

In search of safety: A qualitative study on how LGBT+ college students find safe spaces
on college campuses

A Thesis submitted
to the Graduate School of
Valdosta State University

In partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In Educational Leadership

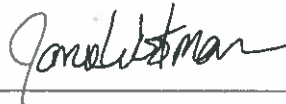
In the Department of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development
of the James L. and Dorothy H. Dewar College of Education and Human Services

April, 2021

Ryan James Campen

BA, Saint Peter's University, 2019

**Thesis
Committee
Chair**

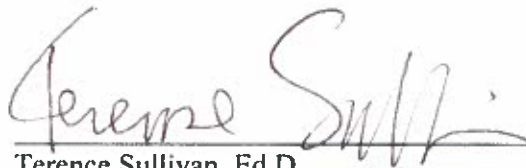


Jamie Workman, Ph.D
Assistant Professor of Higher Education Leadership

**Committee
Members**



James Archibald, Ph.D., LPC
Associate Professor of Higher Education Leadership



Terence Sullivan, Ed.D
Assistant Director of the Academic Support Center

**Associate
Provost for
Graduate
Studies and
Research**

Becky K. Da Cruz, Ph.D., J.D.
Professor of Criminal Justice

Defense Date

April 1, 2021

© Copyright 2021 Ryan J. Campen

All Rights Reserved

FAIR USE

This Thesis is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, revised in 1976). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of the material for financial gain without the author's expressed written permission is not allowed.

DUPLICATION

I authorize the Head of Interlibrary Loan or the Head of Archives at the Odum Library at Valdosta State University to arrange for duplication of this Thesis for educational or scholarly purposes when so requested by a library user. The duplication shall be at the user's expense.

Signature  _____

I refuse permission for this Thesis to be duplicated in whole or in part.

Signature _____

ABSTRACT

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and more (LGBT+) college students have had a long and interesting history with higher education institutions. These students seek out a location on campus that provides them with a safe space where they are free to express themselves in terms of their gender and sexual identity openly. This study seeks to better understand how LGBT+ college students find a safe space on campuses when there is not one already provided for them. These data were collected through interviews with six college students who identify within the LGBT+ community and attend an institution which does not have an established safe space. Through analysis of the themes, it was revealed that LGBT+ students find safe spaces in other students in comparison to the physical environment. Students also stated that being on campus, offers more safety than being off campus when they considered their identities. Students also indicated locations like the library and front lawn offered safe spaces. Five students supported the establishment of a safe space for LGBT+ students; one student was neither supportive nor unsupportive. These data can better inform student affairs practitioners on how to better support LGBT+ students while they work with them. They also support colleges and universities establishing safe spaces for LGBT+ students. Finally, the study lays groundwork for future research projects into how other groups of students of historically marginalized identities find safe spaces and how students attending different types of institutions with different attributes are impacted in their search.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Overview of Paper.....	2
Theoretical Framework.....	3
Chapter II: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
Introduction.....	7
History of LGBT+ College Students.....	7
Current State of LGBT+ College Students.....	10
Current Anti-LGBT+ Legislation.....	20
Safe Spaces.....	20
Constitutionality of Safe Spaces.....	24
Student Development Theory and Safe Spaces.....	25
Conclusion.....	28
Chapter III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	30
Theming and Coding Data.....	31
Overview of Participants.....	32
Limitations.....	34
Preliminary Suppositions and Implications.....	33
Chapter IV: RESULTS.....	35
On Campus Being Safer When Compared to Off Campus.....	35
Odum Library and Front Lawn as a Safe Space on Campus.....	35
Faculty, Staff, and Student Organizations Provide Safe Spaces.....	36
Student Union and Outdoor Walkway as an Unsafe Space.....	38

Feelings Regarding an Established Safe Space on Campus.....	39
CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION.....	41
Discussion.....	41
Connection to Schlossberg’s Theory of Mattering and Marginality.....	41
Connection to Strange and Banning’s Four Environments.....	42
Connection to Other Referenced Theories.....	44
Implications for Student Affairs Practice.....	49
Implications for Future Research.....	50
Conclusion.....	53
REFERENCES.....	55
APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Protocol Exemption Report.....	66
APPENDIX B: Research Statement and Individual Interview Questions.....	69

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The time this thesis has taken is time that I am extremely appreciative of because it revealed just how many people were there to support me to ensure that this thesis did come to light and in time for my graduation date.

My advisor and thesis committee chair, Dr. Jamie Workman, has been an immense help in my coursework and in this thesis. I am so thankful to have had Dr. Workman as my coach and cheerleader during this entire process. She always encouraged me to push further and celebrated the little accomplishments along the way.

Dr. James Archibald, thank you so much for your support during my two years in the program. Your insights and thoughts have repeatedly challenged me to think deeper and more critically in a plethora of ways than I believed possible. Also, thank you for agreeing to serve on my thesis committee.

Dr. Terrence Sullivan, thank you so much agreeing to serve on my thesis committee. Also, a big thanks for being such a great advocate for the LGBT+ faculty, students, and staff at Valdosta State University.

Thank you to the six students who agreed to be a part of this study. Your experiences aided me so much in my study and I am thankful for the opportunity to have met you all.

Thank you to the Housing and Residence Life Office of Valdosta State University for employing me the past two years. And a huge thank you to Amanda Thompson for being an amazing supervisor, for developing me and helping me grow as a student affair professional and for constantly telling me to finish my thesis. You consistently inspire me to never stop learning and to become a better human and for that I am extremely thankful. And another huge thank you to my fellow Residence Hall Directors of the past two years, for being my friends and families during my time at Valdosta. Finally, specifically to the 2020-2021 Georgia Hall staff, you all have been the light on my darkest days. You keep me smiling and laughing and I am so appreciative for that.

To my family, though I was states apart from all of you during the completion of my thesis and my entire graduate school career, the main motivation to complete this thesis was to make you all proud. I love you all more than anything else and I hope you are proud mom and dad <3

DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to all the past, present, and future Blazers who flames burn on the more colorful side.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Colleges and universities in recent years have strived to create inclusive environments that foster academic success and honor the identities of their students. As college populations become more diverse over generations there are many challenges to ensure that all populations are protected. One specific population that has grown tremendously in terms of visibility are students that identify under the umbrella term of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT+). These students have had a long history of fighting for inclusion and safety on college campuses especially after the Stonewall Riots of 1969 (Beemyn, 2019). One way in which some college campuses have tried to do this for LGBT+ students is by creating safe spaces. These spaces are usually physical places on campus that are specifically set aside for LGBT+ students and allies to be themselves and share their ideas and feelings without risk of being persecuted or judged for their beliefs or identities (Pitcher et al., 2018). These spaces have been under tough criticism by some higher education administrators as a way of sheltering students from having tough conversations that would enhance academic growth (Brown & Mangan, 2016). Others have argued that safe spaces increase the feeling of inclusion for minority college students. Researchers also argued that the benefit of the safe spaces is that safe spaces add to the educational benefits of diversity by becoming a marketplace of ideas (Harpalani, 2017). Though some college campuses have established a safe space

program, some do not have a set space at their institution solely dedicated to LGBT+ students. This will be the center of the research study. Through qualitative analysis of LGBT+ Valdosta State University students, information was gained to explain how students find a community of other LGBT+ students and how they form their own safe space either on campus or off campus. To analyze the results, individual interviews were coded to find what the most common occurring themes across all the interviews are. This research is important to the field of higher education and student affairs because it can assist student affairs professionals and higher education administrators identify what students look for in safe spaces and what is the process, they use for establishing themselves as a community on college campuses that do not have a designated safe space.

Overview of Paper

This thesis aids to provide insight into the lives of LGBT+ students. The student's stories are directly informed from their own experiences of being students at Valdosta State University. The following chapters in the thesis aim to give context to the study and give the reader access to deeper knowledge to make an informed decision for themselves, increase the knowledge base in the future, and better inform student affairs practice in general and specifically related to LGBT+ students.

The literature review serves as the main section to give context to the history of LGBT+ students and safe spaces. The history of LGBT+ students and higher education, while not always an easy experience, does demonstrate higher education's overall progression toward ensuring that students from all backgrounds are supported and cared for at their institutions. The literature review also explores the idea of safe spaces. As

stated previously, this has not always been an easy initiative to start or implement on campuses but there is a decent amount of support from academics for these spaces. To give a well-rounded perspective the arguments against safe spaces are also included for the reader.

The research design and methods follow the literature review. This section includes the method of recruiting the participants and a brief description of who the participants are, and how their interviews were conducted. Finally, this section also illustrates how the researcher coded and themed the interviews to form data points. The data points are then fully explained in the results section which immediately follows the former section. This section specifically addresses the themes and codes found in the data. The final section and conclusion of the thesis discusses the results, and how they specifically relate to student affairs practice and opportunities for future research.

Theoretical Framework

A safe space for the terms of this research which will later be supported by the literature is a space that LGBT+ students feel safe and comfortable enough to express themselves in terms of their gender and sexual identity. It is important to understand that this space can be anywhere. The safe space is determined by the individual person and it is dictated by the individual person. The individual can decide this for a multitude of reasons such as the company with the individual, the physical location, and the lived experiences of the individual while they have been in this space (Fast, 2018).

Strange and Banning (2015) argue in their book, *Designing for Learning: Creating Campus Environments for Student Success*, that there are four environments found on a college or university campus. Those four environments are the physical,

human aggregate, organizational, and the socially constructed. All these environments play an important role in understanding how to best support college students and how college students view the environment around them.

The physical environment is one that comprises all the buildings, natural and designed landscapes, and human made objects and artifacts (Strange & Banning, 2015). This also encompasses how much the natural landscape of an institution's layout influences how a campus was originally planned and how it continues to grow. Examples of the physical environment are the buildings and pathways laid out by the institution, the types of trees or grass used to decorate the institutions more natural areas, sculptures that are displayed on campus and trash that may be left behind by students.

The human aggregate environment is dependent on the characteristics of the college or university community as a whole and the characteristics of the dominant group. These characteristics influence the institution's decision making and identity (Strange & Banning, 2015). Examples of the human aggregate at a higher education institution can be seen greatly at a Historic Black College or University (HBCU) or a Minority Serving Institution (MSI). HBCUs and MSIs have an identity of having a strong commitment to uplifting and representing marginalized groups in society. They also place an emphasis on honoring the traditions and history of the pioneers of their identity group who has come before them.

The organizational environment is described as the environment where power is held. This center of power can be different depending on which organization inside an institution one is looking at or when looking at an institution where the power lies at that specific institution (Strange & Banning, 2015). An example of an organizational

environment can be seen in most Housing and Residence Life departments. Most Housing departments have a central office where most of the power is held in but Residence Hall Directors, Resident Assistants, and other staff who work directly in the residence halls also hold some amount of power in their office space or living area.

The final environment is the socially constructed environment. Socially constructed environments can assist students in learning and growing during their collegiate years. The students' perception and definition of the environment around them directly influence their behavior in that space. The perception of the space and the university by many individuals also informs the overall campus climate of the institution (Strange & Banning, 2015). If enough students feel safe and comfortable being on campus, then the campus climate report will say that the institution is very welcoming to individuals of various identities.

