Exploring Intersections of Identity and Service Provision Among LGBTQ Young Adults: A Participatory Action Research Approach

by

M. Alex Wagaman

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Elizabeth Segal, Chair
Cecilia Ayón
Madelaine Adelman

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the ways in which LGBTQ young adults describe the aspects of their identities, and how those identities shape their service needs and experiences. A participatory action research component was explored as a research and service approach that is sensitive to LGBTQ young people living at the intersections of multiple identities. Although it is understood that LGBTQ young people come from a variety of backgrounds, research is limited in its understanding and exploration of how aspects of identity, such as race and class, influence the lives and service needs of this population.

The data was collected through an initial set of interviews with fifteen LGBTQ-identified young adults ages 18 to 24. The interviewees were recruited from an LGBTQ youth-serving organization using a purposive sampling approach to reflect racial/ethnic and gender identity diversity. Following the interviews, eight of the participants engaged as co-researchers on a participatory action research (PAR) team for sixteen weeks. The process of this team's work was assessed through a reflective analysis to identify factors that impacted the participants' lives.

Analysis of the interviews identified key themes related to identity among the LGBTQ young people. The interviewees experienced a multiplicity of identities that were both socially and individually constructed. These identities were impacted by their immediate and social environments. The young people also identified ways that they used their identities to influence their environments and enhance their own resilience. The service experiences and needs of the LGBTQ young people in this study were directly influenced by their multiple identities. Implications for intersectional approaches to serving this population are explored. Analysis of the PAR process identified four areas in

which the young people were most impacted through their work and interactions with one another: relationships, communication, participation, and inclusion. Implications for research and service approaches with LGBTQ young people are discussed.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife who has supported and encouraged my passion for social change from the first day that we met. For all of the sacrifices that you have made to get us to this point, I am eternally grateful. And to my children, who have shared their mother with many other young people, and who have asked good questions about why we must make a commitment to help not only ourselves but those around us, I love you with all of my heart. It is my goal to pass on a better world to you.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth are a marginalized subpopulation that can be found among every other population within the United States. They are a population that crosses lines of class, race/ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, and faith. While LGBT young people may vary substantially in their experiences based on factors that include family background, geography, and the intersections of other aspects of their identity, there is one area that LGBT youth in the United States share - daily confrontation with homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism (Morrow, 2006). Since 1999, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has found in its school climate surveys that LGBT youth have reported experiences with bullying and harassment, both verbal and physical, at alarming levels (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

These forms of discrimination are embedded within the structures and institutions of United States society, and create an experience of marginalization for LGBT youth. While some LGBT young people are not as severely affected by these experiences as others, it is clear that the constant experiences of both overt and covert forms of discrimination negatively impact LGBT youth. Perceived discrimination has been found to moderate the relationship between LGBT identity and emotional distress (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009), and experiences of discrimination and marginalization have been linked to suicidality among LGBT youth (Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008).

Given the social and systemic climate for LGBT young people, putting their lives in context - in terms of their identities, experiences, and discourses – will help us to better understand the meaning that they give to their LGBT identity and how that identity is both shaped by and shaping the world around them. Such an understanding can inform social work practice in terms of advocacy and social/institutional change efforts, as well as practice level responses through programs and services. In addition, the societal cost of not addressing structural inequality and its impact on contributions that LGBT youth can make to society into adulthood are great. Research to identify effective service and research approaches can minimize this cost, and support a decrease in suicide, negative health and mental health outcomes. Furthermore, more effective services can increase success in preventive health-seeking, family outcomes and overall well-being for LGBT youth in years to come.

Similarly, giving voice through research to those LGBT young people who face injustice can strengthen social workers' ability to develop programs and services that are deeply rooted in the experiences and perceptions of those they are intended to help. The study described in this document aims to move the dialogue forward between research scholars, service providers and LGBT young people.

Assessing Service and Research Models

Risk-resilience and empowerment frameworks are the two primary service and research approaches used with LGBT youth that have been identified in the literature. These models have both strengths and limitations. Perhaps, there is even some overlap between the two. Based on the existing research, however, it is unclear how these models are being utilized in practice settings with LGBT young people, and how this population

of young people experiences and understands these service approaches. No known research has explored the value and consequences of risk-resilience and empowerment frameworks with LGBT youth, nor has research addressed how LGBT youth might envision a service or research framework or approach that fulfills their perceptions of need for support and development. In addition, the research that has been conducted on LGBT youth-specific interventions and service provision has been limited in scope as it relates to the intersections of other identities. Research on young women, bisexual and transgender youth, youth of color, youth who are not school age, and youth with disabilities are either completely invisible in the literature or severely lacking.

Unique Service Needs of LGBT Young People at the Intersections

While previous empirical studies have not noted significant differences between the service needs of LGBT youth of color and their white counterparts, Davis, Saltzburg, and Locke (2010) identified unique needs for LGBT youth of color as defined by the participants in a concept mapping process. LGBT youth who have multiple identities that face oppression experience stress differently than white LGBT youth (Hyeouk & Adkins, 2009; Barney, 2004), however little research has paid attention to the specific needs that may result from such experiences (Chung & Katayama, 1998; Sadowski, Chow, & Scanlow, 2009). This is particularly true in large urban areas.

> Queer youth in urban communities, who are increasingly non-White, immigrant, and attending schools in lower-income, underresourced communities, experience a multitude of oppressive forces that stem from their social identities as people of color, non-standard English speakers, non-Christians, and gender nonconformists, to name a few. If one takes these social, cultural, and economic dynamics into account, it becomes clear that, to work effectively with queer youth in urban communities, one has to embrace the complexities of their multiple identities and develop the capacity to understand the intersections among them. (Blackburn & McCready, 2009, p. 228)

Similarly, the unique needs, strengths and experiences of other understudied populations, such as youth in rural areas (Yarbrough, 2003) and transgender youth (Sausa, 2005), are gaps in the existing research on LGBT youth.

The Disconnect Between Research and Service

A clear challenge for both research and practice with LGBT youth is that the dialogue between service providers and scholars has been limited. While there has been a growing consciousness in practice settings of the need to be sensitive to issues specific to this population, research has not always been accessible to practitioners and the public (Alexander, 2000). This severely limits the ability of LGBT youth-specific services and programs to be evidence-based (Dankmeijer & Kuyper, 2006; Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010). For those who serve the general population ofyouth, the ability to apply the lessons learned from research to more affirming and sensitive approaches with their LGBT clients is diminished because of the research-service disconnect. Similarly, LGBT youth advocates and service providers have not always engaged adequately with researchers (Dankmeijer & Kuyper, 2006). This has contributed to a significant gap in the literature that has not captured the areas in which LGBT youth-serving organizations are succeeding in their work nor those areas in which enhancement is needed. Even more striking is the almost non-existent voices of LGBT youth themselves in defining and discussing what their needs are, as they perceive them, and how they can best be served in ways that enhance their optimal growth and development in a sometimes hostile environment.

Research Gaps

Based on the existing research, there are several key areas that are in need of research that give voice to LGBT youths' perspectives and experiences. Research in the following three areas will develop a deeper understanding that will allow social workers to identify ways to adequately respond to and work with this population. These three areas include; (1) research and service approaches, (2) services, and (3) complexity of multiple identities. Exploration of each of these areas and their intersections will begin to fill a gap in the research knowledge about LGBT youth.

The first area of research that is needed is to gain a deeper understanding of the ways that the underlying assumptions guiding current research and service approaches are viewed by LGBT youth. Services and interventions are driven by often taken for granted theoretical standpoints. Exploration of both dominant and alternative approaches to understanding LGBT youth is necessary for reframing our approaches to developing forms of evidence that inform practice. Evidence is needed that includes an understanding of the ways in which LGBT youth are both resilient and resistant as they maneuver within a homophobic and heterosexist social context. Such an understanding would support the connection between micro and macro approaches to serving LGBT youth, as well as broaden our view of both the nature of risk and the point at which service providers can, and do, most successfully intervene.

The second area of research that is needed is the ways that LGBT youth experience and envision their relationships and interactions with services and service providers designed to support their growth and development. If it is our intention as a profession to design and implement services and programs that are driven by the unique

needs and wishes of this population, then we must invest in listening to what they are. LGBT youth voices are limited in social work literature, as well as in other disciplines that seek to serve this population.

And the third area is the need to incorporate an understanding of the complexities of multiple identities, as voiced by youth, into our understanding of the experiences of LGBT youth. A greater knowledge of their needs in terms of social services and programs would greatly contribute to bridging the divide between research and practice. Tolman and Diamond, as quoted in Savin-Williams (2005), state that we need to understand "…not just whether factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and social class are statistically related to specific sexual behaviors, but how and why these factors bear a meaningful relationship to adolescents' experiences of their sexuality" (p. 190).

Current Study

This study was designed to explore LGBT young adult experiences with, and perceptions of, existing service systems aimed at meeting their needs. The focus of this research was on the following questions. How are these services experienced by the young people themselves both in and out of school settings? How might LGBT youth envision and create relationships with service providers to support both their individual well-being and social change? How is all of this shaped by their own sense of LGBT identity and its intersection with other identity groups to which they belong? These questions were aimed to infuse youth voices into the future directions of LGBT youth research and practice. Participatory action research was used to determine what value it might hold as both an intervention and a research method with LGBT youth. As stated by Russell (2005), "…given that there is so little proven prevention and intervention efforts

that have targeted sexual minority youth, we need innovations that employ theoretically sound approaches for creating institutional and individual change" (p. 15).

