identity is not worth the effort to support. The resulting barriers from this type of exclusion harm relationships and the trust upon which they are built. Once again, LGBTQ+ individuals are forced to face the challenges of gender and/or sexual identity exploration and development on their own. It is crucial that families in any form create an environment of openness and trust, especially between parent figures and their children.

Faith Communities/Churches

There is an element of poignant mercy in knowing that LGBTQ+ students believe that local churches *can* be a positive force for change. Even though many have experienced derogatory judgment of their LGBTQ+ identity in the very name of religion, these students remain hopeful of the role churches and/or faith communities can take in promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Similar to the co-researchers at BHU, I would posit that the LGBTQ+ community is much more present in local churches than what many pastors, ministers, or church members may perceive. Church and faith leaders must address the harm that many LGBTQ+ Christians have experienced from faith communities. Many times, LGBTQ+ students are told that they must choose their faith or LGBTQ+ identity – that both cannot coexist. Interestingly, by literally imposing this cognitive dissonance, the strategy seems to be that they will forego their LGBTQ+ identity, but often what actually occurs is the dismissal of their faith or religious beliefs. When it comes to LGBTQ+ issues, churches and faith communities need to act. Co-researchers shared that even when they had witnessed positive attitudes from pastors toward LGBTQ+ members, usually no action followed, thereby negating any good from talking about it.

Summary

This study has generated many implications for BHU, CCUs at-large, families of LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as faith communities and churches. These represent both individuals and groups in the outer three levels the ecological model, specifically in relationships, and in the campus and community environments. Just as there is opportunity for immediate action, still, continued research must persist to bring about more individualized solutions.

Future Research

The present study spurs further research and further action. Though good has come from this project, efforts must continue to enhance LGBTQ+ inclusivity. The following represents but a small portion of the work yet to accomplish. Because the scope of the study was intentionally narrow and involved a small number of co-researchers, more research from within individual CCUs should continue for further enrichment of data available to administrators and practitioners.

One of the findings of this study is that BHU and other CCUs can fulfill their unique Christian missions and values by serving LGBTQ+ students. Further, by creating a resource for sharing stories of LGBTQ+ students at BHU through a musical composition, co-researchers demonstrated one way that their advocacy for other LGBTQ+ students contribute to the work of realizing a Christian institution's faith mission and identity. Additional research could focus on actions that LGBTQ+ students carry out in their daily college life that contributes to an institution's Christian mission. This could perhaps even expand the use of the Spiritual Gifts Inventory to identify specific spiritual strengths that are carried out on a normal basis.

While this study has equitable representation of gender and sexual minorities, additional research should center more intersecting identities, especially as it pertains to race and ethnicity. It would also prove beneficial to continue to conduct this research in highly individualized contexts. A major advantage of focusing on a single institution is that it enables internal stakeholders to advocate for change specifically targeted to their individual college or university.

In thinking about tailoring resources for individual institutions, another research project should engage local churches or faith communities in a greater way. Co-researchers shared mixed experiences about finding churches that had been very welcoming and others that would ban LGBTQ+ persons from attending. Similar to the index created and maintained by Campus Pride, identifying opportunities for LGBTQ+ involvement in local congregations would be a valuable resource for LGBTQ+ students, especially those experiencing the reckoning of identities.

To further explore the relationship between CCUs and local churches, future research might investigate the ways in which institutions engage local faith communities. Gaining a better understanding of these relationships could help to identify levels of power and influence among external stakeholders. A study like this could also give greater insight into the nature and motivation of the relationship between local churches and CCUs as well as whether there are certain denominations or sects that are more frequently engaged. This could prove useful when leveraging these relationships to promote greater inclusivity.

Another possible line of research could examine the experiences of families of LGBTQ+ students. Though we now have greater understanding of how LGBTQ+

students navigate their family dynamics, it is only one single component of the holistic experience. There are siblings, parents, guardians, extended family, and others who live through that experience as well. It would be equally useful to hear the stories of families whose responses may fall anywhere on a continuum of inclusion and acceptance, understanding there will be those who may be discouraging and those who are supportive.

The use of ABAR through musical composition has been particularly meaningful for the expression of ideas and the creation of shared meaning. Future research should continue to innovate and explore arts-based methods in elevating the voices and stories of underrepresented and marginalized populations. It has proven to be very accessible and engaging in the current study. Integrating multiple arts methods into a single study or project to create a mixed media approach might further enhance the accessibility to participate and strengthen the voice of the storyteller.

I have come to experience that the values of action research are profoundly connected to the faith convictions I hold. The approach is one of meaningful collaboration, rooted in working for the good others. It is very similar to the purpose and organization of a mission trip that a church group might take. An opportunity exists for action researchers to find opportunities for collaboration within faith communities or churches to facilitate shared meaning around issues within their own congregations or parishes. Given the prominent role of music in Christian expressions of worship (Coghlan, 2020; Dockery, 2007), future research could also explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ persons in church music programs (choirs, praise bands, church pianist or organist, etc.). Other examples of particularly challenging topics in conservative or

evangelical congregations include LGBTQ+ inclusivity, the hotly contested Critical Race Theory, or the role of women in ministry. I think about how powerful it could be for a congregation to learn from their own membership about the lived experiences of individuals or families who have been marginalized or excluded because of their gender, sexuality, race, or the intersection of these identities. Action research within faith communities provides an opportunity for the confluence of a set of shared values that I believe could be leveraged to promote meaningful research and compel action toward promoting justice.

LGBTQ+ students are most assuredly on Christian college and university campuses, including BHU. However, they still often lack access to support groups or LGBTQ+ organizations (Pitcher et al., 2018), inclusive faculty (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Hughes & Hurtado, 2018; Linley et al., 2016) and curriculum (Hughes & Hurtado, 2018; Linley et al., 2016), and are expected to assimilate into the collegiate environment, all while navigating the highly complex interaction of their gender and/or sexual identities with the faith identities of themselves (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Oliner, 2021; Snow, 2018) and/or their institutions (Crandall et al., 2020). The current study validates the continued need for research about the many facets of the LGBTQ+ student experience at CCUs, and especially from those *within* Christian higher education, and at individual institutions.

Conclusion

Unequivocally and without hesitation, this story affirms the presence and worth of LGBTQ+ students on BHU's campus. They are a community passionately advocating for equality and access to forge supportive networks openly and without fear of reprisal. These co-researchers have given voice to the challenges and rewards of being an

LGBTQ+ student at BHU. They are unified in calling on BHU leadership for the most basic acknowledgement – that they exist. They want and need to know that they are welcome on BHU’s campus.