This can be applied to this research study because as will be revealed later, students define a safe space for them when they are able to act in a way that does not contradict their gender or sexual identity. This also includes the people that they choose to include in their safe space since the students have decided that the space is available as a safe space where they can express themselves freely. When students can create their safe space then they overall campus feels more accepting. This also means that if an individual feels that they can freely express themselves all over campus, then the institution is completing its mission of creating a safe and welcoming environment for all individuals regardless of their identity.

Another theory that supports the research is Schlossberg's Theory of Mattering and Marginality. Schlossberg states that when students feel that they matter it leads to

them being able to develop more and will become more involved in campus life. The five areas of mattering are attention, importance, ego extension, dependence, and appreciation (Patton et al., 2016). Safe spaces fulfill all these feelings for LGBT+ students. Attention is felt when they are noticed and appreciated for their identity. Importance is felt by students when they feel someone cares about them, this is easily understood in a safe space because the LGBT+ student feels comfortable enough for them to express themselves. The affirmation of their identity helps the LGBT+ student feel important. The close bond formed in the created safe space also allows for students to depend on each other and celebrate the highs and reflect on the lows of the members of the safe space (Morris, 2017). These feelings cover the ego extension, dependence, and appreciation aspects of mattering.

The theoretical framework gives a lens through which the reader should observe the results. The theories of mattering and marginality (Patton et al., 2016) and Strange and Banning's (2015) theory of the four environments can be directly applied to the results. The theories also serve as a starting point when discussing how the results can be impactful to the field of student affairs and further student development research projects that can be explored.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To fully grasp why safe spaces developed and how useful they are for LGBT+ students, a few different topics need to be reviewed. First, a history of LGBT+ college students must be established and an analysis of the major issues on LGBT+ college students in institutions across the United States of America today. Next, the literature currently surrounding safe spaces will be looked at and how they impact and work in collaboration with various student development theories. Finally, literature about safe spaces of LGBT+ college students will be looked at including the legality and constitutionality of safe spaces.

History of LGBT+ College Students

During the 1960s, LGBT+ college students could be expelled or sanctioned because of their sexual identity (Beemyn, 2019). Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) students could be sent to counseling services to undergo a form of conversion therapy so they could be “cured” of their sexuality. The first documented LGB group on a college campus was the Student Homophile League at Columbia University in New York City in 1966 (Beemyn, 2003). Similar groups were founded and recognized by their respective institutions at Cornell University, New York University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Some groups were formed but not recognized by their institutions (Beemyn, 2019). On June 28th, 1969, the Stonewall Riots in New York City were the

catalyst for LGBT+ activism to become a movement at many college and university campuses across the country (Eskow, 1969). By 1971, an estimated 150 institutions had some form of an LGB group (Beemyn, 2003).

Some institutions were not as accepting right away. Many private, religiously affiliated institutions blocked the creation of LGB groups because of their religious beliefs. One of the most notable was Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Georgetown had not recognized their LGB group until 1987 after the University President Timothy S. Healy of the Society of Jesus and the University were sued by the Gay Rights Coalition of Georgetown University Law Center (*Gay Rights Coalition vs. Georgetown University*, 1985). The trial proceedings ended with the District of Columbia Court of Appeals ruling that by not recognizing the gay rights student groups, Georgetown University was in violation of the District of Columbia's Human Rights Act which did not allow educational institutions to discriminate based on sexual orientation (*Gay Rights Coalition v. Georgetown University*, 1985).

Continuing to follow the Stonewall Riots, institutions began forming centers that would cater specifically to LGB individuals. The first of the offices were the Human Sexuality Office at the University of Michigan and the Alternative Lifestyles Office at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the 1970s (Beemyn, 2019). In the 1980s, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and Princeton University established their own offices (Beemyn, 2019). During the 1970s and 1980s, academic programs and courses were established though they were met with backlash from administration who did not see the value nor thought they were rigorous enough

(Beemyn, 2019). It would not be until 1989 at the College of San Francisco that an LGB studies department would be established (Beemyn, 2019).

While there was some advancement in the inclusion of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) student populations at some schools, the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville, Florida did not formally accept their LGB students for several years. Prior to the Stonewall Riots, the Florida legislature had a committee that was more popularly known as the “Johns Committee”. This committee became infamous for their persecution of LGB students and faculty at Florida’s colleges and universities from 1956 to 1964 (Clawson, 2014). In 1974, following the Stonewall riots, UF still did not recognize the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which was a group of LGB students organized by student, Julius M. Johnson, in 1970 (Clawson, 2014). This was because of a paragraph in the Board of Regents Operating Manual of 1974 which read:

In order to assure a wholesome educational environment within the state universities of Florida, the Board of Regents . . . enjoins the administration in each of the institutions to continue to guard against activities subversive to the American democratic process and against immoral behavior, such as sex deviation. (as cited in Clawson, 2014, p. 217)

The Faculty Senate would eventually vote to strike the phrasing at the end of the manual in 1974 but it was not removed until the Board of Regents decided to remove it (Clawson, 2014). The GLF renamed itself to the Gay Community Service Center to be less militant and would eventually gain recognition by UF in 1976 all through student activism efforts (Clawson, 2014). The assistance of student affairs professionals being focused on protecting diverse groups of people including LGBT+ individuals and the

American Psychological Association (APA) removing homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1974 also assisted in the student activism efforts (Renn, 2010).

In the 1990s, a few colleges began to offer safe zone training programs (Beemyn, 2019). Ball State University was one of the first institutions to offer these programs whose aim was to educate the community about LGBT+ individuals to make the campus more accepting. The number of schools that offered similar programs grew to 60 by the early 2000 (Beemyn, 2019). Part of the reasoning for this was the torturous murder of Matthew Shepard who was an out gay student at University of Wyoming in 1998 (Beemyn, 2019; Brooke, 1998).

Current State of LGBT+ College Students

When observing higher education environments today, it is apparent that institutions have become more inclusive of gender and sexuality minorities. Some of the greatest achievements are that there are now more than 250 colleges and universities with some form of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) resource center in the United States and one in Jerusalem (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2019) and many institutions have an LGBT+ studies program (Younger, 2019). These centers have been directly related to ensuring students feel safe and welcomed while on campus. They also have been useful in times of crisis for LGBT+ students. To give a specific example, on June 12th, 2016, the deadliest mass shooting in the United States at the time had occurred at Pulse, a gay nightclub, located in Orlando Florida. Forty-nine patrons of the nightclub were murdered and an additional 53 were injured because of the shooting. This also does not account for the mental health strain that it had on the patrons and the friends and families who were traumatized because of

the events (Hurt & Zambelich, 2016). This mass attack specifically on the LGBT+ community affected many more people than those just in attendance. LGBT+ communities on college and university campuses found solace and support at LGBT+ resource centers when there was one that was available (Sandoval, 2016). Sandoval's (2016) article specifically notes that the University of Georgia hosted a safe space following the shooting, so that students could be together to process the emotions and feelings that students felt. The author further goes on to explain that for LGBT+ students who attend higher education institutions that do not offer a resource center often students turn to resources outside of the college or university such as local gay bars (Sandoval, 2016). While these bars as a safe space for these students to attend is good for the student at the time, it does pose a threat to the overall mental health of LGBT+ college students. Previous research has found that when LGBT+ students feel unsafe or do not feel that they have a place to go to they are prone to more mental health problems and furthermore become more at risk for drug or alcohol abuse (Dworkin et al., 2018; Fish & Palsey, 2015; Reed et al., 2010) Having a student's safe space in times of trauma be a bar where alcohol is present may exacerbate mental health problems that LGBT+ students have or lead to LGBT+ students developing addictions to drugs and alcohol.

Having resource centers is also important for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. They assist with LGBT+ students' sense of safety, security, and overall wellness. A report from the Human Rights Campaign (2020) indicates disparities in LGBT+ health statuses during the pandemic. The indicated disparities and unique challenges that the LGBT+ community face vary depending on the individual but according to the report, the LGBT+ community are more likely to be employed in

industries that are highly affected by the pandemic such as education, food industry, hospitals, and retail. LGBT+ individuals are also more likely to be poorer than their straight and cis-gender counterparts and are also less likely to be able to afford health insurance. The disparities become even greater when race and specifically transgender individuals are looked at. LGBT+ individuals are also more likely to be daily smokers and have asthma in comparison to straight and cis-gender counterparts (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2020).

LGBT+ resource centers also can assist and remedy some of the issues that LGBT+ students have in terms of the pandemic. Marine (2011) argues that LGBT+ resource centers offer three main functions for their campus. These are counseling/support, education, and advocacy (Marine, 2011). These functional areas are important for LGBT+ students during the pandemic since they are at higher risk of abuse from family members because of their identities due to being sent home (Brown, 2020), mental health issues, and greater feelings of loneliness and suicidal ideation due to a decrease in social interactions because of the pandemic (The Trevor Project, 2020). Gilbert and colleagues (2020) further expanded on this specifically through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic. Administrators who work in LGBT+ resource centers to find creative ways to continue offer their services to LGBT+ students. This can be completed through virtual or hybrid programs. For administrators who do not work in the LGBT+ resource centers, Gilbert and colleagues (2020) recommend advocating on behalf of the employees of the centers and ensuring that they are being inclusive of their LGBT+ students. Recommendations for faculty members include conducting research

specifically on how LGBT+ students are affected by the pandemic and continuously advocating for LGBT+ resource centers.

Mental health is an essential component to the overall well-being of an individual. A college student's wellness usually revolves around two main areas, physical and mental health. When college students have better health and wellness, they appear to perform better academically (Gökalp, 2020). Gökalp's (2020) study recommends having trainings and educational sessions specifically dedicated to educating students on the importance of wellness and its association with academic performance. Having a healthy lifestyle was also directly linked to having a better psychological health even though a high percentage of students have an unhealthy lifestyle during their time in college (Hanawi et al., 2020). For LGBT+ students, a study of mental health indicated that students who were gender non-conforming had a higher risk of experiencing, anxiety, pain, and depressive symptoms (Gordon et al., 2017). Conversely, in terms of physical health, students who identified as LGBT+ had the highest scores according to their diet intake meaning that they had a balanced and highly nutritional diet (VanKim et al., 2019). This means that it is important for institutions of higher education to focus on supporting LGBT+ students mental health and offering resources to LGBT+ students to ensure that they are taking care of their mental health. Institutions also need to evaluate their campus climate to ensure that it is welcoming and not causing undo harm or stress on LGBT+ students.

In a study of 11,362 students in 23 high schools indicated that LGBT+ students exhibited higher rates of depression and suicidal behavior in comparison to heterosexual and cis-gendered students (Espelage & Merrin, 2016). A separate study of 347 LGBT+

students across the United States of America found that 89% of respondents indicated that they had experienced low occurrences of physical bullying victimization related to their sexual orientation or gender identity and that five students had experience physical bullying victimization at a high frequency. The same study also reported that the highest frequencies of bullying came in the form of verbal bullying and that they had the most social support from their peers in comparison to their families and campus (Moran, Chen, & Tryon, 2018). These various studies demonstrate that while campus climates have improved for LGBT+ college students, there is still work that can be done to ensure that college students are being cared for and safe. One way that colleges analyze how accepted students feel is by utilizing campus climate surveys.