Importance to Social Work and the Social Sciences

This study has a number of implications for social work and the broader social sciences. The environmental context, as has been discussed, is challenging for LGBT youth. They face discrimination and harassment that can have deleterious effects on their well-being, including their health and mental health. These effects can hinder their ability to prepare for successful adulthood, particularly as we consider academic and employment outcomes. By understanding the experiences of this population with service provision, and preferred service and research approaches, social scientists can better address existing gaps in intervention development and testing (Saewyc, 2011).

More specifically, social workers are called to address issues of social and economic justice and to identify ways that marginalized populations can work, hand in hand, with us to address oppression and discrimination (NASW, 2008). While there exists several decades worth of research documenting the experiences of LGBT young people, researchers have fallen short of translating the findings into application in the form of interventions. Dankmeijer and Kuyper (2006) argue that researchers should consider in advance how their research will be used. This planning and strategic vision can lead to accountability and transferability into the policy and practice arenas. Research is only one link in the chain of intervening in the lives of LGBT youth (Dankmeijer & Kuyper, 2006). Planning for research application may also encourage the community of LGBT youth scholars to challenge the existing theoretical frameworks within which we

conduct our work, and to explore the relevance of concepts to the daily experiences of LGBT youth.

Research on LGBT youth has also fallen short of understanding the experiences of this subpopulation from the perspective of the youth themselves. This has particularly been the case in community settings. Increasing perspective taking among service providers and decision makers can support the development of programs and policies that are in the best interest of the population at hand (Segal, 2011) - in this case LGBT youth. In a time when evidence-based practice is what is being called for, we need to attend also to developing evidence that is rooted in practice (Green, 2006). LGBT youth are uniquely positioned to deepen our understanding of the practices that have worked in their experiences. In addition, as social work continues to be challenged to promote social justice and to question how our profession upholds the status quo (Belcher, DeForge, & Zanis, 2005), giving voice to those who regularly face injustice will support our ability to shape an agenda for justice that is grounded in the lives and voices of those to whom we are committed.

Serving Adolescents and Young Adults

Populations of marginalized youth are the focus of a great deal of attention and resources in social work, both in research and practice. Adolescence and young adulthood are times of transition in the United States, when expectations for behavior and levels of responsibility increase dramatically. The transitions associated with this developmental period serve as opportunities for social workers. Socially, the investment in young people is wise because it supports healthy development into adulthood, which can have a ripple effect into relationship patterns and parenting outcomes, as well as civic and social

engagement. Intervention at this time in a person's life has the potential to minimize the need for services in adulthood. In addition, social workers are called professionally and ethically to be advocates for social justice. Supporting young people to be equipped to serve as their own advocates enhances the goals of the profession and the betterment of society.

LGBT Youth

More specifically, research and practice with LGBT youth is still in its infancy as compared to many other populations served by social workers. In fact, much of what exists was published within the past two to three decades (Saewyc, 2011). Those at the forefront of this work have set the stage for further development and research that enhance practice with this population. There is no doubt that the increase in empirical research literature on LGBT youth since the 1980's has had a positive impact on raising awareness of the unique risks faced by this population, and the impact of a homophobic and heterosexist social environment on their well-being (Thompson & Johnston, 2003). However, it is staggering to compare the number of studies that make service and intervention related recommendations to the relatively minute number of studies on LGBT specific intervention programs or population specific services (Saewyc, 2011).

This comparison is particularly striking if we are to limit our scope to community-based research. While it is true that many LGBT youth spend a large portion of their time in the school environment, it is important to recognize that (a) school is not the only environment impacting young LGBT people, (b) research has identified that many LGBT youth drop out of school or have significant numbers of absences, and (c) young people beyond high school age must still maneuver in community spaces that pose barriers and

challenges to healthy development. Therefore, it is crucial to translate existing and future research into applied service approaches and interventions (Dankmeijer & Kuyper, 2006).

A Note about Identity Labels

Up to this point, I have used the label "LGBT" (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) to refer to the group of young people on which this study was focused, and with whom it will be conducted. This acronym has been embraced by mainstream organizations and members of the population who identify as sexual and/or gender identity minorities. The use of this acronym is for the purpose of using commonly understood, and used, terminology to refer to the identities of this group of young people, but with a clear understanding that these may or may not be terms that the youth themselves use or identity with. This has, in part, been addressed by the young people and researcher as part of this study as outlined in the methods chapter. For the purposes of providing a clear introduction and review of the literature (that, for the most part, also uses this terminology), I have used the acronym LGBT. However, at times I have used the term "queer" as a more inclusive umbrella term that is sometimes used to capture the spaces between the L, G, B and T in the traditional acronym. In other words, some youth and adults may identify as sexual and/or gender identity minorities, but not as one of the four identity labels within the LGBT acronym.

It is important to recognize that the term "queer" is both generational and contextual in its use and acceptance among LGBT-identified people. For many, it is a term that has been used in a derogatory and hurtful way. For others, its use is a form of reclamation, and theoretically "queering" has been used to refer to the process of calling into question those practices and norms within society that are taken for granted, such as

the binary of male and female as gender categories to which has been added only one other option - transgender. In many ways, LGBT youth have expressed that their very existence and visibility is a queering. It is for these reasons that LGBT, LGBTQ and queer are terms used throughout this dissertation.

Presenting Research Findings: A Note

There are two aspects of the presentation of findings from this study that are worth noting for the reader. First, in alignment with the theoretical approach and the methodological underpinnings of this study, numbers of young people that shared experiences within each theme or concept will not be shared. In the attempt to raise up voices of marginalized populations, it is not the number that is of value but rather the experience that voice represents. This is particularly true in areas of research for which so little is present in the existing literature. The emphasis in this study is less on generalizability or other positivist standards of validity, and more on transferability. Do the voices of the young people in this study give us insight that might support further exploration or theorizing in future research? Do their voices give us insight into populations that have traditionally been silenced or invisibilized based on research methods that emphasis quantification? This is not to say that population-based samples and counts of LGBTQ young people should no longer be sought after by research scholars. Indeed, numbers often drive policy and funding. What is of import is that the numbers do not overshadow, or limit access to, the diversity and complexity of experience within a population that requires attention and support from professions such as social work.

Second, in contrast to a common presentation of research findings among qualitative studies, this study will not use pseudonyms of its participants as a way of linking the quotes from each individual. This is done, in part, because of the nature of the sample and the context within which the study was conducted. The depth of the stories and experiences shared by interviewees may lend themselves to identification of the young people. Such identification could pose a risk to the participants, particularly those who are undocumented, given the political climate toward immigration in Arizona during the timeframe of this study. In addition, the complexity of confidentiality was furthered by the fact that over half of the interviewees were engaged in the participatory action research component of the study, during which they gave consent to be identified as research team members, and presented their research within the community. As such, to maintain the anonymity of the personal stories of the participants, the researchers are numbered within dialogue quotes in chapter 6 to allow for linkages for the reader. They are not, however, consistently numbered between dialogue quotes.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Section I: LGBT Youth/Young Adults and Their Experiences

Identification of LGBT Young People

Knowing who LGBT young people are and how to identify them for the purposes of research and service provision is a complex issue. Savin-Williams (2005) addresses some of these issues in a critical review of the literature. As he points out, there has been considerable inconsistency in the existing literature in terms of defining which youth fall within this population. Some researchers use association with an LGBT youth serving organization or some form of self-identification. Primarily, this assumes two things. First, that LGBT youth are in need of services and therefore can best be accessed through programs and agencies designed to meet their needs. And second, that having an LGBT-related identity or self-identifying as one of the respective labels falling under the acronym umbrella (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) is necessary to being included in research. Savin-Williams (2005) problematizes the latter of these by highlighting examples of youth in his own research who express that these labels have little to no meaning for youth today. His assertion is that "gay" has either an outdated meaning or has become so mainstream that it has little or no connection to young people's perceptions of themselves. It should be noted, however, that Savin Williams' sample of youth from whom he drew these conclusions had an over-representation of educated, White young people (Diamond, 1998; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000).

As research on LGBT youth has strived to be more empirically-based through the use of population-based samples rather than convenience samples (Savin-Williams, 2005;

Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009), the issue of identifying LGBT youth has become further complicated. Studies that have used this sampling approach, in an attempt to compare risk factors between LGBT youth and their heterosexual counterparts, have focused on school-based samples and/or samples drawn from larger health-related studies on adolescents. These efforts have resulted in multiple methods of identifying primarily LGB youth, including categorical, survey-based questions that ask youth to identify their sexual behaviors, physical and/or affectional attractions, and/or sexual fantasies. Some studies have used identity scales that include categories such as heterosexual, mostly heterosexual, bisexual, mostly homosexual, homosexual/gay/lesbian and unsure (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009). In some cases, due to the limited number of young people who identify in population-based surveys as LGB or homosexual, these categories have been collapsed to include all young people who identify as anything but "purely" heterosexual into the LGB category (Savin-Williams, 2005). All of these are problematic in some way, particularly for young people who are exploring and forming their sexual identities in developmentally appropriate ways.

LGBT Identity

The above forms of identification highlight one of the key challenges to the LGBT umbrella identity, which is the conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity. Some researchers have completely separated the two by focusing either on sexual orientation with a concentration on the LGB components of the population or by focusing solely on gender identity with a focus on transgender youth. Some scholars recognize and explore the intersections between the two (e.g., McCready, 2010), but this is rare particularly within social science research. An approach that separates the two

aspects of identity has value in that it allows for specification of the unique needs of youth dealing with one or the other of these aspects of identity and its perceived deviation from the societal norm. However, what has not been adequately explored in the literature (and is directly tied to issues of identity and identification) is the way in which young people are (a) queering themselves in ever more complicated ways with an ever-changing matrix of identities related to sexuality, gender identity, gender expression, and relationship patterns, and (b) identifying themselves as a broader community or population with both unique and common needs. The issue for the larger LGBT community is whether these differences in needs or experiences for people who identify as sexual minorities or as transgender are a point of division, or if, in fact, the population capitalizes on its marginalized position by coming together to highlight its commonalities. Again, because there has been so little research, the answer is unclear, and may be linked to generational status when social and political contexts are taken into account.