The things that they advocate for provide a keen insight into their experience and expectations. While most co-researchers willingly chose to attend BHU, they expected the environment to be unwelcoming. But for the love and care shown to them by individual allies, their experience may have been completely different. A single person can make a substantial difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ students at BHU. All it takes is one person to advocate, to include, to welcome, to care.

BHU and other CCUs must recognize the importance of LGBTQ+ students on their campus. Engaged effectively, these students can propel the Christian mission and values of the institution forward, creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ and all students. Change is needed and change is possible. It can radiate from BHU’s LGBTQ+ students and have an enduring impact on the institution and the community.

Though the *telling* of this story comes to a close, the story continues – it must. I conclude my portion of the storytelling in the same manner I began, with words from one of my favorite hymns, *Stir Your Church, O God, Our Father*.

Give to us a social conscience
Which enables us to see
That all folk are Your creation
And that they have dignity.
Let us feel, with real compassion,
Needs of body, mind, and soul;
For these needs may we provide them
Ministry which makes them whole.
(Price, 1991, verse 3)

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APPENDIX A

STRUCTURED ETHICAL REFLECTION

Structured Ethical Reflection - Research Group

As a group of co-researchers working together to improve the college experience for LGBTQ+ students at our institution, we hold these values as central to our purpose.

Basic Values	Focus Groups	Individual Interviews <i>Interview follow-up & Writing the story</i>	Collaborative Music Making	Sharing Music and Knowledge	Moving On
RESPECT	Am I validating others' stories and truths?	Am I understanding of boundaries?	Is this the story you want it to be?	Am I respecting others' decision and desires for this piece?	Am I respecting group members after the study?
HONESTY	Am I being as open as others?	Am I being truthful?	Does this show the individual's personality?	Is there consent to share?	Am I being honest to the cause even amid conflict?
EMPATHY	Are you being considerate of others' journeys?	Am I providing space for vulnerability?	How will this resonate with others?	How does empathy impact the decision to share?	Am I continuing to be understanding?
SINCERITY	Am I accommodating of others' values?	Do we trust one another?	Is this showing your true self?	Is this what I truly want?	Am I keeping in touch with other co-researchers?
COMMITMENT	Am I putting in the effort?	Am I making time?	Is it for the entirety of the group?	Am I committed to honoring the wishes of others?	Am I advocating?

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL GIFTS SURVEY

SPIRITUAL GIFTS SURVEY

DIRECTIONS

This is not a test, so there are no wrong answers. The *Spiritual Gifts Survey* consists of 80 statements. Some items reflect concrete actions; other items are descriptive traits; and still others are statements of belief.

- Select the one response you feel best characterizes yourself and place that number in the blank provided. Record your answer in the blank beside each item.
- Do not spend too much time on any one item. Remember, it is not a test. Usually your immediate response is best.
- Please give an answer for each item. Do not skip any items.
- Do not ask others how they are answering or how they think you should answer.
- Work at your own pace.

Your response choices are:

- 5**—Highly characteristic of me/definitely true for me
4—Most of the time this would describe me/be true for me
3—Frequently characteristic of me/true for me—about 50 percent of the time
2—Occasionally characteristic of me/true for me—about 25 percent of the time
1—Not at all characteristic of me/definitely untrue for me

-
- _____ 1. I have the ability to organize ideas, resources, time, and people effectively.
_____ 2. I am willing to study and prepare for the task of teaching.
_____ 3. I am able to relate the truths of God to specific situations.
_____ 4. I have a God-given ability to help others grow in their faith.
_____ 5. I possess a special ability to communicate the truth of salvation.
_____ 6. I have the ability to make critical decisions when necessary.
_____ 7. I am sensitive to the hurts of people.
_____ 8. I experience joy in meeting needs through sharing possessions.
_____ 9. I enjoy studying.
_____ 10. I have delivered God's message of warning and judgment.

- _____ 11. I am able to sense the true motivation of persons and movements.
- _____ 12. I have a special ability to trust God in difficult situations.
- _____ 13. I have a strong desire to contribute to the establishment of new churches.
- _____ 14. I take action to meet physical and practical needs rather than merely talking about or planning to help.
- _____ 15. I enjoy entertaining guests in my home.
- _____ 16. I can adapt my guidance to fit the maturity of those working with me.
- _____ 17. I can delegate and assign meaningful work.
- _____ 18. I have an ability and desire to teach.
- _____ 19. I am usually able to analyze a situation correctly.
- _____ 20. I have a natural tendency to encourage others.
- _____ 21. I am willing to take the initiative in helping other Christians grow in their faith.
- _____ 22. I have an acute awareness of the emotions of other people, such as loneliness, pain, fear, and anger.
- _____ 23. I am a cheerful giver.
- _____ 24. I spend time digging into facts.
- _____ 25. I feel that I have a message from God to deliver to others.
- _____ 26. I can recognize when a person is genuine/honest.
- _____ 27. I am a person of vision (a clear mental portrait of a preferable future given by God). I am able to communicate vision in such a way that others commit to making the vision a reality.
- _____ 28. I am willing to yield to God's will rather than question and waver.
- _____ 29. I would like to be more active in getting the gospel to people in other lands.
- _____ 30. It makes me happy to do things for people in need.
- _____ 31. I am successful in getting a group to do its work joyfully.
- _____ 32. I am able to make strangers feel at ease.
- _____ 33. I have the ability to plan learning approaches.
- _____ 34. I can identify those who need encouragement.
- _____ 35. I have trained Christians to be more obedient disciples of Christ.
- _____ 36. I am willing to do whatever it takes to see others come to Christ.
- _____ 37. I am attracted to people who are hurting.
- _____ 38. I am a generous giver.
- _____ 39. I am able to discover new truths.
- _____ 40. I have spiritual insights from Scripture concerning issues and people that compel me to speak out.

- _____41. I can sense when a person is acting in accord with God's will.
- _____42. I can trust in God even when things look dark.
- _____43. I can determine where God wants a group to go and help it get there.
- _____44. I have a strong desire to take the gospel to places where it has never been heard.
- _____45. I enjoy reaching out to new people in my church and community.
- _____46. I am sensitive to the needs of people.
- _____47. I have been able to make effective and efficient plans for accomplishing the goals of a group.
- _____48. I often am consulted when fellow Christians are struggling to make difficult decisions.
- _____49. I think about how I can comfort and encourage others in my congregation.
- _____50. I am able to give spiritual direction to others.
- _____51. I am able to present the gospel to lost persons in such a way that they accept the Lord and His salvation.
- _____52. I possess an unusual capacity to understand the feelings of those in distress.
- _____53. I have a strong sense of stewardship based on the recognition that God owns all things.
- _____54. I have delivered to other persons messages that have come directly from God.
- _____55. I can sense when a person is acting under God's leadership.
- _____56. I try to be in God's will continually and be available for His use.
- _____57. I feel that I should take the gospel to people who have different beliefs from me.
- _____58. I have an acute awareness of the physical needs of others.
- _____59. I am skilled in setting forth positive and precise steps of action.
- _____60. I like to meet visitors at church and make them feel welcome.
- _____61. I explain Scripture in such a way that others understand it.
- _____62. I can usually see spiritual solutions to problems.
- _____63. I welcome opportunities to help people who need comfort, consolation, encouragement, and counseling.
- _____64. I feel at ease in sharing Christ with nonbelievers.
- _____65. I can influence others to perform to their highest God-given potential.
- _____66. I recognize the signs of stress and distress in others.
- _____67. I desire to give generously and unpretentiously to worthwhile projects and ministries.