The most recent national analysis of campus climates specifically for LGBT+ individuals was completed by Campus Pride in 2010 (Rankin et al., 2010). The report states it had a total of 5,149 responses of which 2,384 responses were from undergraduate students from all 50 states. In the report it demonstrated that respondents who identified as a part of the LGBT+ community had all experienced high levels of harassment in comparison to their straight and cis-gender counterparts. LGBT+ students also reported higher levels of harassment on campus in comparison to the faculty. LGBT+ respondents also reported lower levels of comfortability on campus. The comfort levels of LGB respondents of color were lower, and they were more likely to have witnessed harassment and been harassed in comparison to their white peers (Rankin et al., 2010). The results of this study are alarming, and institutions of higher education need to take this report and their own campus climate reports into consideration when making decisions that will be affecting the LGBT+ community on their campus. The report also demonstrates that

schools need to do a better job of protecting and ensuring that their students, particularly their students of color, are receiving the support that they need and that institutions are truly enforcing non-discrimination policies (Rankin et al., 2010).

Campus climate reports are extremely important when discussing academic attainment for LGBT+ students. The main reason for attending college or university is to obtain a degree in the field that the student wants to pursue a career in. A positive campus climate was directly linked to students succeeding academically while they were attending college (Rankin et al., 2010). Part of academic success is also staying enrolled at an institution and completing their degree. One study by Strayhorn and colleagues (2010) indicated that when LGBT+ students were on a campus that celebrate and respect them their academic achievement and overall well-being increased. There are data that suggest that LGBT+ individuals are obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees at a higher rate when compared to their straight cis-gender counterparts (Wimberly, Wilkinson, & Pearson, 2015). Microaggressions can also greatly impact a student's educational achievements. Typical microaggressions that are made are 'that's so gay' and 'no homo' (Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005; Kosciw et al., 2012). These phrases have a negative impact on LGBT+ individuals. Hearing these phrases put levels of stress onto LGBT+ students that can affect their academic attainment and achievement. When students encountered these phrases, it had negative effects on development while specifically hearing 'no homo' had a negative effect on grade point averages (Mathies et al., 2019). This also leads to LGBT+ students labeling an institution as unsafe and can lead to adverse mental health affects for LGBT+ students.

Another way that LGBT+ students experience bullying while on college campuses is through cyberbullying. In a comparison study of 55 LGB students and 171 heterosexual students, it was found that students who held LGB identities were more at risk of being cyber bullied and bullied in general. They also reported lower levels of support from family and peer groups. Students' perception of their institution's safety also informed whether students felt they were being bullied more or less as a result of their identity (Buck, 2015). The lack of support can be extremely damaging to a student's mental health. When the effects of bullying and victimization are untreated, then it led to potentially harmful and damaging outcomes for students.

One such incident of the effects of bullying on an LGBT+ student that led to a devastating outcome was that of Tyler Clementi. He came out as gay the summer before his freshman year of college at Rutgers University. During his freshman year, Clementi was exploring his sexuality and asked his roommate to give him privacy for the night of one of his dates. Clementi's roommate agreed but instead pointed his webcam towards Clementi's bed and filmed Clementi and his date perform intimate acts. Clementi's roommate also showed this to his friends, posted it on his Twitter, and planned on livestreaming the next time Clementi brought someone over (Tyler Clementi Foundation). Clementi later discovered all this three days later. On September 22nd, 2010, the same day Clementi found his roommate's Twitter, Clementi posted on his Facebook account that he was going to jump off the George Washington bridge and he then committed suicide (Heyboer, 2010). This story was covered nationally and led to many conversations surrounding cyberbullying and bullying in general. It also led to

many discussions as to what is the best way to support LGBT+ students through their academic journey in college.

In terms of what academic field the students want to major in, this is usually determined by the student's career goals. This is not always an easy choice for students and factors such as internalized homophobia, peer victimization, restricted career interests, occupational stereotypes, and testing bias make a career decision or setting a career path an even more difficult process for LGBT+ students (Chen & Keats, 2016). Due to these barriers, it is imperative that LGBT+ college students receive proper career counseling from administrators in career centers and academic advisors especially in the student's first year. Chen and Keats (2016) recommend that career counselors need to develop competence and establish a safe space for their LGBT+ students. This is important so that students feel comfortable enough to talk to their advisor and be open and honest with them. When discussing career options for students, it is also important that counselors are aware of fields that have higher forms of discrimination against LGBT+ individuals (Chen & Keats, 2016).

One reason that LGBT+ students may not feel as safe on campus is because of the practice and history of the Traditionally Heterogender Institution (THI). The THI is a concept that was developed from the notion of a Traditionally White Institution (TWI) (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). A TWI is an abstraction applied to institutions from applying Critical Race Theory to institutions of higher education to see how students of color are being supported or undermined by institutions who have a long history of predominately serving white students (Iverson, 2007). Similarly, the theory of THI uses the TWI framework and applies Queer Theory to higher education institutions. Preston

and Hoffman (2015) explain how LGBT+ resource centers and safe spaces seek to provide students with emotional, mental, and health support while providing a space on campus for students to feel welcomed and comfortable but the goals may provide some disadvantages that continuously promote the idea of a THI. The way centers do this is by focusing only on the support of students. Stating that students who are LGBT+ need mental health support and protection from homophobic acts promotes the idea that all LGBT+ individuals are suffering from mental health issues and that the campus and surrounding community are homophobic and violent in nature. Preston and Hoffman (2015) argue that centers need to do a better job promoting advocacy and social transformation as a part of mission statements and goals. The language that is used by centers often 'others' LGBT+ students and leaves them appearing to be less than heterosexual and cisgender students because of the extra support they need. Preston and Hoffman (2015) recommend that instead of 'othering' LGBT+ students, centers should promote them to become active members in the larger institution and community by expanding their horizons by getting involved in other campus and community activities. While transforming students is important and getting them more involved on campus is important. LGBT+ support services should continue to provide services for students that need that extra support such as mental health because as explained before it is still a serious issue a concern that LGBT+ students experience on campus.

LGBT+ students have also reported that just because an institution is LGBT+ friendly, it does not mean that LGBT+ students are immune from threats and acts of violence or feelings of discomfort while on campus. Through a visual and discourse study of an institution, Jonathan Pryor (2018) conducted a study in which students

illustrated places (or locations) on campus that evoked feelings of non-comfortability in LGBT+ college students. Almost all the participants had mentioned that Greek life, campus recreation, and athletics heightened feelings of self-consciousness and uneasiness. The reason the students state is because of the heavily binary system of these functional areas. Pryor wrote: “These systems are historically situated along the gender binary, rooted in masculinist traditions, and perpetuated in residential life facilities, campus locker room facilities... or through Greek organizations that provide narrow definitions of gender membership requirements” (Pryor, 2018, p. 40). To get away from the practices of a THI, institutions should be trying to incorporate LGBT+ students into all campus events and activities to prevent ‘othering’ LGBT+ students. Institutions should also investigate advocating for changes regarding residence halls and athletic facilities and practices so that transgender and non-binary students are able to participate without fear of feeling different and not welcomed. One way that institutions have tried to support students is by establishing safe spaces, but others feel that they perpetuate the idea of a THI.

In terms of feeling safe, a main force and representation of safety on college and university campuses is an office of campus safety or a police department. These individuals are meant to protect and serve but LGBT+ students have a different perception regarding police officers. In a study performed by Owen and colleagues (2018) found that in comparison to their heterosexual and cis-gender counterparts, LGBT+ students had a significantly more negative view of police officers and police departments. When looking towards public perceptions of treatment from police officers towards various communities, LGB individual’s treatment from police officers were

viewed as more fair in comparison to Latinx, transgender people, and Black populations (Owen et al, 2018).

Current Anti-LGBT+ Legislation

At the time of composing this thesis, there are a few pieces of legislation being discussed and voted on across the United States of America. An article published by the Human Rights Campaign by Ronan (2021) stated that as of March 13, 2021, there had been over eighty pieces of legislation all directly targeting transgender individuals' rights. The American Civil Liberties Union has been tracking all of the bills related to LGBT+ individuals rights and what their status is. From their tracking data it appears that most of the current bills that are being pushed through state level legislators focus in on prohibiting healthcare for transgender youth, excluding transgender youth from athletics, and restrictions on changing identification documents. There are also a number of religious exemption bills focusing on general exemption, healthcare, adoption and foster care, schools and student organizations, and other areas. If these bills passed it gives the legal right to individuals to discriminate against LGBT+ individuals based on their religion (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021). It is unclear at the time of writing this thesis if any of the laws proposed will become law in their state and what impact that may have on LGBT+ students and higher education institutions.

Safe Spaces

Safe spaces have been an idea and practice that have been highly linked to trigger warnings and political correctness in the modern day. Trigger warnings are the practice performed by leaders of groups by notifying participants of potentially harmful topics that may affect the persons mental health (Bellet et al., 2020; Boysen, 2017). The goal of

these spaces is to provide a location or space where students are able to escape microaggressions and ensure the emotional security so that the students can learn and grow (Vezina, 2017). While most trigger warnings and safe spaces are distinctly thought of being only an experience that students have in the classroom, the reality is that trigger warnings could happen anywhere on campus. Hickey (2016) argues therefore institutions should have resources and support systems set aside for when students are triggered by materials and conversations that happen throughout the institution. One way to satisfy these support systems and crisis intervention is through safe spaces (Hickey, 2016).

Safe spaces have an unclear beginning, but it seems they may have started off as community spaces for social movements such as the civil rights movement, the woman's movement, and others. One reporter links the beginning of safe spaces being in the 1960s and 1970s for feminist groups and those involved in the civil rights movements while some believe the idea came from LGBT+ movements in the 1990s (Shulevitz, 2015). Safe spaces serve as a way for people of marginalized communities to come together and escape their oppressors (Oglesby, 2019), to escape trauma or triggering events (Byron, 2017), and to engage in activism (Pasque & Vargas, 2014). Davis (1999) equated the practice of African American women in kitchens during times of slavery to safe spaces. Kitchens during the times of slavery were delegated to African American women to oversee. This then caused the kitchen to become a safe space tied to education on black history, culture, and activism for the enslaved African American people. Safe spaces can also be tied to many different social movements in the twentieth century such as how Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) served as centers of protests and recruitment for the Civil Rights movement (Allen et al., 2007).

Safe spaces on college campuses have been used by many different groups of students. Students seek out support and will try to find spaces that make them feel comfortable and free of harm. While some colleges and universities do have formal safe spaces as a resource for their students to use, some institutions do not. In times like this, students seek out other areas or people on campus that can become a mentor or a safe person for them to talk to. Students sometimes find that teachers and professors are a resource that they can rely on. Some students have found comfort and role models in music teachers (Southerland, 2018). Another space on college and university campuses that LGBT+ students may try to find a safe space in is the library. This is because libraries often have literature written by LGBT+ authors and on topics affecting the LGBT+ community (Wexelbaum, 2018). The library also offers a quiet space where students can go to escape the stress that they may experience in a day because it can be calming and take their mind away from the stressors that they hold.