Identity intersections. Yet another aspect of identity and identification is the intersection of multiple identities facing societal oppression. While Savin-Williams (2005) identifies the traditional label of gay as being outdated and inapplicable to youth today, what he identifies as being influenced by greater openness and visibility of LGBT people could also be as a result of resilience and adaptation to cultural factors and multiple forms of discrimination. For example, communities of color have associated "gayness" with "whiteness" (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010). While much of the literature has framed the experiences of LGBT people of color as having added stigma to deal with from within their racial or ethnic community (Huang, Brewster,

Moradi, Goodman, Wiseman & Martin, 2010; Morrow, 2006), little has been written to explore the ways in which LGBT people of color maneuver their multiple identities that allow for active engagement in multiple populations or communities. One way in which this has happened is through the formation of new identity labels. For example, the Unity Fellowship Church, a predominantly African American faith movement geared toward creating a place of Christian acceptance for LGBT people, has used the phrase "same gender loving" to identify aspects of its membership. Similarly, the term MSM (men who have sex with men) has been used to refer particularly to Latino and African American men who are engaging in same-sex sexual activity, but may not identify as a part of a group that is under the LGBT umbrella of identities.

Because, as previously stated, LGBT young people cross multiple identity groups within society in terms of race, ethnicity, class, faith tradition, nationality, language, ability status, etc., the unique intersections of their identities create opportunities for culturally specific language and identity labels to emerge. This is further illustrated in the work of Blackburn (2005) who explored the discourse patterns of a group of black queer-identified youth who participated in a LGBTQ community center. Blackburn (2005) found that the youth used a blend of racially-specific language patterns with their own queer-specific language in what the group identified through the process of creating a dictionary as "gaybonics". The use of this "new" language gave the youth power to assert their identities in homophobic contexts, and it allowed for a sense of intimacy between the youth as they taught and learned the language that they had created. Blackburn's (2005) research emphasizes that race and sexuality cannot be explored in isolation. Indeed, research on LGBT youth must take into consideration the challenges and

strengths related to having multiple identities that face oppression (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Barney, 2003).

Overall, research on LGBT people of color is limited regardless of age. The literature that does exist (both empirical and nonempirical) focuses on men, and African Americans and Latinos at much higher rates than women and other racial/ethnic groups (Huang, Brewster, Moradi, Goodman, Wiseman, & Martin, 2010). Research that does exist is often modeled on the identity development framework (Chung & Katayama, 1998), or is focused on risk factors (Barney, 2003). A systemic exploration of the experiences of LGBT American Indian, or First Nations, youth with homo/transphobia is largely missing from the research literature. Two-spirited people were an accepted and valued part of many tribal communities until missionaries and European colonizers reframed this important role within tribal culture (Balsam, Huang, Fieland, Simoni, & Walters, 2004). This history and the resulting institutions that limit the tribal communities' ability to support their LGBT youth are overlooked. Beyond racial and ethnic identity, other areas of identity intersections for LGBT youth are nearly invisible in the literature.

The Experiences of LGBT Young People in a Social Context

Understanding the social context within which LGBT youth and young adults are functioning and developing as emerging adults is key to identifying strategies to best support this population. LGBT youth, since the turn of the century, have experienced ever-increasing levels of visibility. Huge strides have been made to address homophobia and heterosexism in important institutional settings that generally impact LGBT people, such as the United States government, military, corporations, and schools. However, it

cannot be assumed that LGBT youth no longer face discrimination and harassment at levels that can affect their well-being. (Alexander, 2000; Bernal & Coolhart, 2005; Blackburn & McCready, 2009)

School harassment. Every two years the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducts a school climate survey to understand the experiences of LGBT or queer-identified youth in US schools. The most recent findings show that 82% of the LGBT youth who participated in the study had experienced verbal harassment at school in the past year based on sexual orientation, and 64% based on gender expression. The rates of physical and verbal harassment found in the 2011 survey represent the first significant decline since 2001 (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). The survey encompasses students in both middle and high schools. A 2005 GLSEN publication, *From Teasing to Torment*, reported that LGBT students nationally are three times as likely as their heterosexual peers to not feel safe at school. LGBT youth of color are even more likely to feel unsafe (Gastic & Johnson, 2009). However, the 2011 GLSEN National School Climate Survey found that African American and Asian/Pacific Islander students reported lower levels of physical and verbal harassment than their White, Hispanic/Latino, and multiracial counterparts (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). Understanding the experiences of LGBT youth in schools is crucial given the amount of time that young people spend in school settings, as well as the common overlap between a young person's school network and community network.

In a Massachusetts study conducted in 2002, LGB students were twice as likely to feel unsafe at school, and 47% of them had seriously considered suicide. Similar findings of increased risk for suicide were reported in the UK in a study that found that students

dealing with bullying and harassment on their own (which is common in schools with little or no support) are at greater risk for self-harm and other destructive behavior (McDermott, Roen, & Scourfield, 2008). Harassment and bullying increase students' risk of depression, suicide, academic failure, dropping out of school, and substance use (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, & Jones, 1997). While LGBT youth are at risk due to stigma and prejudice experienced in other settings, such as home and in their community, it has been found that a positive school climate can actually moderate some of the general risk that LGBT youth face in these environments (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009).

It is important to acknowledge that students' perceptions of a school climate are what drive their behavior. LGBT students who attend schools with policies in place to protect their rights are more likely to perceive a positive environment (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). Similarly, perceived discrimination can create emotional distress for students, which in turn increases depression, suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviors (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009).

Inaction among school staff is a recurring theme within the research on harassment of LGBT youth in schools. Their inaction does not appear to be due to teachers not knowing that the harassment is happening. In studies done with educational leadership participants, teachers have reported observing anti-gay harassment at the same rate as LGBT youth (Stader & Graca, 2007). In many cases, school staff who identify as LGBT may feel unable to act out of fear for their job and harassment targeting them (Macgillivray, 2008). Teachers also may be unclear about their role. Over 25% of teachers surveyed across the country reported that they do not feel an obligation to ensure

a safe learning environment for LGBT students (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). Few principals believe that anti-gay harassment is a frequent occurrence in their schools (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2008).

Family conflict and responses to LGBT young people. LGBT young people face experiences of discrimination in a number of settings, and in ways that are often complex. While many marginalized groups face discrimination primarily from outside of their own family or community, many LGBT people must withstand such experiences from within their families and communities as well. For youth, in particular, the inherent dependence on a parent or guardian puts them at risk of losing basic needs such as housing and financial resources as a result of being open about their LGBT identity. Very little research has documented the ways in which family conflict around a child's sexual orientation or gender identity manifests itself. Of the studies that do exist, youth report fear of family and parental responses (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009), which include physical assaults and other forms of abuse (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005), and the child being forced out of the home (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009). As reported by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless (2006), LGBT youth are significantly over-represented among runaway and homeless youth. A large portion of these young people become homeless as a result of family conflict (Ray, 2006). Research also suggests that parental rejection and a lack of engagement in the lives of LGBT youth's lives may result in higher risk-taking behaviors (LaSala, 2007), and poorer health outcomes (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanches, 2009). More recently, evidence suggests that sexuality-specific support from parents

increases the likelihood that youth will feel affirmed in their LGB identity (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2012).

Discrimination from service providers. While LGBT young people are often in need of support and services as a result of their experiences, social service agencies may not be a welcoming environment. Some LGBT youth find that the services available to their heterosexual peers are not welcoming or affirming (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010; Llera, & Katsirebas, 2010), and that systems and institutions that are in place to protect them (such as the juvenile court and criminal justice system) are in fact disproportionately sanctioning LGBT youth (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Majd, Marksamer, & Reyes, 2009). LGBT youth who find themselves without housing often find that traditional shelters are not safe spaces for them (Ray, 2006). Many LGBT communities have created LGBT youth-specific programs and centers in order to counter these experiences (Peters, 1997). Unfortunately, studies on the experiences of LGBT youth who seek services is limited (Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008), as is any analysis of existing programs that take place outside of the school setting.

Responding to narratives and creating counter-narratives. Because the challenges faced by LGBT youth and young adults are often as a result of a hostile or less than affirming social context, it is important to understand the larger narratives that have been established for LGBT youth, and to which they respond in multiple ways. Talburt (2004) uses the phrase "normative constructions" to define, in part, the concept of a narrative. As she explains, adults have traditionally developed stories or narratives in society about what the end result should be for adolescents in general as they mature into adulthood. These narratives also divide adolescents into subcultures or subpopulations

for whom the expected rebellion or "storming" is characterized as risky or dysfunctional. LGBT youth are one such subpopulation (Talburt, 2004). The existing narratives for LGBT youth in the United States are parallel to what is seen in much of the social sciences – a binary between what is functional or normal in terms of responses and coping to the existing social context, and what is abnormal (Bernal, & Coolhart, 2005; Cohler, & Hammack, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005).

One of the most commonly used narratives related to the experiences of LGBT youth is the coming out narrative, which has been illustrated through the development of coming out or identity development models for LGBT people. These models have been used by social scientists to identify factors associated with "healthy" identity development and to provide interventions that enhance coping strategies for dealing with the barriers to "healthy" development (Morrow, 1993; Bernal & Coolhart, 2005). They were traditionally developed based on the experiences of white males (Crisp & McCave, 2009), and have been criticized for privileging the male experience (Savin-Williams, 2005).