- _____ 68. I can organize facts into meaningful relationships.
- _____ 69. God gives me messages to deliver to His people.
- _____ 70. I am able to sense whether people are being honest when they tell of their religious experiences.
- _____ 71. I enjoy presenting the gospel to persons of other cultures and backgrounds.
- _____ 72. I enjoy doing little things that help people.
- _____ 73. I can give a clear, uncomplicated presentation.
- _____ 74. I have been able to apply biblical truth to the specific needs of my church.
- _____ 75. God has used me to encourage others to live Christlike lives.
- _____ 76. I have sensed the need to help other people become more effective in their ministries.
- _____ 77. I like to talk about Jesus to those who do not know Him.
- _____ 78. I have the ability to make strangers feel comfortable in my home.
- _____ 79. I have a wide range of study resources and know how to secure information.
- _____ 80. I feel assured that a situation will change for the glory of God even when the situation seems impossible.

SCORING YOUR SURVEY

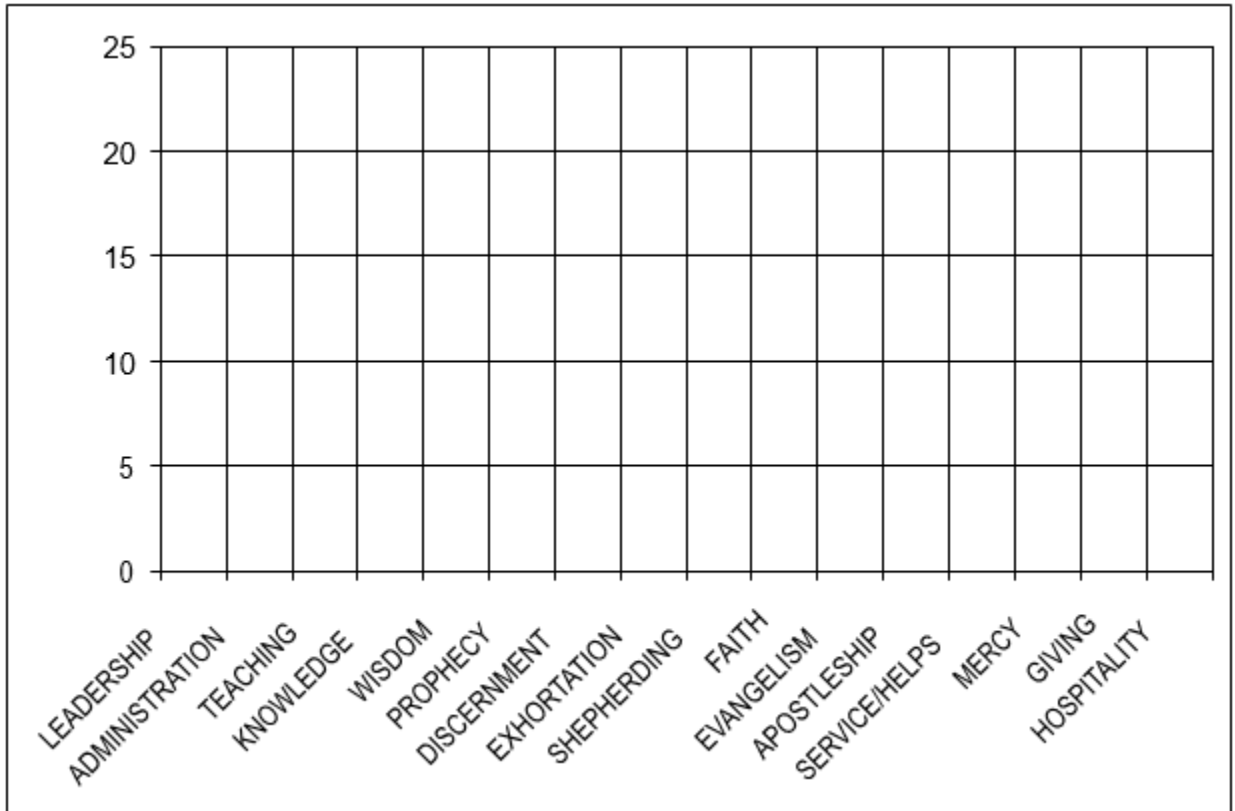
Follow these directions to figure your score for each spiritual gift.

- Place in each box your numerical response (1-5) to the item number which is indicated below the box.
- For each gift, add the numbers in the boxes and put the total in the TOTAL box.

LEADERSHIP	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 6	Item 16	Item 27	Item 43	Item 65 TOTAL
ADMINISTRATION	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 1	Item 17	Item 31	Item 47	Item 59 TOTAL
TEACHING	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 2	Item 18	Item 33	Item 61	Item 73 TOTAL
KNOWLEDGE	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 9	Item 24	Item 39	Item 68	Item 79 TOTAL
WISDOM	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 3	Item 19	Item 48	Item 62	Item 74 TOTAL
PROPHECY	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 10	Item 25	Item 40	Item 54	Item 69 TOTAL
DISCERNMENT	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 11	Item 26	Item 41	Item 55	Item 70 TOTAL
EXHORTATION	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 20	Item 34	Item 49	Item 63	Item 75 TOTAL
SHEPHERDING	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =
	Item 4	Item 21	Item 35	Item 50	Item 76 TOTAL
FAITH	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ +	_____ =

	Item 12		Item 28		Item 42		Item 56		Item 80	TOTAL
EVANGELISM		+		+		+		+		=
	Item 5		Item 36		Item 51		Item 64		Item 77	TOTAL
APOSTLESHIP		+		+		+		+		=
	Item 13		Item 29		Item 44		Item 57		Item 71	TOTAL
SERVICE/HELPS		+		+		+		+		=
	Item 14		Item 30		Item 46		Item 58		Item 72	TOTAL
MERCY		+		+		+		+		=
	Item 7		Item 22		Item 37		Item 52		Item 66	TOTAL
GIVING		+		+		+		+		=
	Item 8		Item 23		Item 38		Item 53		Item 67	TOTAL
HOSPITALITY		+		+		+		+		=
	Item 15		Item 32		Item 45		Item 60		Item 78	TOTAL

GRAPHING YOUR PROFILE



1. For each gift place a mark across the bar at the point that corresponds to your TOTAL for that gift.
2. For each gift shade the bar below the mark that you have drawn.
3. The resultant graph gives a picture of your gifts. Gifts for which the bars are tall are the ones in which you appear to be strongest. Gifts for which the bars are very short are the ones in which you appear not to be strong.