In higher education, safe spaces have been used to refer to areas on campus where students or marginalized identities would be at low risk of harm, both real and perceived, and connect with fellow members of the identity groups. This has created competing ideologies on what a safe space is meant for. Some see safe spaces as a way to coddle students and not challenge them academically or socially. Others challenge this ideology by stating that safe spaces provide the comfortability of being open to sharing ideas and having an open conversation on a multitude of topics (Ali, 2017). Both arguments do illustrate that students of marginalized identities do experience some form of harm or harassment. The latter viewpoint sees this as a reason to provide the spaces but the former thinks that the harm could serve as a starting point of dialogue and discussion

surrounding the trauma which could benefit all involved parties. Safe spaces do perform a task of protecting students from potential harm just as a movie or television show warning does. Safe spaces are usually set aside specifically for individuals who need them and are not meant for anyone to utilize just as a religious text is not meant to be read by an atheist (Kelly, 2018).

While safe spaces may detract from an educational moment for the students, the harm that the marginalized student may face is not always considered in this school of thought which is inherently unjust and aligns to the ideology of people in the position of power. To keep individuals safe, one must be free from real and perceived threats of violence. Jina Fast (2018) goes further to say that:

Safety entails a positive conception... worthy of safety and protection, and as valuable in creating the shared world. When marginalized groups are denied physical and psychological right to remittance from violence, they are also denied right to recognition and instead often suffer from misrecognition. (Fast, 2018, pp. 4-5)

Fast (2018) further explicates how she creates a safer space in her classroom where she supports her students and allows for them to share. It also does not alienate opinions that may be considered problematic because students are taught to question power structures and that power structures are dynamic and can be challenged and changed. Marginalized students are also given the ability to respond or not respond meaning that they do not have to be the spoke person for their identity (Fast, 2018).

The idea presented by Fast (2018) is like the idea of a Brave Space presented by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013). A brave space is one that does not force students

to share thoughts but when a student does share thoughts and opinions, they must own how it has impacted a person included in the dialogue and that they do not directly attack someone with their statement (Arao & Clemens, 2013). Brave spaces differ from the idea of safe spaces because brave spaces allow for all thoughts and opinions to be shared and all students agree to be a participant in the discussion. Safe spaces operate under the idea that everyone has the same idea and viewpoint so that no one will be harmed or harassed. Brave spaces understand that there is a real possibility that someone will be offended and that students may be at odds with people. At that point, it would be the facilitator's role to help foster the dialogue in a way that allows for an educational outcome to be reached by all involved parties.

LGBT+ individuals have also demonstrated that when they do have a community of other individuals who identify within the LGBT+ community they feel safer (Morris, 2017). These friendships and bonds that develop are usually found in LGBT+ centered locations, organizations, and groups (Levine, 1998). These groups once they are formed help assist LGBT+ individuals in facing the heterosexism that they may experience (Weeks et al., 2001). The same could be said for safe spaces. LGBT+ students who find other students form safe space for themselves. These safe spaces will be able to assist, help and defend others once there is a threat of heterosexism. Morris (2017) further explicates that students usually develop their safe spaces or friendship networks away from institutional organizations but rather through spontaneous ways.

Constitutionality of Safe Spaces

It is also important to note that there is still debate revolving around the constitutionality of safe spaces on public college and university campuses. The Supreme

Court of United States has not ruled on the constitutionality but that has not prevented constitutional scholars from debating the issue. The most common argument against safe spaces is that it is a direct violation of the first amendment of the United States Constitution. The first amendment of the United States constitution is: “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech” (U.S. Const. amend. I). In the most fundamental understanding and interpretation of this amendment is that in the United States, its citizens are free to express themselves. It is thought that this is fundamental to ensuring that the country as a democracy functions and that all individuals have the freedom to speak on their beliefs in anyway (Emerson, 1977) except for physically violent or criminal ways (Rafidi, 2016). The idea exchange that is allowed because of the law is believed to be the hallmark of higher education and education in general (Pasquerella, 2017).

The argument against safe spaces is that when safe spaces are established it sets up a vetting process that deems that certain speech is acceptable while others is not. Also, when safe spaces are set up specifically for groups of students, such as LGBT+ students, then it is showing an institutional commitment to protecting these students while not protecting all students. Furthermore, if the Supreme Court of the United States were to rule that safe spaces are constitutionally allowed then it would give college and universities free control over how their students are educated and what topics are allowed for students to learn and would lead to colleges and universities being granted totalitarian like control over information and knowledge that their students are exposed to (Magistro, 2019). Safe spaces are expected to be a location where students are able to attend and not be challenged on ideals, feelings, or identities that they may hold. It is understandable

that some individuals would feel that if safe spaces were deemed constitutional it could lead to voices being silenced.

On the other side of the argument are those that believe that safe spaces do not violate the first amendment of the United States Constitution. The basis for this argument is that safe spaces do not seek to silence or take rights away from anyone instead they seek to protect and support individuals who are traumatized by certain conversations especially those involving conversations about sexual assault (Rafidi, 2016). The opinion of people who hold these mindsets are that safe spaces provide a location that promote the health and safety of students and boosts the confidence of those students to provide different insights. They also say that safe spaces are meant for those who need it. Students who do get triggered by certain topics being discussed on campus need those spaces so they can process the information safely. Someone who is not traumatized by the discussion are not in need of the safe space just as a student who may be traumatized by a discussion does not need to attend the potentially triggering event (Rafidi, 2016).

Student Development Theory and Safe Spaces

In higher education, student affairs practitioners are taught to use various student development theories to aid in the growth of the students that they work alongside. Various pedagogies and schools of thought surrounding student development theory exist and are used by practitioners but there is an overarching goal of helping students grow holistically during their time attending a college and university (Patton et al., 2016). Student affairs practitioners utilize theory to inform their practice and decisions with the

end goal of helping students develop new skills, viewpoints, and overall growing into a more complex individual.

One of the most prevailing theories in student development theory is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs originally called Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow theorizes that for students to achieve self-actualization and personal growth, students need to have fulfilled the other four levels of needs. These four levels of needs preceding self-actualization needs are physiological, security, social, and esteem needs in that order (Aanstoos, 2019). When applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to post-secondary students physiological is provided in residence halls, dining halls, and the infrastructure of an institution. Security is provided by campus security and police departments. Social needs are fulfilled in many ways that allow students to feel wanted. When students feel like they belong they then begin seeing the importance in them and take pride in their accomplishments and will then reach the top of their needs and will begin developing.

When looking at safe spaces, they can be applied to a few different levels in Maslow's hierarchy. At the most basic level, safe spaces provide a sense of safety and security for their students. They allow the students to escape from the harm they may be experiencing on campus. Safe spaces also connect students with other people at the college or university that want to help them and are supportive of them. This group helps the student feel like they belong and sometimes helps them see their self-worth thus fulfilling the esteem and social needs of the students. This then allows students to reach the highest level in the hierarchy of needs where they can begin growing and developing (Aanstoos, 2019).

Anthony D'Augelli (1994) also argued that social support network is an important part of developing one's LGB identity. He says that for a person to develop their own LGB social identity they must find a group of people who accept their sexual orientation and then once one goes through all the stages of identity development, they begin making varying degrees of commitment to their community (Patton et al., 2016). This type of community can be developed because of a safe space. Individuals can find like-minded and similarly identified individuals who can assist in their development of their identity. This is also supported by a study of sexual minority college students administered by Richard A. Brandon-Friedman and Hea-Won Kim (2016). In their study it was found that students who are of a sexual minority were impacted the most by support from sexuality-specific campus groups. These students were impacted on eight aspects of sexual minority identity development including identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativism, identity affirmation, acceptance concerns, identity superiority, and concealment motivation, and difficulty in the identity development process (Brandon-Friedman & Kim, 2016).

Nevitt Sanford's (1966) Theory of Challenge and Support also supports the idea of a safe space if it is being monitored correctly. Challenge and Support shows the balance that student affairs professionals must have with educating their students. In optimal cases, Sanford believes that students should have high support and challenge to promote the best growth, development, and engagement of students. Conversely, when students experience low challenge and low support, there is little progress in learning. Students who experience high challenge and low support will also experience a lot of stress and when students experience low challenge and high support, they will have no

need to put energy into a project or assignment and do not learn, grow, or develop (Patton et al., 2016). Optimally, to have students learn, institutions challenge them by pushing them out of their comfort zone but also give them enough support that they are not being challenged too much. Sanford's easy-to-follow model is used by many student affairs practitioners because it is easy to apply to many situations with students.

The Challenge and Support model of student development can be applied to the practice of safe spaces. Safe spaces offer places of comfort and support for students. Safe spaces do not provide a challenge for students directly because it is supposed to be a place where students feel comfortable. Some students in safe spaces may experience some form of challenge because they may develop a relationship with the community in the safe space. When they develop this closer relationship, it may open more discussion on different ideologies that can challenge the student's prior beliefs while simultaneously giving the student the support that they need. Safe spaces can also provide support to students who may receive challenges that are not associated with the space. For instance, a closeted student that is stressed out from academic work and family life may find relief in a safe space where they are free to be themselves and express themselves freely because of the community that they have made in the safe space.

Conclusion

For LGBT+ students, their time in higher education is a time of self-discovery and exploration. Colleges and universities history began with intolerance but the Stonewall riots in the late 1960s created a movement that would forever shape the history of the United States and the landscape of LGBT+ college students. More tolerance was found, and LGBT+ students became a welcomed member at many higher education

institutions, but this does not mean that the heterosexism that exists in society does not permeate into higher education communities. To combat the harm that students face they have found safe spaces to escape the harassment that assists in LGBT+ students' identity and overall development.

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

With the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Valdosta State University (VSU), VSU students who identify under the umbrella of LGBT+ identities were asked about how they find safe spaces on campus for themselves and their community. Once the exemption was obtained from the IRB at VSU, the researcher could then begin the research (see Appendix A). These questions were tailored to better understand the research question that guided this study: *How do VSU's LGBT+ students find safe spaces on campus?* These spaces were locations the students say are the most comfortable for them to be open about their sexuality and gender identities. These spaces are also where LGBT+ students share their ideas without risk of being harassed by fellow community members. These questions were asked during an individual interview with each participant or through email due to concerns of outing an individual. These interviews were completed over Zoom because of the outbreak of COVID-19. Before the interview began the researcher read the researcher statement so the participant had a better understanding of the study and their rights as a participant (see Appendix B). This was the case for all the interviewees except for the one interview performed over email. For that student, the research statement was emailed to the student so they could read it over. The interviews were recorded and kept secure on the researcher's computer under password protection. The recordings were then transcribed by the researcher and then the

voice recordings were deleted. The data were analyzed by the researcher. The researcher then coded and identified four themes and one subtheme from the interviews.

Narrative inquiry served as the method of data collection. Specifically, respondents were asked to share their personal narratives that were prompted by questions from the researcher. These narrative interviews were focused on personal experience stories, which Cresswell and Guetterman define as: “narrative story of an individuals’ personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations, or common folklore” (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 514). Respondents were encouraged to share as much as they could when asked questions so that the researcher and reader were able to have a full, well-rounded view of the participants experience in the different spaces. This also allowed the researcher to put themselves in the shoes of the respondent to empathize and understand what their true experience was in the space they were discussing. This allows for a more impactful and informed study.

Coding and Theming Data

Once these data were collected from the research participants, the researcher transcribed five of the interviews using an online transcription tool, Trint.com. One interview was conducted via email. Given that, her responses were typed and did not need to be transcribed, the researcher then went through the process of coding and theming the data that was most prevalent in the respondents’ answers. Coding is a process which involves analyzing participants’ responses and picking out recurring topics over multiple interviews. When these themes are repeatedly appearing then these are the codes that will develop into themes for the research (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019).