For LGBT people, there are many such narratives that have been created based on privileged social locations. For example, Mary Gray (2009) in her research on LGBT youth in rural Appalachia explores the coming out narrative that in order to have a "good" life as a queer-identified person one must move to the city. This narrative conveys that only in the city can LGBT people truly be themselves. Mary Gray identifies how rural youth, particularly those who do not want to leave their homes or do not have the financial means to do so, create a counter-narrative in which they negotiate their identities within the given cultural norms. At the same time, the youth she studied created

spaces online to assert the pieces of their identities that could not be fully expressed elsewhere.

Critical race theorists use the concept of counter-narratives or counter-storytelling as a way of privileging the stories and narratives that people create for themselves, particularly in response to oppressive conditions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Many such counter-narratives exist among LGBT youth, who often are fed social messages of shame and deviance based on their identities (Hillier & Harrison, 2004). Ungar and Teram (2000) found through a grounded theory process that young people have better well-being when they can exercise power over the narratives that are used to refer to them, and that often serve to define them in social contexts. These authors encourage mental health providers to support youth as they "drift" toward discourses that allow them more control over their personal identities.

Similarly, Hillier and Harrison (2004) found that although the youth in their study were well aware of the destructive narratives that exist about LGBT people, they had a number of strategies that were used to contradict, delegitimize, and otherwise counter those narratives in ways that supported their own positive sense of identity. Counter-narratives can be identified as one form of resistance in which LGBTQ youth are asserting agency against the societal structures that confine them. Other forms of resistance include such acts as self-defining, finding symbols to create visibility and connection, creating new "labels" and pronouns, creating queer autonomous zones (Peters, 1997), and participating in activism in the institutional settings that often shape their lives (Craig, Tucker, & Wagner, 2008).

Resilience and protective factors among LGBT youth. Given that we know that LGBT youth are using creative coping strategies to negotiate the trans/homophobic and heterosexist environments within which they must function, it is unfortunate that there is a paucity of research on resilience generally, and protective factors more specifically, among LGBT youth (Savin-Williams, 2005; Saewyc, 2011; Russell, 2005). As will be discussed later, there may be a need to more clearly define resilience for youth who function in a context that is oppressive. Russell (2005) purports that our risk and resilience research has been traditionally focused on the individual rather than putting the individual within a context. Research on GSAs in school settings has begun to identify the connection between school environment factors and the experiences and outcomes of LGBT youth (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009). For example, an LGBT student's perception of his/her school environment as being affirming has protective effects. Perception of affirmation is influenced by such factors as relationships with teachers (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009), the presence of a GSA (regardless of participation), and school policies that are affirming of LGBT students (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Focusing on risk and resilience in both micro and macro terms is crucial to understanding the unique dynamics between youth and their environments, and for making space to contextualize the experiences of LGBT youth in ways that honor the differences they have in other areas of identity.

What we know about protective factors is that supportive adults, both within and outside of the family, are key to the well-being of LGBT youth (Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Torres, Harper, Sanchez, & Fernandez, 2011; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanches, 2009). In fact, Gastic and Johnson (2009) found that informal mentorship between teachers and

LGBT-identified students was particularly protective for sexual minority young women of color. Unfortunately, this group was the least likely to receive such mentorship within the study sample. The variety of ways that youth have characterized their natural mentoring relationships, including how they are formed, what the relationship looks like, and what is most beneficial about them (Torres, Harper, Sanchez, & Fernandez, 2011), calls for further research in this area to identify the key components of these protective relationships.

What has also been suggested in the literature is that the unique discourses – language and ways of being in the world – of LGBT youth may be protective and in fact forms of resilient resistance. Blackburn (2005) found that youth had ways of interacting with one another that were viewed as preparation or a form of strengthening them to deal with the experiences of harassment and discrimination that they may face in their daily lives. Forms of resilient resistance like "gaybonics" (Blackburn, 2005) or "gay boy talk" (Mutchner, Ayala, & Neith, 2005), may in fact be protective factors that can be built upon to increase the effectiveness of interventions that target LGBT youth (Mutchner, Ayala, & Neith, 2005). First, however, they must be identified and understood within the context of the time, place and unique identities of the youth involved.

Section II: Approaches to Serving LGBT Young People

General Service Approaches

There have been a number of service approaches posited in the literature intended to inform service provision and interventions with LGBT young people. These are summarized below. To date however, based on a thorough search of the literature, it appears that only school-based strategies and disease-focused interventions (Blake,

Ledsky, Lehman, Goodenow, Sawyer, & Hack, 2001) have been formally tested through research to determine their effectiveness in application. Intervention scientists have begun to examine the ways in which existing intervention models could be adapted to meet the specific needs of LGBT youth (Holleran Steiker, 2008), but no adaptations have been formalized or tested for efficacy and no known research has been conducted on any existing differences in treatment outcomes for LGBT youth receiving interventions or services intended for a more general population (Gamache & Lazear, 2009).

In their approaches to meeting the needs of LGBT youth, social work scholars have recognized the importance of addressing both the micro level and macro level needs of LGBT youth (Morrow, 1993; 2004). Practice approaches for LGBT youth often combine a call for attention to both the individual needs of LGBT youth and the broader environmental factors that can be impacted through advocacy (Morrow 2004; Crisp & McCave, 2007). Sadowski, Chow and Scanlow (2009) combined micro and macro level perspectives, using a feminist psychology lens, to propose a relational assets approach to program development with LGBTQ youth. This service approach builds on the unique strengths and protective capacity of relational connections in LGBTQ young people's lives, while also acknowledging the dynamics of homophobia and heterosexism that can create relational disconnections for this same population of youth.

Mutchler, Ayala and Neith (2005) took a similar approach to understanding the context of the lived experiences of young, gay males and drew from resilient experiences of their research participants with safer sex encounters to guide the development of HIV prevention programs. And Bernal & Coolhart (2005) emphasize the need for researchers and practitioners to identify the relational structures and processes that are used by LGBT

youth to cope with the stress and sometimes trauma related to living in a society that pathologizes LGBT identity. Understanding the strengths of youth who overcome the challenges and are functioning well is just as important as understanding those who do not fare as well (Bernal & Coolhart, 2005).

Crisp and McCave (2007) pose a gay affirmative practice approach with LGBT youth that comes out of the cultural competence model of social work service provision. Gay affirmative practice is not a set of techniques or methods but rather offers a set of guidelines or principles for working with LGBT people in general. The practice model takes both a micro and macro level approach to understanding the experiences of LGBT youth, and acknowledges that existing coming out models were established based on the experiences of white gay men and lesbians. However, the model still encourages the use of coming out models as a framework. Another limitation of this practice approach is that while it encourages social workers to identify gay affirmative community resources, there is no clear operationalization of what constitutes an affirmative resource or guidelines for how to identify one.

Cohler and Hammack (2007) pose a life-course approach to understanding the development and needs of LGBT youth. This approach focuses heavily on understanding the context, historically and socially, within which LGBT youth are forming and expressing their identities. This, in many ways, challenges the notion that a coming out or identity development model could be applied in any meaningful way across settings and generations.

While these service approaches or general models for working with and understanding LGBT youth are helpful, they have not been responded to or scrutinized by

LGBT youth themselves. In addition, the models give limited information that could guide practice behaviors or advocacy efforts that support LGBT youth. In other words, their relevance and effectiveness in practice settings are unknown. In fact, this is a trend within LGBT youth-specific research and literature. Methods of service delivery and other forms of intervention are scarcely mentioned other than in the form of intervention recommendations, or as a disease-focused intervention such as HIV. The one setting in which literature does exist is the schools, which is discussed later.

Place-Based Service Provision for LGBT Youth

Mental health centers. Although limited, research has identified more specific techniques or approaches to serving LGBT youth by describing specific ways that a service may be provided or the context within which it has been provided. For example, Llera and Katsirebas (2010) describe the use of "truth telling" in a clinical/counseling setting with adolescent lesbians. This method has traditionally been used with African American youth, and involves a narrative process in which the young person puts personal experiences of discrimination within a social context with the goal of minimizing internalized oppression. Given that mental health issues have been raised as a concern with serving LGBT youth (Ungar & Teram, 2000), it is not surprising that two other sources describe LGBT specific programs that have been offered in community mental health settings (Travers & Paoletti, 1999; Medeiros, Seehaus, Elliott, & Melaney, 2004).

LGBT-specific support groups and centers. The support group environment was one of the first spaces created in response to the specific needs of LGBT youth (Peters, 1997). However, very little has been written about the process or outcomes of

such an approach. In 1997, Peters published research on experiences with such a support group, identifying themes within the topics addressed during the group. Similarly, the existing research on the work of LGBT youth-specific programs with LGBT community centers and on LGBT youth-specific centers or drop-in programs is severely lacking (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010). This is problematic, and a key illustration of disconnect between the research and practice communities. There are hundreds of LGBT-specific, youth-serving organizations across the United States. However, the successes and challenges of such organizations are not being documented within the research literature. The connection between the two has generally been limited to the identification of a community-based or convenience sample, which was the primary form of accessing LGBT youth for research for a number of years and has come under scrutiny for not adequately representing the population and/or offering empirical evidence that is rigorous enough to form a valid conclusion about how LGBT youth compare to their heterosexual counterparts (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Schools. The existence of bullying and harassment as it is experienced by LGBT youth is well-documented (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Macgillivray, 2000). There are a number of ways that the problem of anti-gay harassment in the schools has been addressed, from both policy and practice approaches.