Now that you have completed the survey, thoughtfully answer the following questions.

The gifts I have begun to discover in my life are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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APPENDIX C

QUESTION FRAMEWORK

QUESTION FRAMEWORK

		Asking Questions	
		About	In a way that
Centering LGBTQ+ Identity Christian University Context	Individual <i>Person/self, own identities, beliefs, sense of belonging</i> Relationships <i>Interrelationships with friends, peers, faculty, staff, and administrators</i> Campus <i>University values, mission, services, academics, co-curriculars, activities, engagement</i> Community <i>University policies, broader local community engagement (civic and church-related associations)</i>	Identifies what is already working Dreams about how good it could be Considers how to make it happen	
	EXPANDING OUTWARD GROWTH	ELEMENTS OF TIME	

APPENDIX D

QUESTION MAPPING

Questions	CENTERING		ASKING IN A WAY THAT			
	LGBTQ+ Identity	CCU Context	Identifies what is already working	Dreams about how good it could be	Considers how to make it happen	
INDIVIDUAL						
<i>How did you first learn about the LGBTQ+ community?</i>	X		X			
<i>How did you come to the self-realization that you were part of the LGBTQ+ community?</i>	X		X			
<i>What experiences have helped shape your beliefs about your identity or sense of self?</i>	X		X			
<i>What advice would you give your younger self OR others who may be struggling with self-realization/self-acceptance?</i>	X			X	X	
RELATIONSHIP						
<i>Share about a time that BHU employee has validated your identity.</i>	X	X	X			
<i>How have your peers made your experience at CU more livable?</i>	X	X	X			
CAMPUS						
<i>Share about a campus event or group that has made you feel accepted.</i>	X	X	X			
<i>In what ways can the campus advocate for the LGBTQ+ community and advocate for you?</i>	X	X		X		

<i>What is a specific action that BHU can take to improve the LGBTQ+ student experience?</i>	X	X	X
COMMUNITY			
<i>What can our local community do to serve the LGBTQ+ community?</i>	X		X
<i>In what ways could BHU influence the local community to be more inclusive and affirming?</i>	X	X	X
<i>How could the role that churches play in the local community change if they were more inclusive/affirming?</i>	X		X

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

E.J. Pavy – Ph.D. Candidate – University of Louisville

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to elevate LGBTQ+ student experiences and stories within a single Christian higher education institution.

Description of Framework

LGBTQ+ students must navigate the many complexities of the campus environment with increased challenges stemming from their gender and sexual identities. To better understand their experience, the interview protocol was developed within Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development. Questions will be asked about four different levels of environmental engagement: individual, relationship, campus, and community. From one level to the next, there is an expanding environment with which a student engages. The *individual* level addresses perception or knowledge of self, own identities, beliefs, and sense of belonging. The *relationship* level inquires about interrelationships with friends, peers, faculty, staff and administrators. The *campus* level seeks to understand how individuals interact with institutional values, mission, services, academics, co-curriculars, or activities. Finally, the *community* level addresses the relationship between the individual and policies and local civic community engagement.

The questions have been developed in an intentionally appreciative manner, seeking to understand the best of who the LGBTQ+ students are, the best of the institution and its local community, and how good they could potentially be. Structuring questions in this way also helps to capture a sense of time, by inquiring about what has worked in the past, what is working now, and what the future may look like. The co-researchers worked together to create the set of questions within this framework for the individual interview (see attached question mapping). The group also ensured that questions centered the elements of LGBTQ+ identity and the individualized context of this single Christian liberal arts university.

Interviewees

I will be interviewing LGBTQ+ students at ██████████ University. Historically, these students have been suppressed and marginalized simply because of their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. These students hold a wide variety of cultural values, academic interests, and intersecting identities on the university campus. Elevating their stories as lived truth of LGBTQ+ students within this Christian institutional context is desperately needed.

Interview Dialogue

I will be conducting a single 60-90 minute semi-structured interview, approached from a perspective of appreciative inquiry. In an effort to generate organic and honest conversation, there may be additional follow up questions that are asked as a result of something shared by an interviewee.

Before we begin, I would like to read the Structured Ethical Reflection questions we developed for this stage of our study as a measure of holding ourselves accountable to the values of respect, honesty, empathy, sincerity, and commitment:

- **Respect:** *Am I understanding of boundaries?*
- **Honesty:** *Am I being truthful?*
- **Empathy:** *Am I providing space for vulnerability?*
- **Sincerity:** *Do we trust one another?*
- **Commitment:** *Am I making time?*

As a reminder, this interview is being audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription for use in data analysis.

Individual

- How did you first learn about the LGBTQ+ community?
 - How did you come to the self-realization that you were part of the LGBTQ+ community?
- What experiences have shaped your beliefs about your identity or sense of self?
- What advice would you give your younger self OR others who may be struggling with self-realization/self-acceptance?

Relationship

- Share about a time that a CU employee has validated your identity?
 - What did that mean to you?
 - What impact did that have on your college experience?
- How have your peers made your experience at CU more livable?

Campus

- Share about a campus event or group that has made you feel accepted.
- In what ways can the campus advocate for the LGBTQ+ community and advocate for you?
- What is a specific action that CU can take to improve the LGBTQ+ student experience?
 - Your student experience?

Community

- What can our local community do to serve the LGBTQ+ community?
 - What role can you play in creating that change?
- In what ways could CU influence the local community to be more inclusive and affirming?
 - How would it affect your college experience, if the local community were more inclusive and affirming?
- How could the role that churches play in the local community change if they were more inclusive/affirming?

Is there anything else about your experience as an LGBTQ+ student at a Christian university that you would like to share that perhaps has not been asked?