These codes were utilized to inform the researcher on the respondent’s personal experiences. When themes were developed, they provided more validity to the experience of the LGBT+ students that attend the institution. Themes were also broken down to subthemes. Subthemes are also common occurrences found in participants’ responses that be grouped together and then combined into a larger theme (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). These subthemes provide additional information that can assist in better understanding the collective stories of the group of participants.

Overview of Participants

Table 1

Individual Interview Participant Profile Table

Participant	Gender Identity	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Classification	Sexual Identity
Cam	Cisgender Female	She/Her/Hers	Hispanic	Senior	Bisexual
Walker	Cisgender Male	He/Him/His	Hispanic	Sophomore	Gay
Jay	Cisgender Female	She/Her/Hers	White	N/A	Bisexual
Tyler	Cisgender Male	He/Him/His	Black	Senior	Gay
Emily	Cisgender Female	She/Her/Hers	N/A	N/A	Bisexual
Sam	Gender Fluid	They/Them/Theirs	White	Sophomore	Queer

The six participants in the study come from a variety of backgrounds. It was important for the researcher to be somewhat selective on who was included in the study to ensure that there was a variety of backgrounds being represented. All the individuals

held an identity that would make them a member of the LGBT+ community. Most participants just had one identity that would label them as being a part of the community, except for Sam who had two identities, which can be seen in the table above, which would still put them in the LGBT+ community.

The participants were recruited through a variety of methods. The researcher knew some of the participants through their campus involvements and asked them to participate in the study. The participants who were recruited through this method are Cam, Walker, and Sam. The researcher recruited one participant through a snowball method of recruitment. The researcher was referred to Jay from Walker. Tyler and Emily were recruited through a different means. The researcher obtained permission from the Gender and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) President to send a message in the organization's GroupMe which held all the GSAs members. Two members responded to the message, so the researcher personally reached out to them to confirm that they wanted to participate to which both agreed. Like most interviews, Tyler's was conducted over Zoom due to COVID-19 and the geographic distance between the two participants. Emily had a unique situation in which she was not out to her family and was fearful of what their reaction would be to them finding out about her sexual identity. To provide the utmost safety for the participant, the researcher reached out to his thesis advisor to gain permission to have Emily fill out her interview questions through an email. The thesis advisor approved the process of data collection for Emily. However, this resulted in the researcher not being able to probe deeper into Emily's responses.

Limitations

There were a few limitations associated with this study. The first being that it is nearly impossible to cover the full cross-section of LGBT identities in the study. There were four identities associated with the LGBT+ community. Some studies show that there are technically a limitless number of identities that can be associated within the LGBT+ or queer community. Queer or being queer at a fundamental level means not straight or cisgender (University of Wisconsin – Superior). This would mean surveying or researching all of these identities in one study would be somewhat impossible. This research study serves as a starting point for further research into how specific identities within the LGBT+ community while also giving insight into the LGBT+ community at VSU.

Due to all of the interviews being conducted virtually and most of them over zoom. The researcher was unable to fully connect with the participant and see their body language which would have given the researcher insight into how the participant reacted when certain questions were asked. This could have also better informed the researcher into further probes that would reveal more information. Finally, since there was not one singular method of data collection in this study, the results may be different in comparison to if one singular method of data collection was utilized.

Preliminary Suppositions and Implications

Based on previous research, it can be deduced that the places where the students will feel safest are the library (Wexelbaum, 2018), music classrooms (Southerland, 2018), and faculties that support them inside the classrooms (Linley et al., 2016). This research is valuable because it can aid higher education employees ensure that they are

doing the best that they can to make sure that LGBT+ students feel included while they are on campus. It can also open the door for future research related to safe spaces for LGBT+ students and how campuses can become more inclusive. It could also assist in research of not only LGBT+ safe spaces but also other safe spaces such as those for racial and ethnic minorities, women, and other populations who may have a need for a safe space. This research could also prove valuable for LGBT+ students when they are looking for a place on campus that makes them feel safe and comfortable.

The results can assist in helping LGBT+ students on their collegiate journey while also lending itself to areas of research for other groups of students. With the help of the theoretical framework and literature, the results provide a perspective into how LGBT+ students move through college. This also allows for future areas research to develop and better informs student affairs practitioners on how to best support their LGBT students.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

From the interviews that were completed there are certain themes that all or most of the participants spoke on. There were a few outliers that brought in a new perspective or gave deeper insight into the issues that the research was trying to look more into. These new insights and viewpoints can also be used as a springboard for future research into why these students feel this way or have had these experiences.

On Campus Being Safer When Compared to Off Campus

All respondents noted that Valdosta State University was a safe space for them in comparison to off campus locations. Students felt that on campus they had to hide their gender identity or sexual orientation less than they have to off campus. This means that VSU whether it be the students, the physical location, or the constructed spaces contribute positively to LGBT+ students' lives while they are on campus. This puts a certain level of responsibility on VSU students, faculty, and most importantly administrators to ensure that the campus continues to be a safe space for LGBT+ individuals and that VSU affirms and appreciate the LGBT+ community on campus.

Odum Library and Front Lawn as a Safe Space on Campus

On campus, there is a specific location that many respondents have noted as a safe space. This was the Odum Library. The library is in the heart of campus and has four floors. The students who mentioned the library as a specific safe space said it is because

in the library everyone is focused on their own work. This means that there is less attention put on other individuals in the library, so people feel free to be themselves. One respondent specifically theorizes that LGBT+ individuals feel safer in libraries because they are surrounded by books which may be a form of comfort for LGBT+ students from a young age. When asked about a safe space on campus for them, Cam said: “For me, like a safe space on campus. For one, I love the library. That is where I practically like live. I practically like to live at the library because I don't live on campus” and Tyler said: “I want to go into the library more often to just to study. And I used the study rooms a lot just to like, you know, decompress with life sometimes. And I found myself a lot more as the year went on”. Jay and Emily both mentioned that the Front Lawn located near West Hall as a safe space. Jay said: “It's like on the lawn and stuff. But I know, like, the last relationship I was in was with a woman and we would go out and hang out there and stuff it like, you know, just be cute and like, you know, no one was really weird about it”. Emily said: “It was my room before I left. I liked being with my roommate. I also liked being out on the lawn”. They noted that the reason for this is because being outside allows them to be themselves. They also gave similar reasoning for the front lawn to be a safe space as they did with the library. Particularly the library and front lawn are both areas where they can be themselves and that people at these spaces are only concerned with who they are with and no other people in attendance at these buildings or locations.

Faculty, Staff, and Student Organizations Provide Safe Spaces

Respondents were also probed about who or what makes a safe space for the individual. This was because many students listed a specific location as their safe space

but through further questioning it was revealed that the students, faculty, and staff that affirm their identities that truly make a safe space for them. Some respondents mentioned that regardless of the exact location that they were in, if the people that were in the location accepted them, they truly felt like they were in a safe space. Jay explained when speaking about the GSA on campus that: “was kind of like the first time that I actually experienced, like, that much acceptance from people around me who all, like, knew how I identified and everything like openly”. The opposite is also true according to some respondents. Some respondents said that a space for them can be considered safe until someone who is not affirming of their identities enters the physical location. Sam expertly summed up this experience by saying: “Location doesn't mean anything if the people who are entering it are hateful”. Sam further explained their feelings by stating: “I can walk into Reade [Residence Hall] and I'll see a group of people who I know have not been nice to me and I'll be like, Oh, I'm out. I'll be like, I don't feel safe here anymore”.

Furthermore, students were asked to list specific university faculty and administrators who provided a safe space for them. The most common answers from the respondents were the staff in the Student Diversity and Inclusion office and the Housing and Residence Life Office. Students also listed specific professors who they have encountered during their undergraduate career. Emily stated: “Most of my professors have made it clear that their classrooms are safe spaces”. Jay also further explicated why one of her professors was very impactful on her. Jay stated: “And he was like a World Lit professor and he also like had us study a lot of like LGBTQ literature, which was really cool because, you know, I've never really had a class that like did that”. The reason that these offices and professors offered a safe space for the respondents was

because the groups did not treat anyone differently because of their gender or sexual identity. Respondents also shared that two organizations that shared these feelings were the Gender and Sexualities Alliance and the Student Government Association. These two organizations offered the same feelings for the same reason as the offices and professors.

Student Union and Outdoor Walkway as an Unsafe Space

There are general locations on campus where some respondents stated that in a larger crowds or areas with large amounts of foot traffic, they began feeling more uncomfortable. Respondents mentioned that when they are in an extremely public location, a lot more people will begin staring at them. Specific locations that respondents mentioned were the walkway in the center of campus and the student union. Interestingly juxtaposed against the library and front lawn it can be deduced that areas in which students feel like less people will pay attention to them, the safer the space is for the student to express their gender identity and sexual orientation. By this logic, students need a support group around them of people that do not pose a threat of danger so that they can be able to fully explore their identity and continue to grow and develop when they are in crowded locations.

Respondents mentioned that to combat feelings that other people may have negative attitudes towards them, the campus should make more educational opportunities available to all students to learn more about various sexuality and gender identities and social issues. One respondent believed that many students at their institution have not been exposed to queer identities or queer individuals. Therefore, they think it is imperative that these are the students that attend the trainings and educational sessions. When asked what VSU could do to make the campus safer, Sam specifically said:

“Education... Base knowledge like, hey, these people exist. They're like you and me. It's literally normal. It's not a special circumstance or anything like that. I'm a normal person and I don't know. I just feel like these people were more exposed to it”. Cam also further explained that on why on campus is safer than off campus by saying: “You know, because I was literally talking about this with someone the other day, the fact that education tends to breed, more open mindedness”. These educational moments can help make non-LGBT+ students more comfortable with the topics that affect the LGBT+ community. It is the hope that educating around these issues will eventually lead to more acceptance from the overall VSU community.

Feelings Regarding an Established Safe Space on Campus

Finally, respondents gave feedback on what they believe the benefits would be for creating an established safe space on campus. All respondents were in support of having a safe space established for LGBT+ students, some mentioned faculty and staff being included in the safe space as well. There was only one respondent, Walker, who was apprehensive regarding creating a safe space. They said that going to the space would automatically label someone as a member of LGBT+ community or an ally. This can be dangerous if there was to be a person that was looking to harm or target the LGBT+ community, but this fear could be counteracted if there was education surrounding these topics.

Regardless, most participants felt that having a safe space would be overall beneficial and helpful to the LGBT+ community. When the respondents were asked to describe what the space would look like, most students mentioned that it should be closed off but open enough for people to enter. The words that the respondents used to describe

the inside of the space were comfy, welcoming, accepting groups, artistic, and filled with music. Some students mentioned that there should be an administrator or faculty member that would be there to support students who may be in crisis and to address any issues that may arise while students are using the safe space.