GSAs and student organizations. In 1984, the federal Equal Access Act was passed. This law guaranteed students' right to hold meetings on school campuses that received federal funding. It created the concept of "limited open forum" which allowed students freedom of speech as long as meetings/groups were voluntary and student-

initiated (The Equal Access Act. 20 U.S.C.S. 4071-4074, 1984). The limited open forum existed whenever a school allowed a group of students to meet around a non-curriculum issue, and established the foundation for the legal right of students to organize and maintain Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools. GSA's are a primary mechanism for addressing homophobia and heterosexism in school settings. Gay Straight Alliances are student-initiated organizations that create a safe space for LGBT youth and their allies. They are often also used to address issues within the school that threaten the safety and well-being of LGBT youth. The goal is to build a sense of community that is based on respect and understanding within schools for LGBT students (Robinson, 2009). Research has shown that the existence of a GSA in a school improves the perception among LGBT students in terms of how safe the environment is, and this is not limited to the students who participate in the GSA as members (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010).

LGBT students and their allies have also been known to organize collaboratively with other students who have similar issues or concerns. For example, students who are interested in issues related to diversity and inclusion may join together to form an organization that generally promotes these areas but also includes addressing such issues as anti-gay harassment. In smaller communities and often in rural areas this is one way that students can both build a collective mass (relatively speaking) and fly under the radar in terms of the controversial nature of dealing with sexual orientation in the schools (Gray, 2009). Advocates for LGBT youth have mixed feelings about this approach because, while it allows students to engage in change efforts in the schools, it may mean that anti-gay harassment becomes an after-thought in the group's work. Clearly, however, the ability of students to organize, create visibility, and hold the school (students,

teachers, administrators) accountable for the safety of LGBT youth is an important piece of how change has been happening.

Anti-bullying efforts. States vary in how they specifically address anti-gay harassment or bullying. For example, in seventeen states and the District of Columbia the bullying policy includes an enumeration of the identity categories that are protected under its domain, including sexual orientation and gender identity expression. Two additional states include sexual orientation but not gender identity. In twenty-six states, state law prohibits bullying in schools but there is no enumerated list as to who the law applies to, which leaves districts to make their own decisions about whether or not LGBT students will be afforded the same protections. (Human Rights Campaign (HRC), 2012) The argument in some states is that all students deserve to be safe and will be protected. However, as has been discussed, certain groups of students such as those who are sexual minority youth, or are perceived to be, are at greater risk for bullying and harassment.

Many of the state policies against school bullying are accompanied by bullying prevention and intervention programs, few of which have been empirically evaluated (Hansen, 2007). However, these programs (as with the policies) are targeted at reducing or eliminating the bullying behavior rather than the underlying attitudes and prejudices that drive the behavior. They also rarely address the school environment, which has been found to have an enormous impact on the bullying behaviors and their effects. Many teachers and school administrators are ill-equipped to address, let alone stop, anti-gay harassment. This inaction creates an environment of silence and can compound the negative effects of harassment and bullying for LGBT youth. (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Hansen, 2007; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

Limits of school-based interventions. While schools are a space in which many LGBT youth spend a large portion of their time, which clearly can have a lasting impact on their well-being, it must also be acknowledged that LGBT youth may not be reached by interventions within the school setting. Research has indicated that GSAs and other school-based strategies may not be welcoming or meet the needs of LGBT students of color (McCready, 2004). Additionally, if, as research suggests, LGBT youth have a higher rate of dropping out or missing school then school-based interventions and strategies may not reach those who have left or been pushed out of their school setting. Finally, the exploration of school-based interventions raises the question of who LGBT youth are in terms of age. Many community-based, LGBT youth-serving organizations identify their target population in a way that is inclusive of both school-age youth and those transitioning into adulthood (up to age 24). If, in fact, LGBT youth range in age from 12 or 14 to 24, then school-based interventions and advocacy strategies will not impact them all.

Section III: Approaches to Researching LGBT Young People

A Risk-Based Approach with LGBT Young People

Most research that has been conducted on LGBT youth or subsets of this population has approached the experiences of these youth from a risk framework (Saewyc, 2011; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009; D'Augelli, & Grossman, 2006). A risk framework approaches research and practice with the goal of understanding the individual, social and environmental factors that impact a population negatively, and the disparities that are created as a result. A risk framework also maintains a focus on the responses of that population to the negative environmental factors. The focus is primarily

on the responses that put people at risk for health and mental health problems. For example, a young person facing family conflict after coming out may engage in substance use as a coping mechanism. We know that substance use can lead to substance misuse, which can result in poor health outcomes. This would be viewed as a risk factor.

Young people who identify as LGBT and experience perceived discrimination have been found to either internalize these experiences and perceive them as resulting from a personal inadequacy, or externalize the experiences and manifest their responses through behaviors that put the youth at risk (Elze, 2002). The assumption underlying risk-focused research is that interventions should be aimed at helping LGBT youth to cope with their environment and the experiences of discrimination (Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott, 2008).

Benefits of a risk-based framework. There certainly have been benefits to approaching research from a risk framework. Many of the challenges faced by LGBT youth had previously been invisible. Since 1998, research on this population has increased (Saewyc, 2011). A clear understanding of the links between environmental factors, behaviors, and well-being can assist in the development of adequate services and interventions to support youth. In addition, as a previously understudied, invisible population, LGBT youth have gained much needed attention based on research from a risk perspective.

A risk framework allows for exploration of resiliency and protective factors (Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008; McDaniel, Purcell, & D'Augelli, 2001). While research that approaches this area is limited, what has been done indicates that LGBT youth benefit from some of the same protective factors as their heterosexual peers, but

they have less access to them (Saewyc, 2011). These factors include family support, positive peer relationships, and other adult role models. Even less literature has looked at LGBT-specific protective factors. Many LGBT youth are able to maneuver their experiences in ways that minimize the associated impact of discrimination, and that support their healthy growth and development. A study by Hillier and Harrison (2004) found that same-sex attracted youth are able to reframe the common, negative discourses that they receive about being gay in ways that support positive identity development. Identification of the factors and processes employed by LGBT youth, either individually or collectively, to deal with social stigma can provide valuable insight into opportunities for intervention and service provision.

Limitations of a risk-based framework. There are also limitations to a risk-based approach with LGBT youth. First, we must consider the underlying message that a risk framework posits. Because "risk often is translated into a status characteristic of the young person rather than a characteristic that describes that person's experiences or context" (Russell, 2005, p. 8), scholars argue that a risk framework may contribute to the stigmatization of LGBT youth (Mutchler, Ayala, & Neith, 2005). Social workers approaching LGBT youth in this way position themselves as being able to help protect LGBT youth from the "evils" that exist in society – homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism. This approach creates not only a power dynamic but establishes a relationship of dependency. We can relate this to Iris Marion Young's (2003) work on the role of the state, and men, as protector, which positions citizens or women as in need of being protected from a faceless enemy. One risk in this kind of a "helping" relationship is that the group in need of protection releases any sense of agency and control to the

protector. This kind of dependency leaves LGBT youth vulnerable to further abuses of power. In addition, it has the potential to actually suppress factors that may help LGBT youth to minimize the effects of social stigma and discrimination.

An example of how this kind of protector relationship has been used to the detriment of LGBT youth has occurred, and continues to occur, between adults and students in US schools. The right of students to establish a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in school was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1990 (Board of Education of Westside Community School v. Mergens, 496, 1990). However, students are often discouraged from following through with this right by school personnel (administrators and/or teachers) who express concern that such visibility may attract violence or harassment. In essence, using a rationale for protecting the safety of the students, schools discourage one of the few things that has been found to decrease LGBT students' perceptions of hostility and harassment in the school environment. What this protection rhetoric does not address is the fact that LGBT students may be experiencing violence and harassment on a daily basis. For them, the risk involved with starting a GSA outweighs the idea of having to endure one's current experience. In fact, research has shown that the presence of a GSA or other LGBT-inclusive programs in one's school can decrease perceptions of hostility and discrimination on the part of LGBT students (Chesir-Teran, & Hughes, 2009; GLSEN, 2009; Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008).

A second limitation of the risk-based approach is that it establishes a standard that LGBT youth are held to by practitioners and researchers, similar to the standard established for the coming out process by coming out or identity development models. While risks are viewed as unhealthy responses to a hostile environment, resilience is

often defined as one's ability to employ healthy coping strategies in order to achieve "an end state of positive adaptation and development" (Russell, 2005, p. 7). If a young person is able to stay in school despite harassment or, better yet, works to establish a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in school, then these types of behaviors and responses to experiences of discrimination categorize this young person as resilient. However, the young person who manifests resilience through forms of resistance that are outside of the norm of acceptable behavior are seen as "at risk" or as externalizing his/her experiences in unhealthy ways. For example, the transgender student who decides to use the bathroom designated for his/her gender identity rather than assigned sex may be seen as disruptive and inciting provocation as opposed to resiliently resisting the lack of inclusive bathroom space in the school setting.

Broadening our view of resilience in LGBT youth. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), using a critical race theory and Latino critical theory (LatCrit) framework, pose four types of resistance in their examination of the Chicano/Chicana student rights movement. These authors argue that most research looking at resistant behaviors in school settings tends to focus on self-defeating resistance, and encourage researchers to look deeper into resistant behaviors to examine the motivation and intent rather than problematizing behaviors that are often associated with working class students and students of color.

In Solorzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) model, "conformist resistance" is used to refer to the way that young people who are motivated by social justice might seek to help themselves or others by adapting to the current situation in order to achieve personal success. This form of resistance is not motivated by any critique of the systems of

oppression and is often driven by an internalization of experiences of oppression. "Transformational resistance," on the other hand, is motivated both by social justice and a critique of oppressive forces. "Transformational resistance" incorporates action upon and within the systems that oppress in order to both succeed personally and engage in social change. Tara Yosso (2000) adds to this model by posing the concept of "resilient resistance," which Solorzano and Delgado Bernal view as being at the intersection of conformist and transformational resistance (2001). Resilient resistance is defined as "surviving and/or succeeding through the educational pipeline as a strategic response to visual microaggressions" (Yosso, 2000, p. 180).

Such a framework may prove useful in examining the behaviors and interactions of LGBT youth at both interpersonal and institutional/environmental levels. Employing a binary framework of risk and resilience may limit the ability of researchers and practitioners to identify behaviors among LGBT youth that illustrate their understanding of and capacity to act upon the existing forms and sources of discrimination and harassment that they face. In fact, for LGBT youth, authority figures may be the ones enacting or condoning discriminatory behavior such as in the school setting. Is a challenge to authority in these cases considered a risk factor or resilience? The existing social work and broader social science literature has not explored this in any depth.

Research on protective factors in LGBT youth. The fact that the delineations between resilience and resistance are not clearly outlined may be due in part to the limited research on how LGBT youth are thriving and what factors most support their abilities to do so. In any case, the framework of risk and resilience lends itself to being used in a way that establishes "acceptable" ways for young people to respond to their

environments and be in the world. Given that research on the experiences of LGBT youth from non-dominant racial and class backgrounds is severely lacking (Huang, Brewster, Moradi, Goodman, Wiseman, & Martin, 2010), these standards of acceptability are not able to take into account differences based on race and class. What results is the establishment of a binary that privileges the experiences of dominant racial and economic subpopulations of LGBT youth and positions youth from non-dominant identity groups as "unacceptable" if they are unable or unwilling to conform.

An Empowerment Approach to Research on LGBT Young People

Although much more limited in terms of quantity, there has been some exploration in the research literature of empowerment as an alternative framework for approaching LGBT young people. Most of our understanding of LGBT youth empowerment comes from school-based settings, and primarily in GSAs. As is the case in adolescent research more generally, empowerment is defined inconsistently (Wagaman, 2011). Of those studies that address empowerment with LGBT youth, a few approach it from the perspective of organizational development or macro-level change, including participatory strategies to identify needs (Dentato, Craig, & Smith, 2010; Craig, Tucker, & Wagner, 2008; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009; Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010). Others have explored empowerment-based services, such as counseling (Llera, & Katsirebas, 2010; Travers, & Paoletti, 1999).

Although inconsistent in definition and application, an empowerment approach generally includes an individual's awareness of systems that impact his/her experiences, increased control over those systems, and employment of strategies to engage in changing those systems in order to increase equity (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger

Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). In contrast to a risk focused approach, empowerment shifts some of the focus to efforts to intervene with the environmental factors responsible for the issue or disparity at hand. As such, it has been used as an approach to addressing public health issues with young people (Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008).

Strengths of an empowerment framework. Empowerment as a framework for conducting research on and with LGBT youth offers a number of strengths. The diversity of the LGBT youth population requires a flexible approach that allows for a range of experiences and the nuanced needs that come with the intersections of identity. For example, a psychoeducational group that focuses on reducing social isolation may have little relevance for a transgender youth who feels very connected to an LGBT community and self-created family, but who is compelled to engage in sex work because the options for employment are limited by his/her gender expression and identity. This is not to imply that LGBT youth do not have a need for existing services or for clinical care. However, the breadth of LGBT youths' experiences calls for research methods as well as interventions tailored to young people from varied races, ethnicities, genders and classes. A study conducted with LGBT youth of color in an urban area found that the youth did not have a sense of empowerment and had limited control over their negative treatment at school. The youth did not perceive themselves as being able to change their school environment (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009). Similarly, explorations of the perceived value of school-based, LGBT-specific student groups have identified that youth of color may have different perceptions of how welcoming and affirming such spaces are as compared to their white counterparts (McCready, 2004).

Theoretically, empowerment has the capacity as both a research and service model to deal directly with issues of oppression. Rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, empowerment-based programs and services include a component of critical reflection that supports youth in putting their experiences within a social and historical context (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Llera, & Katsirebas, 2010). This is important for groups of youth who face marginalization and discrimination. LGBT youth often internalize the homophobia they encounter in their environment, which can manifest itself through destructive behaviors as well as decreased self-esteem (Barajas, 2005). Young people who can externalize their experiences, or have an understanding that the discrimination is not a reflection of them as a person but rather a reflection on society, have different views of their experiences of discrimination (Major, O'Brien, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2007). These differences may be protective against some of the impact of discriminatory experiences, and they may also inform researchers on the most appropriate next steps in the development of effective interventions.

Services and research conducted through an empowerment framework shift the relationship between the provider and recipient, or the researcher and subject. Empowerment-based programs and services directly address power, and seek to give young people spaces and opportunities to be experts and leaders. However, this relationship has challenges in implementation (Gant, et al., 2009; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008), and research is limited on best practices in this area.

Limitations of an empowerment framework. An empowerment framework has several key limitations as a research or service model for LGBT youth. First, the inconsistency in definition as it has been applied creates challenges in accurately conducting research on empowerment as either a process or a product (Wagaman, 2011). Some studies have defined empowerment with youth as a product or outcome (Viklund, Ortdvist, & Wikblad, 2007), and others have defined it as a process (Moody, Childs, & Sepples, 2003). Still others, such as Pearrow (2008), define empowerment as both a process and an outcome. How can we identify the ways in which young people become empowered or what it looks like when they do if we are not in agreement about what it is? A similar challenge is posed when we consider the development of services and research methods. Do youth become empowered by learning how to adequately advocate for themselves as individuals, or are they empowered by learning skills for engaging in effective social change?

Another limitation of an empowerment approach is that, with inconsistent definitions, it is unclear with whom this approach might be most effective. If, as some empowerment models suggest (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006), empowerment is rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, does that imply that it is only effective with young people who face oppression? While most empowerment programs focus on populations of youth that have been marginalized or oppressed (Moody, Childs, & Sepples, 2003), it has not been adequately theorized or tested as a research or practice model with young people at the intersections of multiple identities, both dominant and oppressed (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006).

Youth Voice in LGBT-Specific Research

Empirical studies published on LGBT youth were scarce prior to the 1980's (Anhal & Morris, 1998). In the preponderance of research conducted on LGBT youth over the last three decades, the voice of the youth is lacking. While a number of LGBT youth are involved in programs and services that are both school and community-based, they have rarely been asked by researchers to assess their experiences with such programs and services, and are even less often engaged as active participants in the research itself. Davis, Saltzburg, and Locke (2010) used concept mapping with a group of LGBTQ young people at a LGBTQ-focused center to identify the service needs of the population. They acknowledge that while many LGBTQ-specific organizations exist to serve young people, they are left with very little guidance from research about best practices (Davis, Saltzburg, and Locke, 2010). Dentato, Craig, and Smith (2010) discuss their work with a collaborative of stakeholders to develop an LGBT youth specific organization. While youth are identified as one of the key stakeholders in the collaborative process, their specific role or method of engagement is not outlined.

Two specific studies that engaged LGBT youth in action research were identified by this author. The first involved both youth and adults in an action research initiative to address school-based homophobia in their community (Peters, 2003). The research itself was used as a community intervention rather than to inform the research literature. In the second example, youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) was employed by a non-profit organization in Sacramento, California – Youth In Focus (YIF). LGBTQ youth engaged in PAR strategies to document and take action on health and mental health needs of LGBTQ youth in their community. Their efforts gained the attention of scholars and

researchers (including the National Institute of Mental Health) (Sanchez, Lomeli-Loibl, & Nelson, 2009). Other research literature describing the approach of LGBT youth-specific programs has described services that employ action research methods (Travers & Paoletti, 1999), but not with a specific intent to contribute knowledge that is produced in a youth-led manner to the broader research literature on LGBT youth needs and services.

Section IV: Theoretical Framework for Current Study

Calls for a Paradigmatic Shift

Scholars in social work and other applied disciplines have begun to call for a paradigm shift in both the theoretical approach to research around issues of social justice, and methodological approaches that are more in line with theory (Finn & Jacobson, 2003). For example, Belcher, DeForge, and Zanis (2005), question the contradiction between social work's call to challenge injustice and its lack of research that addresses the systemic causes of social issues, such as homelessness. These authors question who ultimately benefits from research that is focused on helping people deal with their situations rather than eliminating the causes of their unjust circumstance.

Similarly, Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008) call for a paradigm shift in the way in which research is conceptualized and conducted with youth. Particularly for Black and Latino youth, research has pathologized young people by focusing on "problem behavior" (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008). As has been discussed, we see a similar pattern in the way in which LGBT youth are often represented in research. In addition, research on youth tends to overlook or minimize young people's ability to critically analyze their own experiences and respond to issues that affect their development and advancement. Akom, Cammarota and Ginwright (2008) draw from

critical race theory (CRT) and other critical theoretical frameworks in their approach to research with young people.

The Basic Tenets of Critical Theory

Critical theory is a theoretical framework that has been used in a very limited fashion in research on LGBT youth. Critical theory is not often explicitly drawn upon in LGBT youth research, but its basic tenets can be found in a handful of studies (Sanchez, Lomeli-Loibl, & Nelson, 2009; Craig, Tucker, & Wagner, 2008). Critical theory (or critical social theory), comes out of the Frankfurt School, and is now often applied as an umbrella term that encompasses a complexity of theories with similar basic tenets underlying them (Agger, 2006; Fay, 1987).