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX F
MUSICAL SCORES

"I am"

I. Haven Leigh

Haven

E.J. Pavy

mf $\text{♩} = 48$

Soprano
Not ev - ry-one's per - cep - tion of re - a - li - ty is go - ing to app - ly to the

Alto
mf
Not ev - ry-one's per - cep - tion of re - a - li - ty is go - ing to app - ly to the

Tenor
mf
Not ev - ry-one's per - cep - tion of re - a - li - ty is go - ing to app - ly to the

Bass
mf
Not ev - ry-one's per - cep - tion of re - a - li - ty is go - ing to app - ly to the

mp $\text{♩} = 48$ *molto solenne*

5

S.
way you live your life, and you just have to ac - ce - pt that. Ac - cept_ that. What -

A.
way you live your life, and you just have to ac - ce - pt that. Ac - cept_ tha - t. What -

T.
way you live your life, and you just have to ac - ce - pt that. Ac - cept_ that. What -

B.
way you live your life, and you just have to ac - ce - pt that. Ac - cept_ that. What -

13

S.
ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. What - ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. will be

A.
ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. What - ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. will be

T.
ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. What - ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. will be

B.
ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. What - ev - er com - mu - ni - ty I'm in will be. will be

2

21

S. *mp* one_ that I _ put ef- fort in- to _____ when it needs _____ it. *Ah*

A. *mp* one_ that I _ put ef- fort- in- to _____ when it needs _____ it.

T. *mp* one_ that I _ put ef- fort in- to _____ when it needs _____ it.

B. *mp* one_ that I _ put ef- fort in- to _____ when it needs _____ it.

31

mp I just want to ex - ist as I am, as I am, as I am, as I am, as I am! I just

A. *mp* I just want to ex - ist as I am with - out hav- ing that be an is - sue. I just

T. *mp* I just want to ex - ist as I am with - out hav- ing that be an is - sue. I just

B. *mp* I just want to ex - ist as I am with - out hav- ing that be an is - sue. I just

♩ = 76

41

S. want to ex - ist as I am.

A. want to ex - ist as I am.

T. want to ex - ist as I am.

B. want to ex - ist as I am.

"I am"

II. Faith

Faith

E.J. Pavy

♩ = 96

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

Hey, Mom. Hey, Mom. Hey, Mom. Hey, Mom. Mom, Mom, um...

Doo... Doo...

6 *Freely* *♩ = 96*

S. N - Nope! Nope! Nope! Nope!

A. Can I mar-ry a wo - man? Mom Hey, Mom. Hey, Mom. Hey,

T. Doo... Doo...

B. Doo... Doo...

12 *Freely* *Rit.*

S. Nope! Nope! That was just real - ly dis - cour - a - ging for me, for

A. Mom. Hey, Mom. That was real-ly dis - cour - a - ging for me, for

T. Doo... Doo...

B. Doo... Doo...

Not in time - repeat as necessary. Order of entrance is Alto, Soprano, Tenor, Bass. Singers lines should end so as to create the cluster in m.25.

20

S. me, for me, for me, for me. I have to be one or the o - ther

A. me, for me, for me, for me. I was a - shamed

T. Pushed a - way Pushed a - way

B. Si - lenced

2022

2

27 *With building intensity!* *accel.*

S. This is who you are. This is who you are. This is who you are.

A. It's who I am. It's who I am. It's who I

T. This is who you

B. This is who you are; it's who you

30

S. This is who you are. This is who you are. This is who you are.

A. am. It's who I am. It's who I am. It's who I

T. are; it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you

B. are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you

33 *molto rit.* *With restraint* *rit.* *Only 1-2 sopranos on SI.*

S. This is who you are. It's who you are! Don't be a-shamed. Don't try to hide— it.

A. am. It's who I am. It's who I am! Don't be a-shamed. Don't try to hide— it.

T. are, it's who you are, it's who you are! Don't be a-shamed. Don't try to hide— it.

B. are, it's who you are, it's who you are! Don't be a-shamed. Don't try to hide— it.

"I am"

Emmett

III. I Feel/This is Me

E.J. Pavy

$\text{♩} = 60$

Soprano
I know a lot of peo-ple say, "If you're born one

Alto
Loo_

Tenor
Loo_

Bass
Loo_

6

S.
way, that's who you are." But I di-dn't tell a - ny - bo - dy that I i -

A.
Loo_

T.
Loo_

B.
Loo_

11

$\text{♩} = 56$

S.
den-ti-fied assome-thing diff-erent than what I was bom. I lit'-ral-ly re-mem-ber in

A.
lit'-ral-ly re-mem-ber in

T.
lit'-ral-ly re-mem-ber in

B.
lit'-ral-ly re-mem-ber in

16 *molto rit.* $\text{♩} = 60$

S. *mf*
 se - venth grade cry - ing in the court - yard 'cause I fi - gured it out! I I I I I I

A. *mf*
 se - venth grade cry - ing in the court - yard 'cause I fi - gured it out! *mf* feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel.

T. *mf*
 se - venth grade cry - ing in the court - yard 'cause I fi - gured it out! I'm a Chris - tian.

B. *p*
 se - venth grade cry - ing in the court - yard 'cause I fi - gured it out!

22

S. I I I I I I I I I I I I

A. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. feel. I I I I

T. and I'm part of the com - mu - ni - ty. feel. feel. feel. feel.

B.

29

S. Oh, you're such a tom - boy oh, you're such a tom - boy Oh, you're such a tom - boy

A. I I I I You can't be both

T. feel. feel. feel. feel. I I I I

B. feel. feel. feel. feel.

33 *Freely* *Declarative*

S. oh, you're such a tom-boy

A. You can't be both

T. I I I I I who am. It just felt right. It felt like me (like me). Like I

B. feel feel feel feel know I am. It just felt right. It felt like me, like me. Like I

40 *rit.*

S. This is me.

A. This is me.

T. act - ual - ly - knew who I was for once. This is me.

B. act - ual - ly - knew who I was for once. This is me.

"I am" IV. Growth

Sophie

E.J. Pavy

With freedom throughout

Soprano: Loo... When I first real -

Alto: Loo... When I first

Tenor: Loo...

Bass: Loo...

rit. *a tempo*

6

S. ized, I was ab-so-lute-ly terr-i-fied.. It was a ba-ttle_ be-tween who I know I am_

A. real - ized Ab-so-lute-ly terr-i-fied.. It was a ba-ttle_ be-tween who I know I am_

T. Ab-so-lute-ly terr-i-fied.. and who

B. Ab-so-lute-ly terr-i-fied..

11

S. *mp* I was terr-i-fied to say a - ny-thing to a - ny - bo-dy. It was just

A. *mp* I was terr-i-fied to say a - ny-thing to a - ny - bo-dy. It was just

T. *mp* peo-ple knew me as al - rea-dy... I was terr-i-fied to say a - ny-thing to a - ny - bo-dy. It was just

B. *mp* peo-ple knew me as al - rea-dy... I was terr-i-fied to say a - ny-thing to a - ny - bo-dy. It was just

Very slowly *Moving*

2

16

S. real - ly nice to know that like they love me... They love me! God will love me!

A. real - ly nice to know that like they love me... They love me! God will love me!

T. real - ly nice to know that like they love me... They love me! God will love me!

B. real - ly nice to know that like they love me... They love me! God will love me!

20 $\text{♩} = 70$

S. Be who you are... It is po-ssi-ble... Be who you are... I can

A. Be who you are... It is po-ssi-ble... Be who you are... I can

T. Loo... I can

B. Loo... I can

26

S. help; I know how it feels! Trust your - self! Be who you are... I know who I am...

A. help; I know how it feels! Trust your - self! Be who you are... I know who I am...

T. help; I know how it feels! Trust your - self! Be who you are... I know who I am...

B. help; I know how it feels! Trust your - self! Be who you are... I know who I am...

33 *molto rit. to end*

S. Be who you are. I know I am, who I

A. Be who you are. I know I am, who I

T. Be who you are. who I am, who I

B. Be who you are. who I am, who I

41

S. am!

A. am!

T. am!

B. am!

"I am"