These results are very useful and give great insight into how LGBT+ students find safe spaces on college campuses. The results show that students are more inclined to have a safe space with individuals who are accepting of their identities. When students are alone, they are more inclined to enjoy spaces such as a library as their safe space because they like that there are less people paying attention to them and potentially judging them for their gender or sexual identity. Students also revealed through their answers that there are spaces on campus in which they do not feel safe. These locations are usually where there is a high population of students because LGBT+ students perceive there to be more of threat to them in these locations. Students also mentioned that there are certain faculty, staff, and student organizations that provide a safe space. These results are important in how they apply to future research and student affairs practice and will be discussed further in the next chapter. Also, how the results tie into student development theories will also be analyzed.

Chapter V

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Previous literature supports a great deal of the findings from the interviews. Specifically, libraries as a safe space for LGBT+ students are found in much of the literature. As Wexelbaum (2018) explains in their article: “LGBT students may seek more alone time, seek the company of others to whom they need to explain nothing, or pursue their own interests independent from the classroom. For avid readers, this means learning in libraries” (p. 7). This is demonstrated by multiple students’ responses. The library offers a space where they do not have a risk of someone targeting them or expect anything from them. They are also allowed to do what they want within reason, and they will not be ridiculed for it.

Connection to Schlossberg’s Theory of Mattering and Marginality

When thinking about Schlossberg’s Theory of Mattering and Marginality (Patton, et al., 2016), several respondents stated that when the people they were with affirmed their identity, it gave them people they could rely on because they were accepted. The feeling of being accepted also made the entire campus feel safer for them and it expanded the people that they could rely on when things were not great for them. Students revealed through their responses that when they are in a group of people who accept their identities, they feel important and comfortable with these individuals. Mattering is also an integrated heavily into the feelings of importance and comfortability.

Students exhibited all five aspects of mattering as laid out by Schlossberg (Patton, et al., 2016). The five aspects of mattering are attention, importance, ego extension, dependence, and appreciation. The students feel that they are important and are given the respectful attention in terms of their identity when the people they surround themselves with accept their identity and do not try to change them. This also allows the student to feel important and cared for because the people who make up their safe space do care for the people they are with. For ego extension, people in safe spaces allow for LGBT+ individuals to express past traumas and they also lookout for each other when there is a threat of someone not being accepting of the LGBT+ student's identity. Safe spaces also allow for students to feel needed because they become a part of a core group that depend on each other to keep their space safe and away from harm. This can be seen in a story from Sam who stated that when they are in a public location and there appears to be a threat the students who are a part of their safe space step in to protect each other. Finally, LGBT+ students feel appreciated when they find a person or people that respects their identity and wants to see them flourish in it. The GSA on campus is an example of a community on campus that students who attend feel appreciated. The GSA also allows them to feel connected to each other and tied together through an organization (Patton, et al., 2016).

Connection to Strange and Banning's Four Environments

The respondents' responses link very well with Strange and Banning's (2015) Theory of Four Environments. The themes do indicate that there is some correlation of physical space to places being safe for students. Students expressed places like the front lawn and the library as safe spaces for them due to low attention they receive in these

places. While some students did indicate that areas with a lot of foot traffic are not as safe of a place for them. Specifically mentioned areas are the walkway between all the academic buildings leading up to the library and the Student Union. Both places at certain times do have many students walking through. The large number of students makes them uncomfortable because they are unsure of what all those students' thoughts are and how they will react to them and their identity.

Further analysis of the results also reveals that students create socially constructed environments to ensure a safe space for them. Students indicated they feel safer in environments that allow them to express themselves freely with no fear of judgement based on their gender identity or sexuality. Students also noted that the physical location has little to no meaning without accounting for the individuals who are also in the space. This means that students utilize elements of the human aggregate and socially constructed environment when their safe spaces are only with specific people. This is also true when students cite a location where they began identifying within the LGBT+ community or began exploring those identities such as a residence hall. The residence halls provided a space for the individuals to not only explore their gender and sexual identity but also to have discussions with other students who are a part of their safe space unit.

Finally, students also at times utilized the organizational environment when discussing a safe space. This is seen through faculty, staff, and student organizations that they feel provide a safe space. These places also coincide with where LGBT+ students would be able to find resources specifically dedicated to LGBT+ students like the GSA, Student Diversity and Inclusion Office, and Housing and Residence Life Office. These organizations offer student support, so students recognize these spaces as safe spaces and

feel comfortable when they are with people who are apart of these organizations or are associated with them.

Connection to Other Referenced Theories

Theories on college student development also connect well with the results from this study. For instance, with Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs (Aanstoos, 2019). The theory states that there are multiple levels of the hierarchy. The college or university as an institution satisfies the physiological needs of food, water, warmth, and rest through their housing and dining facilities. The safety needs are also satisfied by various outlets that the college or university provides such as a police or campus safety department or student positions dedicated to ensuring security. Safe spaces also begin satisfying student's needs at this level. As previously mentioned, students in a safe space look out for each other and ensure that any perceived threat is taken away from an individual by protecting them. Safe spaces also continue to the next level of the hierarchy for belongingness and love needs. Students begin developing relationships with other students in their safe spaces. While it was not directly asked, some students did mention current and previous love interests and partners as being members of their safe spaces and most of the time, the safe space is comprised of friends of the LGBT+ student. The next step in the hierarchy is esteem which includes feelings of prestige and accomplishments. While being a part of a safe space does not give a student accolades, it does give them the people who can be proud of them for their accomplishments. The top of the hierarchy is self-actualization which comprises achieving one's full potential (Aanstoos, 2019). The results from the research did show that when LGBT+ students are

a part of a safe space they do explore their identities a lot more, specifically their gender and sexual identities.

D'Augelli's theory of LGB identity development is also heavily supported by the research. LGBT+ students may not come out or will not explore what their LGBT+ identity means until college. One of the main points of D'Augelli's theory is that once students find a group of students who identify as part of the LGBT+ community, they go through the stages of identity and then make commitments to the community. Part of the coming out process is also entering an LGB community and developing an LGB social identity (D'Augelli, 1994). From the research, some students mentioned that once they came to campus, they began exploring their gender or sexual identity more in depth. This also made them more secure in their identities. Once they have the support of their safe space, LGB students did indicate feeling more comfortable in their sexual identity.

While it does not directly tie to this theory because it is focused specifically on sexual identity, it could also be applied to Sam's experience with their gender identity, because once they found a group of individuals who supported their identity exploration, they felt more comfortable exploring not only their gender identity but also their sexual identity.

A safe space functions as a space where students can express themselves. The research participants also stated this as they felt comfortable with expressing themselves and having conversations about their identity with the others in their group. In terms of Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support the LGBT+ students did state that having individuals who were there to comfort and accept them did make them feel supported. As Cam explained, sometimes a safe space was utilized to decompress from a hard day or an emotionally draining situation for them. They also relied on each other

when there were difficult times on campus. As Jay indicated in her answers, for example when there was a preacher on campus who was homophobic, she was able to rely on the members as they also comforted and supported each other.

VSU is representative of a THI. From the results gathered from the students there were rarely events hosted on campus that were focused on educating the campus community about topics related to LGBT+ identities. A THI usually has a focus on supporting LGBT+ students only when they are in crisis and much of the programming is centered on mental health issues for LGBT+ students (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). One student in particular, Sam, is a huge proponent of getting more educational events for students to learn about the LGBT+ community and the identities associated with it. The results also directly supported the idea of a library as a safe space for college students. Wexelbaum (2018) conveyed that libraries offer students a quiet space where they can go to escape from stress that they experience during the day. This almost directly mirrors some of the responses provided by some of the students.

Some students did indicate a need for a safe space for themselves, such as going to the library or front lawn, as a way to decompress from their normal everyday life and from social interactions revolving around their identities. The researcher did not probe this further, but this could be a potential hint at these students experiencing levels of depression, anxiety, pain, or heterosexist acts done on to them. Gordon and colleagues (2017) did indicate that LGBT+ students were more at risk of developing symptoms of depression and anxiety in comparison to their cis-gender, heterosexual counterparts. Students also did not mention experiencing microaggressions while on campus but did cite feelings of uncomfortableness when they did leave campus.

The results from the research do not verify all the research presented in the literature review. Specifically, no student in their survey indicated that they had experienced any form of discrimination while attending VSU. This contradicts data that suggests that around half of LGBT+ students will experience high levels of harassment in comparison to their straight and cis-gender counterparts (Rankin et al., 2010) or will experience some form of cyberbullying (Buck, 2015). While the data reported from students may not be representative of the entire population of LGBT+ students at VSU, it is to be noted that none of them had experienced any form of harassment. Also, some students did mention the certain faculty and staff are people that provide a safe space for them, no student directly mentioned that any music professor that provided a safe space, contradicting Southerland's (2018) study. It is also important to note that this may be because none of the students that were interviewed had ever taken a music class. Instead, students pointed out specifically professors in the modern language department and biology classes provided a safe space. The respondents also did not indicate any forms of feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in the recreational facilities or while attending athletic events on campus. This directly contradicts a study conducted by Pryor (2018) which stated that participants in the study stated that Greek life, campus recreation, and athletics were among the locations or offices on campus that made students feel the most unsafe.

No student specifically mentioned a need for a safe space because of a local or national homophobic incident such as the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting (Hurt & Zambelich, 2016), Tyler Clementi's suicide (Heyboer, 2010), or Matthew Sheppard's death (Brooke, 1998) but all but one did mention that they wanted a safe space to be established on campus. The reason why this may be is because all of the students that

were interviewed were not attending college or university when a nationally covered homophobic incident had occurred. Experiences and perspectives may be changed depending on if an incident were to take place. It is also important to note that no student mentioned drug or alcohol abuse at all in their responses which does not directly contradict previous theories stating that LGBT+ students are more at risk of developing these theories (Dworkin et al., 2018; Fish & Palsey, 2015; Reed et al., 2010). It is also important to note that the researcher did not probe into coping mechanisms with these students. If the research had it may have revealed data that support these claims of drug and alcohol abuse in the LGBT+ community. The same argument can also be stated for the participant's experience with COVID-19 and their sexuality or gender identity.

Since Valdosta State University does not have an established safe space or solely LGBT+ dedicated center on campus it can be deduced that the normal functions of an LGBT+ center, counseling/support, education, and advocacy (Marine, 2011), are being taken on by other administrators, faculty, and even students. While the change may be negligible if the office existed, it would be interesting to look into the effectiveness of having a center in terms of these three functional areas. Finally, in terms of overall safety of LGBT+ students, only one student mentioned VSU's University Police Department (VSUPD). Jay was the only person to say that they did not think that VSUPD was fully trained to provide a safe space for everyone on campus. This does somewhat tie into Owen and colleagues' study (2018) that stated that LGBT+ students held somewhat negative views of the police. An important note though is that some of these interviews did occur over the summer of 2020 during the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the Defund the Police movement (Gottbrath, 2020). This may have

affected respondents' answers as they may not have wanted to comment on the police department.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

As a student affairs professional who interacts with a multitude of students, it is imperative that administrators have at least a base knowledge of cultural competency to ensure that students are supported and cared for. This is also true for working with students who identify within the LGBT+ community. Student affairs administrators have direct contact with students and should support them along their developmental journey. This means assisting students in finding their safe spaces on campus. Since safe spaces are made up of students, staff, and faculty that support LGBT+ students' identities this means connecting them with resources and people that will become a safe space for them. More importantly, it also means that student affairs professionals themselves need to be safe spaces for LGBT+ college students. This means be willing to support them when times are hard, celebrating them when times are good, and developing them when applicable. Student affairs administrators also must accept everyone's identity and be willing to learn more about the identity in depth so they can be knowledgeable on what resources the student will need to be safe and successful in their higher education journey.