First, critical theory encourages us to call into question the existing power structures and systems (Moya Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010) that have created a narrative for our lives. For example, research on LGBT youth often is driven by a focus on risk and deficit. Through this lens, research questions are asked that result in findings that further confirm or reinforce the narrative of risk and deficits. Critical theory would encourage, in this instance, an analysis of power. Who is in control of defining the research agenda on LGBT youth? Who benefits from the research? Are the institutions involved in conducting and funding LGBT youth research dominated by a heterosexual perspective? A male perspective? A white perspective? A Western perspective? In what ways is the oppressive system that impacts LGBT youth both manifested in and reproduced by this research cycle? These power dynamics, according to critical theory, are important to understanding the experiences of LGBT youth and their status in society. Taking such an analysis a step further, critical theory calls for an analysis of power that takes into

consideration its dyadic nature (Freire, 1970; Fay, 1987). This means that systemic power dynamics not only rely on a dominant relationship but also on the false consciousness of the group or population being dominated (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1973; Fay, 1987). This is vital to understanding the ways in which social change can be accomplished, and the role of the oppressed population in that process.

Critical theory also calls researchers to understand context (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998), employ reflexivity, honor subjectivity, and engage in praxis. Reflexivity positions the researcher in the research process. Instead of assuming objectivity on the part of the researcher, it is expected that the researcher reflects on and makes explicit her/his own biases, reactions, and connections to the research topic, and in the research process. Similarly, in contrast to a positivist approach, critical theory privileges subjectivity rather than believing in one objective truth (Moya Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010). Praxis is a process of the dialectic in which the goal is to take action that impacts the existing social structures to achieve more socially just outcomes (Moya Salas, Sen, & Segal, 2010). In a critical theory framework, reflection and action are used iteratively to achieve social change (Freire, 1973).

The primary critique of critical theory and the critical social theory umbrella, particularly in its application with LGBT youth, is that it is based in a Western European lens (Agger, 2006). Given that the experiences of LGBT youth involve intersections of multiple identities – including nationality, language, immigration status, education, race, ethnicity, faith/religion, ability status, gender, socioeconomic status - that truly cannot be understood in an additive form, a theoretical approach that takes these intersections into consideration would be most relevant to the study at hand.

Critical Theory as an Umbrella

As has been discussed, critical theory itself encompasses a complexity of theories (Agger, 2006; Fay, 1987) that have key elements serving as the threads that connect them. The use of critical theory allows for attention to be paid in this study to issues of context, power, objectivity/subjectivity, assessment/critique, and praxis. By approaching critical theory as a broad umbrella that encompasses multiple critical theories (including feminist, queer, critical race), space is made in this study for the primary critiques of critical theory to be addressed. Given that critical theory, or critical social theories, primarily come out of the tradition of the Frankfurt School and were based in Western, white, male experiences and perspectives, the infusion of theories that have extended the principles of critical theory through other lenses is appropriate in the context of twenty-first century United States society. The application of critical social theories supports the questioning of views that have traditionally been privileged through research, and intentional exploration of the role of race, gender and other identities as important not only to the individual, lived experiences of LGBT youth but also to the systemic context (including institutional practices) within which they live. In essence, we must explore the ways in which existing institutions and systems reproduce themselves by establishing narratives to which people are held through policies and practices, such as social norms. An important aspect of this is understanding that human action is both constrained by such institutions and systems, but also implicit in either reproducing or transforming the very systems that are constraining them (Finn & Jacobson, 2003).

Privileging the knower. The use of critical theories that draw on a multitude of perspectives, including emancipatory, liberatory, feminist, critical race, LatCrit,

disability, and queer theory principles, allow for extension of the tenets of critical theory as originally envisioned to the current context within which this study was conducted. The first element that is incorporated relates to knowledge production, including whose experiences are privileged and validated. In traditional research approaches, the researcher is privileged in the knowledge production process. The researcher is positioned as the "knower" who has the ability to interpret and analyze the experiences of others. In contrast, we must seek to learn from LGBT youth rather than learn about them (Talburt, 2004). By questioning what knowledge is valid, and privileging the experiences and understanding of the traditional research subject, the power structure of traditional forms of research is dismantled. This happens both through the selection of methods (such as narratives and counterstorytelling) and through a participatory approach to conducting research. Traditional research subjects are engaged as researchers, thereby shaping the research question, design, implementation, analysis and dissemination.

Recognizing and addressing the social construction of identity categories. A second key element of critical theory is acknowledgement of social construction, particularly as it relates to identity categories. In research, this factor is applied theoretically by making race and racism (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), gender and sexism (Burdge, 2007), and other socially constructed identity categories central to understanding the research topic and question. Implicit in this is an understanding of intersectionality, which must be addressed in sampling in order to seek representation of the heterogeneity of a population (Mertens, 2007). In addition, social construction should be addressed in research through the process of self-definition on the part of research participants. "Self definition is a matter of self determination and social justice…"

(Burdge, 2007, p. 243). As such, rather than be offered existing categories or identity labels, that are socially constructed to define themselves, space is created for exploration of self-identification. This process also supports the shift in power dynamics and privileging of voices that have not traditionally occurred in research.

Beyond binaries. Beyond identity categories, feminist theorists call into question binaries, or mutually exclusive categories that usually exist in a hierarchical manner, and encourage us to think beyond the limitations that such categorizations create. For example, in the behavioral sciences, a binary is often created between what is functional and what is not (Bernal, Torres, & Coolhart, 2005). This is true of the ways in which people respond to experiences of trauma or social stressors. If we are able to think beyond what is deemed a functional versus dysfunctional response to such experiences as those faced by LGBT youth, like transphobia and homophobia, then we can begin to identify the unique and powerful ways that people find to maneuver their environment, no matter how hostile, and survive – or in many cases thrive (Hillier & Harrison, 2004). The use of feminist and queer theories, as critical theories, allows us to question the validity of binaries and to examine resistance and transformation outside of a paradigm that labels behaviors and responses as positive or negative, functional or dysfunctional.

Action. Finally, building on the critical theory principle of praxis, this study is committed to action. As such, the research should result in some tangible product and/or action that is in the best interest of the population being studied (Mertens, 2007). This process requires ongoing reflection through the creation of pedagogical spaces of resistance and resiliency (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008) in which LGBT youth

can reflect on their own experiences and allow for both personal transformation as well as the production of knowledge that facilitates societal transformation.

Critical Theory: Application to Current Study

This study aims to explore LGBT young adults' experiences with and perceptions of existing service systems aimed at serving their needs. How are these services experienced by the young people themselves both in and out of school settings? How might LGBT young people envision and create relationships with service providers to support both their individual well-being and social change? And what value does a participatory action research approach have as either an intervention or research approach with LGBT young people? These questions will be explored in order to infuse youth voices into the future directions of LGBT youth/young adult research and practice.

Critical theory as a theoretical framework directly relates to this study's research questions. These questions are guided by an honoring of subjectivity, a call for a shift in power dynamics both in the research itself and in traditional social service settings, and a theory of action. The questions have been framed in a way that seeks to privilege the knowledge and experiences of the "researched" over the "researcher", and to put these experiences within a socio-historical and systemic context. It is for these reasons that, while there exists a wealth of theoretical knowledge on identity and identity development in young people, no a priori theoretical position has been taken in this study. This is particularly important given that identity theories and models as they have been applied to LGBT youth and adults have been limited, as previously discussed, and may in fact have reinforced a form of cultural imperialism (Mullally, 2002) that has normalized

certain experiences over others. The selected methods for answering the current study's research questions apply the key principles of critical theory as outlined above.

Section V: Participatory Action Research: A Theory-Based Methodology

Participatory Action Research: History and Background

The history of action research goes back to the writings of Lewin (1946) who articulated the need for a new research method that would allow for an understanding of what was happening between racial groups as more and more activists were engaging in intergroup relations work. Lewin described a need for tangible, accessible information on the successes and challenges experienced by those seeking to improve intergroup relations, and he felt confident that the answers existed in the people and communities where the work was happening rather than in academic settings or among traditional researchers. He also saw the transformative process of activists and intergroup workers who would try something, reflect on its impact, and regroup to identify what action should be taken next (Lewin, 1946).

While Lewin's original idea of action research has since morphed into many different forms and models (Dickens & Watkins, 1999), action research more generally is understood to have an iterative process of action and reflection, or "look, think, act" (Stringer, 1996). Importantly, the group of people engaging in an action research process generally start with very little information, and seek to better understand the situation or issue at hand with the intention to act based on this knowledge (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). At the same time, those engaged in action research are reflecting on and learning about themselves and their own behavior (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Barbera, 2008;

Cahill, 2007). In this way, transformation occurs both at the personal/interpersonal level and the social/community level.

PAR Principles

Based on the research questions and the theoretical framework for this study, participatory action research was used as one of the primary research approaches. Participatory action research (PAR) is a form of action research that is more than a methodology. It is a theory of action that is intended to strive for social justice and social change (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008). PAR generally and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) more specifically is a methodology and a "political commitment" (Cahill, 2007) that rejects the belief in objectivity in research. PAR approaches shift the power of knowledge creation in such a way that the subjects become researchers. This shift is rooted in a belief that traditional research subjects, and in this case young people, have the capacity to conduct and analyze research, and plan and implement action that is based on the findings (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Belcher, DeForge, & Zanis, 2005; Barbera, 2008; Cahill, 2007).

PAR signifies that traditional research subjects have a "…fundamental right to ask, investigate, dissent and demand what could be" (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009). In this sense, PAR is about more than the findings of the research. It is about the creation of spaces where those who serve as "insider" researchers can engage in actions and processes that promote resistance and resiliency. Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008) use the term "youthtopia" to describe the potential of spaces created through the PAR process for youth as "…spaces to hope, heal, repair and transform their personal pain as well as larger social inequalities" (p. 114).