V. Happiness

Erin

E.J. Pavy

1x - Altos, Tenors
2x - add Bass
3x - add Soprano

♩ = 90

Soprano: I made my - self made. my-self feel like

Alto: I am who I am. I am who I am.

Tenor: I am who I am. I am who I am.

Bass: I did, I did al-ways stand out I did, I did al-ways stand out

3

S. Feel like I was the odd one.

A. I am who I am. I am who I am.

T. I am who I am. I am who I am.

B. I did, I did al-ways stand out I did, I did al-ways stand out

5

S. And I don't have a - ny rea-son to be so-rry. for who I

A. I am who I am. I am who I am. I am who I am.

T. I am who I am. I am who I am. I am who I am.

B. I did, I did al-ways stand out I did, I did al-ways stand out I did, I did al-ways stand out

8

S. am and when I ac - cep - ted

A. I am who I am. I am I am I am who I am.

T. I am who I am. I am I am I am who I am.

B. I did, I did al-ways stand out I did, I did al-ways stand out; al - ways stood out

1-2

2022

2

11 3.

S. who I was I was ha-pi-er... Ah. ne-ver stop

A. I am I Ah... I'm just not e - ver go-nna stop. Ne-ver stop-ping

T. I am I Ah... ne-ver stop

B. I did al-ways stand out Ah. ne-ver stop

14

S. ne-ver stop ne-ver stop be - ing

A. I'm just not e - ver go-nna stop. Ne-ver stop-ping. I'm just not e - ver go-nna stop; ne-ver stop be - ing

T. ne-ver stop ne-ver stop be - ing

B. ne-ver stop ne-ver stop be - ing

17 *Deliberate and slow*

S. me!... Re - a - li-zing that some-one could love me... I could fi-na-lly love my - self. I can

A. me!... Re - a - li-zing that some-one could love... I could fi-na-lly love my - self. I can

T. me!... fi-na-lly love my - self. I can

B. me!... fi-na-lly love my - self. I can

23

S. 
rea - lly be my - self. I am _____ who I am.

A. 
rea - lly be my - self. I am _____ who I am.

T. 
rea - lly be my - self. I am _____ who I am.

B. 
rea - lly be my - self. I am _____ who I am.

APPENDIX G
PROGRAM NOTES

“Haven Leigh” – Haven

All of the text used sums up how I view myself and the world around me. It begins very hymnal-like because I was raised in a strict, traditional Southern Baptist church. It transitions from many voices to a singular one because I no longer felt a part of that church community or religion. The solemn, yet definitive sound it ends with represents my current state. I do not need the approval of others to exist as I am. I am proud of my queer identity.

“Faith” – Faith

This song represents my journey as a whole, but I also know that it could probably represent the stories of others who have lived through the same experiences as an LGBT-identifying person. Pay close attention to the different tones and voices throughout the movement, as they portray all the emotions surrounding my experience.

“I Feel/This is Me” – Emmett

This is my story put to music. This story shares who I am and what I had to listen to from others in life. The repetition of “I feel” gave me the sense of ‘I know who I was when I was born was not who I am meant to be’. As stated in the piece, I’ve known, I’ve felt, I’ve lived as the true me since seventh grade. Because of my transition, my voice has deepened. I love how range is also portrayed throughout the piece while representing me – starting as a soprano when I sang in choir, to now being at least a tenor – that portrays the steps within my transition. It is me. I am me. I am free. I feel...this is me! I love how chaotic it kind of is. Life as an LGBTQ+ Christian is not easy. It is VERY chaotic. And I love how it depicts that aspect of my life, as well as others that may be going through the same thing.

“Growth” – Sophie

I wanted this piece to be hopeful and take listeners on the journey I’ve already been through and continue to work through. I wanted this piece to start off feeling quite heavy and burdensome because that’s how I felt when I was first figuring out who I am. However, I’m out of that dark and scare time so I wanted this piece to reflect that, and let others know that it is possible. I want others who are going through what I did to realize that it can be okay. I also want people who aren’t a part of the LGBTQ+ community to hear this and understand that someone they know might be experiencing it and have compassion. Mainly I want people to know they aren’t alone.

“Happiness” – Erin

My piece contemplates some struggles faced on the journey of self-discovery. I mainly wanted my piece to represent when someone has reached self-love and self-discovery, hence the happy, cheerful tone and beat of the piece. I wanted it to be uplifting so that anyone that may be struggling can see that the outcome is worth it and it is when you’re at your happiest when you accept who you are and you love yourself as you are. I especially did not want my piece to sound sad as the journey is always hard for everyone. But the outcome is always the most important aspect and is the only way people can become free. We are all fighting our own battles, but when we can truly be ourselves, we can fight these battles knowing we are happy with ourselves and we won’t apologize for who we are because we love ourselves.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Human Subjects Protection Program Office
300 E. Market Street, Suite 380
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40202



DATE:	December 02, 2021
TO:	Mary L Brydon-Miller, Ph.D.
FROM:	The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board
IRB NUMBER:	21.0940
STUDY TITLE:	LGBTQ+ student experiences at a Christian liberal arts university
REFERENCE #:	736765
DATE OF REVIEW:	12/02/2021
CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:	Jackie Powell, CIP 852-4101 jspowe01@louisville.edu

This study was reviewed and approved with changes on 12/01/2021 by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board. The resubmitted changes were approved administratively on 12/02/2021. This study was approved through Expedited Review Procedure, according to 45 CFR 46.110(b), since this study falls under Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

This study now has final IRB approval from 12/02/2021 through 12/01/2024. The

following items have been approved:

Submission Components			
Form Name	Version		Outcome
Submit for Initial Review	Version 1.0		Approved as Submitted
Review Response Submission Form	Version 1.0		Approved as Submitted
IRB Study Application	Version 1.1		Approved as Submitted
Study Document			
Title	Version #	Version Date	Outcome
IRB Protocol - Version 1.1 - CLEAN	Version 1.0	12/02/2021	Approved
IRB Consent Form - Version 1.1 - CLEAN	Version 1.0	12/02/2021	Approved

IRB policy requires that investigators use the IRB “stamped” approved version of informed consents, assents, and other materials given to research participants. For instructions on locating the IRB stamped documents in iRIS visit:

<https://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/iRISSubmissionManual.pdf>

Your study does not require continuing review per federal regulations. Your study has been set with a three-year expiration date following UofL local policy. If your study is still ongoing at that time, you will receive automated reminders to submit a continuing review form prior to the expiration date. If you complete your study prior to the expiration date, please submit a study closure amendment.