To ensure that LGBT+ students are getting the support they need, the data supports starting a safe space on campus for LGBT+ students, but administrators must also ensure that the individuals in the room agree to supporting everyone's identity. The data also support including more educational opportunities for students of all backgrounds to learn about issues that affect the LGBT+ community. Student affairs

administrators can provide workshops and trainings that will lead to a better understanding of the identities associated with LGBT+. This can lead to more acceptance and will provide an overall safer space on campus for individuals. These programs may already be held by offices, but it may not be publicized in a way that could attract the greatest number of students. Offices who already hold these sessions should investigate what could be done to possibly engage more student populations including offering a session on diverse identities during an orientation for new students so that all students receive the education as they enter their institution. Furthermore, student affairs professionals need to ensure that they are also going through trainings to be able to support students who are a part of the LGBT+ community because by virtue of their occupations, they are safe spaces for LGBT+ students (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2015).

Implications for Future Research

LGBT+ students have experienced overt forms of heterosexism and persecution throughout their history but have also seen the institutions of higher education evolve and become more accepting and begin to offer more resources as time has gone on. This research study also reveals several future areas of research that could be very impactful to a better understanding of how LGBT+ college students grow and develop and how institutions of higher education can further support LGBT+ college students.

Further areas of research or projects that institutions can complete is if their student population would benefit from having a safe space at their institution. Researchers can also do more research into how safe spaces aid in the development of LGBT+ individuals and to what extent safe spaces help in an overall LGBT+ college

students' journey through college. One research project that could prove useful is how and why institutions as an entity provide an automatic safe space for college students and how much more supported students feel once there is a safe space established on campus. Having an established safe space for LGBT+ college students may positively impact students who are in search of a safe space, but it also may negatively impact how LGBT+ students find a safe space because they may not feel comfortable going to a safe space out of fear of being labeled by others or fear of being outed to their already established friend group. Researchers could also look into if LGBT+ safe spaces are places that protect LGBT+ students or expose them to more risk. It could be useful to look into how do closeted LGBT+ students and out LGBT+ students differ in their patterns for finding safe spaces because there may be a large disparity, or it can be identical.

Another area of future research could be how Gender Inclusive Housing options also aid a student in finding individuals to include in their safe space. Also, looking further into Gender Inclusive Housing, an idea to ponder is if the locations where the Gender Inclusive Housing is located becomes a safe space for the LGBT+ students or if they feel like they have become labeled and are at risk of being the victim of hate. This can also be applied to other affinity groups such as for specific races and ethnicities or common interests' groups. Furthermore, other historically marginalized identity groups could be studied to determine if they go through a similar process of finding safe spaces for themselves. Specifically, students of color, female identifying students, low-income students, and first-generation college students can be a fruitful area of research. Something further that can be investigated how intersecting identities play a role in determining safe spaces. For example, do Black LGBT+ college students try to seek out

other Black LGBT+ students for their safe spaces or do they make separate safe spaces for themselves in terms of one for their racial identity and a different one for their sexual or gender identity?

Geographic location and institutional characteristics can also be an interesting area to explore. This study only focused on students who attend a mid-sized institution in Southeastern United States. It is also worth looking into if the process of a student finding a safe space is more easy or difficult depending on if the student is an out of state or in state student or if they have family that live or work in the area. Results may vary for institutions that are in more urban or suburban locations or if an institution is a larger or smaller institution. The role of which religion in religiously affiliated institutions and how that impacts on how or if students can find safe spaces may also be an interesting topic to research and discuss further.

Another interesting area of research that can be looked into that was brought up in the previous sections are if there is not an LGBT+ resource center or safe space which college or university administrators are taking on that role. Looking into the attitudes and feelings and the emotional and mental tax it takes on administrators to performing the extra roles are something that can be useful to look into. Something else that may intrigue some researchers to look into are what are college and university administrators' feelings towards safe spaces? Higher education administrators would be willing to give a different perspective that students do not have. Another area related to LGBT+ safe spaces and resource centers are to what extent have colleges and universities used them as reactionary measures after a heterosexist event has happened on campus or has made the national headlines like previously cited events.

Further research into LGBT+ attitudes toward police would also be interesting to look into and especially looking into how LGBT+ students of color feel when interacting with University police department or campus safety unit would be extremely fruitful to the further LGBT+ research and policy surrounding police funding. Further research also needs to be completed on the constitutionality of safe spaces. There are a few studies that have been completed so far but more work needs to be done to get a well-rounded view of what is allowed in a safe space versus what is not allowed or if safe spaces in general are even allowed under the first amendment.

A final area of research worth looking into are what is the direct correlation between LGBT+ degree completion, academic success, and educational attainment with the presence of an LGBT+ safe space or resource center on campus. This could also be tied into many other areas of research such as career attainment, campus pride, and student retention. Another area that can be looked into are what majors are LGBT+ students graduating in and what are the methods of support that the professors in that academic discipline offer to those students.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine how students who identify as LGBT+ find a safe space when there is not one already available to them. Safe spaces can be defined as a place where students feel safe enough to be themselves and express their gender and sexual identity freely with no risk of being persecuted or become susceptible to hate (Moran, Chen, & Tryon, 2018; Rankin et al., 2010). Students find safe spaces in locations where they feel comfortable enough to be themselves. The research also explored what factors go into the decision-making process for determining if a place is a

safe space for LGBT+ and what are the factors that play the biggest role in determining a safe space.

The research revealed many insightful feelings and thoughts towards safe spaces from six LGBT+ students on campus. The most important findings were that students did feel overall safe on campus. The participants stated that a safe space for them is one in which they can freely express themselves. This means that their gender and sexual identity would not be scrutinized by others. Some spaces that offered this to LGBT+ students are the library, front lawn, and residence halls. Another important finding was that students made a safe space with those that around them that affirm their identity. These results are important because they indicate an initiative for colleges and universities to ensure that their students feel safe and comfortable while they attend their institution. It also gives a focus to student affairs professionals to make sure that they are aware that often they become a safe space for their students. This means that they need to be educated and stay aware of this added role to ensure that LGBT+ students feel safe and supported. Finally, students indicated largely that they would support a safe space being officially established on campus.

LGBT+ students are among a group of students that historically had gone unnoticed and underappreciated as indicated in the literature review. Institutions should be aware of their responsibility to ensure a safe space on all of campus for their students. These institutions should also be willing to hear out their LGBT+ students and figure out what they can do to better support and celebrate their identity. For some institutions, this may mean establishing a safe space or celebrating LGBT+ identities more publicly and openly. Institutions can also investigate other initiatives like Gender Inclusive Housing

and analyzing policies to ensure that heterosexism is not an integrated part of their institutional identity.

REFERENCES

- Aanstoos, C. M. (2019). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*, 3.
- American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2015). *ACPA/ NASPA professional competency areas for student affairs educators*. Washington, DC: College Student Educators International
- Ali, D. (2017). *Safe spaces and brave spaces: Historical context and recommendations for student affairs professionals*. Washington, DC: NASPA.
- Allen, W. R., Jewell, J. O., Griffin, K. A., & Wolf, D. S. (2007). Historically black colleges and universities: Honoring the past, engaging the present, touching the future. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 76(3), 263-280.
- American Civil Liberties Union (2021) *Legislation affecting LGBT rights across the country*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aclu.org/legislation-affecting-lgbt-rights-across-country>
- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces. In L. M. Landreman, *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators* (pp. 94-102). Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.
- Beemyn, B. (2003). The silence is broken: A History of the First Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, College Student Groups. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 12(2), 205-223.
- Beemyn, G. (2019). Higher Education and LGBTQ+ Communities in the United States. In A. J. Clutterbuck-Cook, & H. Chiang (Ed.), *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (Vol. 144, pp. 661 - 666). Library Journal.

- Bellet, B. W., Jones P. J., Meyersburg, C. A., Brennehan, M. M., Morehead, K. E., & McNally, R. J. (2020) Trigger warnings and resilience in college students: A preregistered replication and extension. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* 26(4), 717-723.
- Boysen, G. A. (2017) Evidence-based answers to questions about trigger warnings for clinically-based distress: A review for teachers. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology* 3(2) 163-177.
- Brandon-Friedman, R. A., & Kim, H.-W. (2016). Using social support levels to predict sexual identity development among college students who identify as a sexual minority. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 28(4), 292-316.
doi:10.1080/10538720.2016.1221784
- Brooke, J. (1998, October 13). Gay man dies from attack, Fanning Outrage and Debate. *The New York Times*, p. 1.
- Brown, S. (2020, April 14). COVID-19 sent LGBTQ students back to unsupportive homes. That raises the risk they won't return. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Covid-19-Sent-LGBTQ-Students/248633>
- Brown, S., & Mangan, K. (2016, September 30). What "safe spaces" really look like on college campuses. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11.
- Buck, A. E. (2015). *Retrospective Study of Victimization by Bullying among Sexual Minority and Majority College Students: Exploring External Sources of Support to Promote Resilience* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Tennessee - Knoxville.

- Burn, S. M., Kadlec, K., & Rexer, R. (2005). Effects of subtle heterosexism on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49(2), 23–38.
doi:10.1300/J082v49n02_02
- Byron, K. (2017). From infantilizing to world making: Safe spaces and trigger warnings on campus. *Family Relations*, 66(1), 116-125. doi:10.1111/fare.12233
- Chen, C.P., & Keats, A. (2016). Career development and counseling needs of LGBTQ high school students. *British Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 44(5), 576-588
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2016.1187709>
- Clawson, J. (2014). Coming out of the campus closet: The emerging visibility of queer students at the university of florida: 1970-1982. *Educational Studies*, 50, 209-230.
- Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals. (2019, January 18). *Consortium Map*. Retrieved from lgbtcampus.org:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1uYIF3milN1euuDcLS_iXLncpsHQ&ll=-3.81666561775622e-14%2C-61.28580020000004&z=1
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). New York, New York: Pearson.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, & D. Birman, *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (pp. 312-333). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Davis, O. I. (1999). In the kitchen: Transforming the academy through safe spaces of resistance. *Western Journal of Communication*, 63(3), 364-381.
doi:10.1080/10570319909374647
- Dworkin, E. R., Gilmore, A. K., Bedard-Gilligan, M., Lehavot, K., Guttmanova, K., & Kaysen, D. (2018). Predicting PTSD severity from experiences of trauma and heterosexism in lesbian and bisexual women: A longitudinal study of cognitive mediators. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 65(3), 324 –333.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000287>
- Emerson, T. I. (1977). Colonial intentions and current realities of the first amendment. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 125(4), 737–760.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3311518>
- Eskow, D. (1969, June 29). 3 Cops Hurt as Bar Raid Riles Crowd. *New York Daily News*, p. 30.
- Espelage, D., & Merrin, G. (2016). Violence victimization among sexual minority high school students: Impact of school disorganization on mental health outcomes. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 55(10).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2016.07.228>
- Fast, J. (2018). In defense of safe spaces: A phenomenological account. *Atlantis Journal*, 39(2), 1-22.
- Fish, J. N., & Pasley, K. (2015). Sexual (minority) trajectories, mental health, and alcohol use: A longitudinal study of youth as they transition to adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44, 1508 –1527. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0280-6>

- Gay Rights Coalition vs. Georgetown University, 84-50, 84-51 (District of Columbia Court of Appeals July 30th, 1985).
- Gilbert, C., Siepser, C., Fink A. E., & Johnson, N. L. (2020). Why LGBTQ+ campus resource centers are essential. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000451>
- Gökalp, M. (2020). Investigation of relationship between subjective well-being levels and academic achievements of university students according to various variables. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 15(3), 532–539.
- Gordon, A.R., Krieger, N., Okechukwu, C.A., Haneuse, S., Samnaliev, M., Charlton, B.M., & Austin, S.B. (2017). Decrements in health-related quality of life associated with gender nonconformity among U.S. adolescents and young adults. *Quality of Life Research*, 26, 2129- 2138.
- Gottbrath, L. (2020, December 31) In 2020, the Black Lives Matter shook the world. *Aljazeera*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/31/2020-the-year-black-lives-matter-shook-the-world>.
- Hanawi, S. A., Saat N. Z. M., Zullafly, M., Hazlenah, H., Taibukahn, N.H., Yoganathan, D., Abdul Rahim, N. N., Mohd Bashid, N.A.A., Abdul Aziz, F.A., & Low, F.J. (2020). Impact of a healthy lifestyle on the psychological well-being of university students. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Research and Allied Sciences*. 9(2), 1-7.
- Harpalani, V. (2017, December 15). "Safe spaces" and the educational benefits of diversity. *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy*, 13(1), 117-166.