All other IRB requirements are still applicable. You are still required to submit amendments, personnel changes, deviations, etc... to the IRB for review. Please submit a closure amendment to close out your study with the IRB if it ends prior to the three year expiration date.

Human Subjects & HIPAA Research training are required for all study personnel. It is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that all study personnel maintain current Human Subjects & HIPAA Research training while the study is ongoing.

Site Approval

Permission from the institution or organization where this research will be conducted **must** be obtained before the research can begin. For example, site approval is required for research conducted in UofL Hospital/UofL Health, Norton Healthcare, and Jefferson County Public Schools, etc...

Privacy & Encryption Statement

The University of Louisville's Privacy and Encryption Policy requires identifiable medical and health records; credit card, bank account and other personal financial information; social security numbers; proprietary research data; and dates of birth (when combined with name, address and/or phone numbers) to be encrypted. For additional information:

<http://louisville.edu/security/policies>.

Implementation of Changes to Previously Approved Research

Prior to the implementation of any changes in the approved research, the investigator must submit modifications to the IRB and await approval before implementing the changes, unless the change is being made to ensure the safety and welfare of the subjects enrolled in the research. If such occurs, a Protocol Deviation/Violation should be submitted within five days of the occurrence indicating what safety measures were taken, along with an amendment to revise the protocol.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others (UPIRTSOs)

A UPIRTSO is any incident, experience, or outcome, which has been associated with an unexpected event(s), related or possibly related to participation in the research, and suggests that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or suspected. The investigator is responsible for reporting UPIRTSOs to the IRB within 5 working days. Use the UPIRTSO form located within the iRIS system. Event reporting requirements can be found

at: <http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/lifecycle/event-reporting>.

Payments to Subjects

In compliance with University policies and Internal Revenue Service code, payments to research subjects from University of Louisville funds, must be reported to the University Controller's Office. For additional information, please call 852-8237 or email controll@louisville.edu. For additional information:

<http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/policies/PayingHumanSubjectsPolicy201412.pdf>

The committee will be advised of this action at a regularly scheduled meeting.

We value your feedback; let us know how we are doing:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CCLHXP>



Peter M. Quesada, Ph.D., Chair
Social/Behavioral/Educational Institutional Review
Board PMQ/jsp

██████████ University Institutional Review Board
Notification of Approval/ Non-Approval

Name of Primary Investigators: **Mary Brydon-Miller**
Name of Student Investigators: **Edwin C. Pavy, Jr.**
Name of Research Assistants: **N/A**

Title of Application:
"LGBTQ+ Student Experiences at a Christian Liberal Arts University"

IRB Application Number: **702**

Request Type:

- Original
- Continuation
- Extension
- Revision

Review Type:

- Full Review
- Expedited Review

Approval Status:

Application is approved.

Application is not approved. (See Comments section for explanation.)

Application requires modifications to be considered. (See Comments section for explanation.) Extension is approved.

Comments:

[Redacted Signature]

IRB Chair or Member

12/6/2021

12/6/2022

Approval Date
Expiration Date

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

INFORMED CONSENT

LGBTQ+ Student Experiences at a Christian Liberal Arts University

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to take part in a research study because you are an LGBTQ+ student at ██████████ University. The study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller (Ph.D. Environmental Psychology) at the University of Louisville.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to improve the college experience for LGBTQ+ students at ██████████ University by elevating stories of their lived truth as students at this Baptist institution.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to participate in four focus group sessions, an individual interview, and three additional follow-up discussions, held approximately over a three-month period. In the first phase of the study, each of the focus group sessions will last approximately 90-120 minutes occurring approximately weekly. During the third focus group session, participants will be completing a spiritual gifts inventory, to be expressly used as a tool for generating a discussion at that focus group session. Participants may decline to answer any questions on the spiritual gifts inventory that may make them uncomfortable. In the second phase of the study, the individual interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. This interview will be recorded (audio only). There will also be one follow-up conversation that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. In the third phase of the study, there will be two of the three follow-up conversations will last approximately 45-60 minutes. In all, each participant would contribute a total of 12-15 hours of their time over the duration of their participation.

Your data will not be stored and shared for future research even if identifiable private information, such as your name and medical record number, are removed.

Potential Risks

There are risks associated with participating in the focus groups and individual interviews. Those risks are psychological and emotional as focus group discussions and

individual interviews may engage topics around gender and sexual identity and experiences within various types of faith communities. There may be unforeseen risks.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include sharing your unique story as an LGBTQ+ student at a Christian university, contributing to the ongoing conversation about continual improvement of services offered to LGBTQ+ students at ██████████ University, contributing to broader research on LGBTQ+ students in Christian higher education.

You may not benefit personally by participating in this study. The information collected may not benefit you directly; however, the information may be helpful to others.

Alternatives

Instead of taking part in this study, you could choose to not participate in the study.

Payment

You will not be paid for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. We will protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. Once your information leaves our institution, we cannot promise that others will keep it private.

Your information may be shared with the following:

- Organizations that provide funding at any time for the conduct of the research.
- The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office, Privacy Office, others involved in research administration and research and legal compliance at the University, and others contracted by the University for ensuring human participants safety or research and legal compliance
- The local research team
- People who are responsible for research, compliance and HIPAA/privacy oversight at the institutions where the research is conducted
- Applicable government agencies, such as:
 - Office for Human Research Protections

Security

The data collected about you will be kept private and secure by being stored on the co-investigator's password-protected laptop and backed up to an external

drive. Any hardcopy documents will also be kept in a locked container behind a locked door.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide not to be in this study, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify. If you decide to be in this study, you may change your mind and stop taking part at any time. If you decide to stop taking part, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify. You will be told about any new information learned during the study that could affect your decision to continue in the study.

Research Participant's Rights

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has approved the participation of human participants in this research study.