- Heyboer, K. (2010, October 01). Rutgers student Tyler Clementi's final days before suicide emerge in online posts. *NJ.com*. Retrieved from https://www.nj.com/news/2010/09/tyler_clementis_death_is_mourn.html.
- Hickey, J. (2016). Exempting the university: Trigger warnings and intellectual space. *First Amendment Studies*, 50(2), 70–82.
- Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2020). The lives & livelihoods of many in the LGBTQ community are at risk amidst COVID-19 crisis. Retrieved from https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/COVID19-IssueBrief-032020-FINAL.pdf?_ga=2.87330200.1264278373.1592409759-421246820.1590673497
- Hurt, A., & Zambelich, A. (2016, June 26). 3 hours in Orlando: Piecing together an attack and its aftermath. *NPR*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2016/06/16/482322488/orlando-shooting-what-happened-update>.
- Iverson, S. V. (2007, December). Camouflaging power and privilege: A critical race analysis of university diversity policies. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(586), 586-611. doi:10.1177/0013161X07307794
- Kelly, A. (2018) Political Correctness Protects More Than It Harms. In R. Bozek (Ed.) *Political correctness* (pp. 142-144). New York, New York: Greenhaven Publishing.
- Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Boesen, M. J., Bartkiewicz, M. J., Greytak, E. A., & Gay, L. (2012). The 2011 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

- Levine, M. P. (1998). *Gay macho: The life and death of the homosexual clone*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Linley, J. L., Nguyen, D., Brazelton, G. B., Becker, B., Renn, K., & Woodford, M. (2016). Faculty as sources of support for LGBT college students. *College Teaching, 64*(2), 55-63.
- Magistro, J. L. (2019). First amendment law--free speech and higher education: Can public colleges and universities use “safe space” policies to restrict speech on campuses? *Western New England Law Review, 41*(2), 371–408.
- Marine, S. (2011). *Stonewall’s legacy: Bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender students in higher education*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/aehe.3704>
- Mathies, N., Coleman, T., McKie, R. M., Woodford, M. R., Courtice, E. L., Travers, R., Renn, K. A. (2019) Hearing “that’s so gay” and “no homo” on academic outcomes for LGBTQ+ college students. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 16*(3), 255-277.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2019.1571981>
- Moran, T. E., Chen, C. Y.-C., & Tryon, G. S. (2018). Bully victimization, depression, and the role of protective factors among college LGBTQ students. *Journal of Community Psychology, 46*, 871-884.
- Morris, M. (2017). “Gay capital” in gay student friendship networks: An analysis of class, masculinity, and decreased homophobia. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 35*(9). 1183-1204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517705737>
- Oglesby, A. (2019). Safe Spaces. *Journal of College Admission, Spring 2019*(243), 46-50.

- Owen, S., Burke, T., Few-Demo, A., & Natwick, J. (2018) Perception of the police by LGBT communities. *Southern Criminal Justice Association*. 43, 668-693.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9420-8>
- Pasque, P. A., & Vargas, J. G. (2014). Performances of students activism: Sound, silence, gender, and dis/ability. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2014(167), 59-71.
doi:10.1002/he.20105
- Pasquerella, L. (2017). *Free expression, liberal education, and inclusive excellence*. Association of American Colleges & Universities.
<https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/about/FreeExpression2017.pdf>
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, S. J. (2016). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Pitcher, E. N., Camacho, T. P., Renn, K. A., & Woodford, M. R. (2018). Affirming policies, programs, and supportive services: Using an organizational perspective to understand LGBTQ+ college student success. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(2), 117-132.
- Preston, M. J., & Hoffman, G. D. (2015). Traditionally heterogendered institutions: Discourses surrounding LGBTQ college students. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(1), 64-86. doi:10.1080/19361653.2014.935550
- Pryor, J. T. (2018). Visualizing queer spaces: LGBTQ students and the traditionally heterogendered institution. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 15(1), 32-51.
doi:10.1080/19361653.2017.1395307

- Rafidi, F. (2016, December 1) Safe space and first amendment rights: Do safe spaces belong on college campuses? *Jurist: Legal News and Commentary*. Retrieved from: <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2016/12/fuad-rafidi-safe-college/>.
- Rankin, S., Weber, G., Blumenfeld, W., & Frazer, S. (2010). *2010 State of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, & transgender people*. Charlotte: Campus Pride.
- Reed, E., Prado, G., Matsumoto, A., & Amaro, H. (2010). Alcohol and drug use and related consequences among gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students: Role of experiencing violence, feeling safe on campus, and perceived stress. *Addictive Behaviors*, *35*(2), 168 –171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2009.09.005>
- Renn, K. A. (2010). LGBT and queer Research in higher education: The state and status of the field. *Educational Researcher*, *39*(2), 132-141.
- Ronan W., (2021, March 13). BREAKING: 2021 becomes record year for anti-transgender legislation. *The Human Rights Campaign*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/breaking-2021-becomes-record-year-for-anti-transgender-legislation>
- Sandoval, G. (2016, June 15). To reassure nervous students, colleges lean on LGBT centers. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.chronicle.com/>
- Sanford, N. (1966). *Self and Society; social change and individual development*. New York: Atherton Press.
- Shulevitz, J. (2015, March 21). In college and hiding from scary ideas. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/opinion/sunday/judith-shulevitz-hiding-from-scary-ideas.html>.

Southerland, W. (2018). The rainbow connection: How music classrooms create safe spaces for sexual-minority young people. *Music Educators Journal*, 104(3), 40-45.

Strange, C. C., & Banning, J. H. (2015). *Educating by design: Creating campus learning environments that work*. Jossey-Bass.

Strayhorn, T.L., Blakewood, A.M., & DeVita, J.M. (2010). Triple threat: Challenges and supports of Black gay men at predominantly White Campuses. In T.L. Strayhorn & M. C. Terrell (Eds.), *The evolving challenges of Black college students: New insights for practice and research* (pp. 85-103). Sterling, VA: Syllabus Publications.

The Trevor Project. (2020). Implications of COVID-19 for LGBTQ youth mental health and suicide. Retrieved from:

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/04/03/implications-of-covid-19-for-lgbtq-youth-mentalhealth-and-suicide-prevention/>

University of Wisconsin – Superior (n.d.) Definitions for safe zone abridged. Retrieved from:

<https://www.uwsuper.edu/genderequity/ally/upload/Definitionsforsafezoneabridged.pdf>

US. Const. amend. I.

Vankim, N. A., Corliss, H. L., Jun, H., Calzo, J. P., AlAwadhi, M., Austin, S. B. (2019). Gender expression and sexual orientation differences in diet quality and eating

- habits from adolescence to young adulthood. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 119(12), 2028-2040.
- Vezina, K. (2017). Safe spaces and trigger warnings on college campuses. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.
- Weeks, J., Heaphy, B., & Donovan, C. (2001). *Same sex intimacies: Families of choice and other life experiments*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Wexelbaum, R. S. (2018). Do libraries save LGBT students? *Library Management*, 39(1/2), 31-58.
- Wimberly, G. L., Wilkinson, L., & Pearson, J. (2015) LGBTQ student achievement and educational attainment. In G.L. Wimberly (Ed.) *LGBTQ issues in education: Advancing a research agenda*. (121-139). Washington D.C. American Educational Research Association.
- Younger, J. G. (2019, August 27). *University LGBT/Queer Program*. Retrieved January 2019, from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual & Queer Studies in the USA, and Canada plus Sibling Societies & Study-Abroad Programs:
<http://www.people.ku.edu/~jyounger/lgbtqprogs.html>

APPENDIX A:

Institutional Review Board Protocol Exemption Report



Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

Protocol Number: 04015-2020

Responsible Researcher: Ryan Campen

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Jamie Workman

Project Title: *How LGBT+ Students Find Safe Spaces.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of this research study all data (email correspondence, survey data, participant lists, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *The Research Statement must be read to the participant at the start of the recorded interview session.*

- *Exempt protocol guidelines prohibit the collection and/or sharing of audio/video recordings. Recordings are permitted for the sole purpose of creating an accurate transcript. Each recording must be deleted immediately upon creating the transcript.*

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth Ann Olphie 04.01.2020
application.

Thank you for submitting an IRB

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator
irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.

Please direct questions to

Revised: 06.02.16

APPENDIX B:

Research Statement and Individual Interview Questions

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “How LGBT+ Students Find Safe Spaces”, which is being conducted by Ryan J Campen, a Graduate Student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to see how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) college students find safe spaces on college campuses when there is not one already available for them. The research aims to see what factors are important to students in finding a safe space and what factors influence their decision. The research will also explore if participants believe that the University should establish a safe space for LGBT+ college students and what it would look like. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about how colleges and universities can better support LGBT+ college students as they go through their undergraduate career and how LGBT+ college students see safe spaces and their importance. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio taped in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Ryan J Campen at rjcampen@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

- 1) Please describe your gender identity and sexual orientation.
- 2) How accepting do you think the Valdosta State University community is of these identities? Is this the entire campus or just a select group of people?
- 3) What is a safe space on the Valdosta State University Campus for you, if any?
 - a) How did you come to discover this space for yourself?
 - b) Which is more important to this space, the people or the location, and why?
- 4) Where do you feel more unsafe on campus, when thinking your gender identity or sexual orientation?
- 5) Do you feel safer, on or off campus in terms of your gender identity and sexual orientation?
- 6) Who are some University employees that provide a safe space for you? What do they do that makes you feel safe?
- 7) Who are some University students that provide a safe space for you? What do they do that makes you feel safe?
- 8) What can Valdosta State University do to make you feel safer on campus?
- 9) Do you think that Valdosta State University should have an established safe space for queer individuals on campus and why?
- 10) What is a safe space to you? What does it look like? Who is there? What are the essential components of a safe space for you on campus?