Questions, Concerns and Complaints

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Dr. Mary Brydon-Miller at mlbryd01@louisville.edu, or (502) 852-6887.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call the toll free number 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature and date indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document though you are providing your authorization as outlined in this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Participant Name (Please Print)
Date Signed

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or Co-I)
Co-I) Date Signed

Signature of Investigator (PI, Sub-I, or

Phone number for participants to call for questions:
(270) 849-4614

Investigator(s) name, degree, phone number, University Department, & address:

Mary L. Brydon-Miller, Ph.D

(502) 852-6887

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational
Development

College of Education and Human Development

University of Louisville

1905 S. First Street

Louisville, KY 40292

Edwin C. Pavy Jr., MMC

(270) 849-4614

Human Resources

██████████ ██████████

1 University Drive, UPO 944

████████████████████

Site(s) where study is to be conducted:

██████████ ██████████

1 University Drive

████████████████████

CURRICULUM VITAE

Edwin C. Pavy, Jr.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE – Louisville, KY Anticipated 08/2022
Doctor of Philosophy - Educational Leadership, Evaluation, & Organizational Development

- Concentration in Higher Education Administration
- Coursework completed SP21
- Admitted to Doctoral Candidacy - August 2021

CAMPBELLSVILLE UNIVERSITY – Campbellsville, KY 2016
Master of Music in Conducting – Emphasis in Choral Conducting

- Outstanding graduate music student award
- Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society inductee

CAMPBELLSVILLE UNIVERSITY – Campbellsville, KY 2009
Bachelor of Music in Music Education – Emphasis in Voice

- Outstanding undergraduate music student award

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

CAMPBELLSVILLE UNIVERSITY – Campbellsville, KY

Human Resources

COVID Response Coordinator/Healthy at Work Officer Jan. 2021 - Present

- Oversee employee and student COVID quarantine and isolation protocols.
- Develop and implement institutional COVID policies.
- Responsible for maintaining COVID compliance efforts across multiple instructional sites in different states (Kentucky and California).
- Organize vaccination clinics for employees and students.
- COVID administrator on institution's mobile app platform (CU Mobile App).
- Gather, analyze, and maintain institutional COVID response data.

Title IX Coordinator and Assistant Director of Human Resources 2019 – Present

- Certified Title IX Coordinator, Investigator, Informal Resolution Facilitator, and Decision-Maker
- Oversee staff volunteers in various Title IX roles (Deputy Coordinators, Investigators, Advisors, Informal Resolution Facilitators, and Decision-Makers).
- Oversee effective implementation of Campbellsville University's Sexual Misconduct Policy.
- Promote gender equity across education programs and activities.
- Lead compliance efforts with new Title IX regulations, including training and policy revision.
- Development and implementation of education efforts to increase prevention and awareness of sexual violence – Sexual Violence Prevention Plan.
- Case management of all Title IX complaints, including receipt of complaints, implementation of supportive measures, overseeing enforcement of remedies, and federal recordkeeping requirements.

- Gender equity representative on Diversity Policy Committee.
- Gather, analyze, and maintain gender equity campus climate data.
- Conduct all new hire orientations, including training on institutional policy, benefits, and employee expectations.
- Improve employee engagement efforts, including onboarding and enhancing efficiency of HR office.
- Draft administrative policies and procedures.
- Ensure compliance in the intersection of Title VII and Title IX.
- COVID-19 response team – drafted COVID-19 work policy and phased reopening protocols.
- Serve as HR representative on Campbellsville University Compliance Committee.
- HR representative on ERP transition functional team (HR/Payroll).

Student Services

Assistant Director of Residence Life 2018 – 2019

- Promoted October 2018.
- Oversee a team of nine residence hall directors and fifty resident assistants.
- Responsible for writing and developing student learning outcomes and standards for residential curriculum.
- Developed professional development series for residence hall directors.
- Served as student affairs liaison for regional instructional residential sites.
- Title IX investigator for student cases.
- Student conduct hearing officer.
- Manage all new housing applications and assignments.
- Student Activities Board member.
- SACSCOC 5th Year Review Student Services Compliance Committee.

Men's Housing Area Coordinator 2017 – 2018

- Promoted May 2017.
- Responsible for development of training for resident assistant staff.

- Developed professional development series for resident assistants.
- Coordinated all men’s housing assignments.

Resident Director 2013 – 2017

- Responsible for daily operations of a men’s residence hall.
 - Broadway Hall (2013-2015) – 76 residents
 - South Hall East (2015-2018) – 100 residents
- Led a staff of 4-6 resident assistants.
- Developed and implemented hall programming for residents.

Adjunct Faculty

School of Music 2016 – 2020

- Conductor – University Men’s Choir
- Understanding Music (GenEd)

Department of Introductory Studies 2016 – 2020

- University Success Skills

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS – Washington, DC

General Music Teacher & Choir Director 2011 – 2013

- 6th & 7th Grade General Music Classes
- Multiple Choral Ensembles
- Music Club Sponsor
- Sole consulting teacher for DCPS “Teaching in Action” initiative
- Choirs consistently received superior ratings

METCALFE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS – Edmonton, KY

General Music Teacher & Choir Director 2009 – 2011

- Reinstated choral music program
- 6th Grade General Music Classes
- Middle and High School Choirs

PUBLICATIONS

Pavy Jr., E. C. (2016, July 25). Choral repertoires in Kentucky public schools: The effect of cultural bias in their selection. *The Campbellsville Review*, pp. 72-92.

PRESENTATIONS

“*The Ethic of Imago Dei in the Administration of a Title IX Program at a Christian University*”, presenter, Campbellsville University Quality Enhancement Plan Lecture Series, Campbellsville, Kentucky, April 2021.

“*Lean on Me: Creating Collaborative Inter-Institutional Conversation*”, presenter, Kentucky Association of Housing Officers state conference, Lexington, Kentucky, October 21, 2019.

“Using Spiritual Gifts in the Workplace”, presenter, Campbellsville University Residence Life professional development seminar, Campbellsville, Kentucky, September 6, 2019.

CERTIFICATIONS/AFFILIATIONS

- Certified Title IX Coordinator – Institutional Compliance Solutions
- Certified Title IX Investigator – Institutional Compliance Solutions

- Certified Title IX Informal Resolution Facilitator – Institutional Compliance Solutions
- Certified Title IX Decision-Maker – Institutional Compliance Solutions
- Member - National Association of Clergy Compliance Officers and Professionals (NACCOP)
- KY Certified Teacher, Rank II – Music (K-12) – KY Educational Professional Standards Board (2005-2021)
- DC Certified Teacher – Music (K-12) – District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education (2011-2013)

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Managing Editor – Journal of Student Financial Aid (JFSA) (July 2021 – Present)
- Member – book launch team for Dr. Drew Moser’s book, *The Enneagram of Discernment* (June 2020- August 2020)