PAR as a methodology and a political commitment is in line with social work values and principles (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999; Barbera, 2008; Belcher, DeForge, & Zanis, 2005). PAR, as a form of liberatory research, is parallel to the traditional social work approach of the settlement houses (Barbera, 2008). In this sense, social work research and practice are not mutually exclusive, and traditional clients/research subjects are engaged as partners in efforts for social change (Barbera, 2008). The focus on action is in line with social work's commitment to addressing inequality and social injustices (Belcher, DeForge, & Zanis, 2005). Instead of pathologizing the research subject and individualizing the social problem being studied, they are put within a social and institutional context in ways that address what should be done to alleviate the problem and that address systemic oppression (Belcher, DeForge, & Zanis, 2005; Cahill, 2007).

PAR with LGBT people. PAR has been recommended as an approach to research with LGB people of color, particularly given that the preponderance of existing research is either disease-focused or framed in terms of how people differ from their white counterparts (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010). Issues of language, self-identification, perceptions of the meaning of identity, and intersectionality are all crucial to understanding the diversity of experiences between racial/ethnic groups within the LGBT population, as well as within racial/ethnic groups. PAR may be a particularly useful method to incorporate the experiences and perspectives of LGBT people of color in inclusive ways (DeBlaere, Brewster, Sarkees, & Moradi, 2010; Morrow, 2003; Owens & Jones, 2004).

Application of PAR in the Current Study

PAR is in line with the tenets of critical and feminist theory (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009; Fine & Torre, 2006; DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). The basic tenets include participation, addressing power, praxis and action (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). While many researchers have used PAR, there is considerable variety in approaches and more specifically in the level at which participants are engaged as researchers (Cahill, 2007; DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999; Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010). The following chapter outlines the overall approach and methods of this study.

Chapter 3

METHODS

The focus of this study was to collect data on and understand the dynamics between social service use, assessment and individual identity as they are played out in the lives of LGBT youth and young adults. In the chapter that follows, the methods for exploring these concepts given the theoretical framework outlined previously is explained, including the clarification of research concepts, sampling procedures, methods used for data collection, and approach to data analysis.

Research Questions

Based on the literature that has examined the experiences of LGBT youth and young adults, the following research questions were used as a guide for this study. These questions were based on the premise that "…improvement of services for young people requires their views and interests to be well articulated and represented" (Head, 2011, p. 541).

RQ1: What are LGBT young adults' experiences with and perceptions of school and community-based services aimed at meeting their needs?

RQ2: What role does identity play in LGBT young adults' perceptions of service needs and service experiences?

RQ3: What value does participatory action research (PAR) offer as a research and service approach with LGBT young people?

Research Approach and Key Constructs

There are several key constructs in the research questions that are operationalized below. The focus of this study was to collect data on and understand the dynamics

between these constructs as they are played out in the lives of LGBT youth and young adults.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with young adults. These youth were then invited to participate in a participatory action research (PAR) process. The intention was for the PAR team to develop and articulate a research question or focus area, based in their own experiences as LGBT young people that would guide their work together. The value of the process of the PAR team was collectively assessed for perceived value. The focus of the PAR team's work was drawn from their own experiences and passions as they thought collectively about the needs and lives of LGBT youth and young adults. The PAR team members were the privileged knowers as they are the experts in their own lived experiences.

Key Constructs

LGBT. While LGBT refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, for the purposes of this study the acronym was used interchangeably with queer-identified and LGBTQ. LGBT is a commonly used acronym to refer to people under the queer-identified umbrella, but it also creates categorical limits to identities that exist outside of, on the margins of, or in between these categories. Any young person who is queer-identified, whether or not he/she identifies with a label within the LGBT spectrum, could have been included in this study. As previously discussed, this made space for the variety of identities that may exist within the population based on multiple identities (such as racial/ethnic identity) or perception of irrelevance of the existing categories. For this reason, identity

claims and perceptions were further explored in the qualitative interviews, as well as in the PAR research team process.

One aspect of the LGBT acronym that was raised through the process of this study is the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Although these are two different aspects of one's identity, they are intertwined and often conflated even by those identifying under the LGBTQ acronym. During the course of this study, the young people used the terms cisgender and transgender, and therefore they are reflected in the findings. As a point of clarification, these terms refer to gender identity. Cisgender is a term used to refer to those for whom their assigned sex at birth is aligned with their gender identity. Transgender, as an umbrella identity, refers to anyone whose sex assigned at birth does not align with their gender identity. Use of these terms supports language that seeks to disentangle the conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Identity. One's identity is often shaped by the socially constructed categories to which a person has been assigned. However, there is a great deal of agency involved in identity. A person may or may not feel identified with categories or identity labels that are socially assigned. Identity labels that exist outside of or in resistance to socially constructed identity categories may be created. For this study, the construct of identity was used to explore the meaning that the participants give to groups to which they believe that they belong, how they see these groups and their membership in them shaping their sense of self, how their memberships shape their ways of being in the world, and their perceptions of how the world responds to and interacts with them based in these expressions of

identity. Special attention was paid to the relationships between aspects of identity both in data collection and analysis.

Service systems. For the purposes of this study, service systems included institutional and community-based systems and organizations that meet a specific need of the target population – mental/emotional, physical, spiritual, developmental - with the intention of achieving positive outcomes and/or reducing negative outcomes. Specific service systems were identified by the youth and included both formal and informal networks/entities.

Services. Services was used to refer to the tangible and intangible programs, spaces and/or products that are created and offered to LGBT young people for the purpose of meeting a pre-identified need in the domains listed above. These could include a food box, a drop-in center, a support group, or an HIV test.

Service Approach. For the purposes of this study, service approaches are the ways in which service systems reach out to, engage, interact with/relate to, and provide services to the target population. These may be in both overt and covert form. For example, a service approach could include both an intentional inclusion statement on a website or brochure, or hetero-normative language on an intake form. Service approaches include institutional practices and cultures, as well as dynamics and relationships between staff/volunteers (those who are serving) and those who are served.

Sample

Inclusion Criteria

The sample for this study was defined as LGBTQ-identified youth who are, or previously were, engaged or involved in an LGBTQ youth-serving organization that was used as the source for recruitment. A number of studies on this population of youth have chosen alternative ways to define it. Some researchers focus only on youth who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Transgender youth certainly are unique in their experiences and identity construction. However, in terms of programs and services, most programs serving young people have a broad scope of service that includes transgender youth. The interactions of the youth in these programs are such that it is often difficult to delineate between the groups. Young people may identify as both gay/lesbian and transgender, or identify as gay/lesbian but then transition into a transgender identity. More importantly, the youth in many ways identify themselves as a collective identity group, while recognizing that they also have unique experiences. For this reason, this study included them all as potential participants.

Similarly, some young people do not identify with traditional labels such as gay or lesbian, but rather with more general, queer-identified terms. For example, in the Unity Fellowship Church movement, which predominantly includes people of color, identities such as "same-gender loving" are used. In a PAR study with poor and working class people of color, the identity term "gender non-conforming" was used (Billies, Johnson, Murungi, & Pugh, 2009). In order to be as inclusive as possible, and to acknowledge the ways in which traditional use of identity terms and language may be perceived as

exclusive or elitist in terms of race and class, this study employed a broad frame for identity-inclusion and through PAR, the young people were able to self-label.

Young people who participated in the study ranged in age from 18 to 24. Similar to many LGBT youth-serving organizations across the United States, the local organization with which primary recruitment occurred, defines its population as age 14 to 24. The researcher narrowed the population age range for this study in order to address developmental considerations as well as issues of independence and access. Young people were purposively recruited based on race/ethnicity, and gender identity. The organization from which the youth were recruited has successfully engaged youth from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, including homeless youth. Because research on LGBT youth has traditionally under-represented women, transgender-identified youth, and bisexuals (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006), particular attention was paid to including these voices in the current study.

PAR methodology, in keeping with feminist theory, acknowledges that all knowledge is socially located (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009). For this reason, it was important to incorporate into the design the heterogeneity of experiences of the population of interest (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009). This includes both those who experience multiple forms of oppression and those who are in dominant groups. While representation of heterogeneity is important, it is not intended to imply that the research findings are generalizable in the traditional positivist sense. In fact, it is not the intention of action research to produce a body of generalizable knowledge (Stringer, 1996).

Recruitment Site

one n ten is the only LGBT-specific youth serving organization in the Phoenix metropolitan area. It has been in existence since 1993 when it was formed by LGBT adults in the community who were concerned about providing a safe, social space for LGBT youth. Since 2000, one n ten has seen tremendous growth. The organization went from having limited staff to now having eight paid staff members. In addition, the organization provides weekly drop-in groups at three sites across the Valley, as well as a youth center that provides food and programming five nights a week. The organization has only had an executive director position since 2009. The amount of growth that the organization has undergone in that timeframe has been both tremendous and challenging. one n ten opened a new youth center in April 2012 in a new location that is not only an expansion in space, but allows for additional programming and resources, including showers for homeless youth and an online high school completion program. During this study, the organization also launched a housing program that subsidizes rent at a local complex and provides support services.

According to Micheal Weakley, who has the longest tenure of any staff member at one n ten and serves as Deputy Director, the organization used to serve a rather homogenous subpopulation of LGBT youth – mostly White and middle class. The organization has since built bridges with the Latin American, African American and Native American/American Indian communities and the outreach has paid off as can be seen reflected in the broad diversity represented among the youth. With this has also come an increase in the number of youth served by one n ten on a weekly basis, which

can reach over 100 young people. Many of the youth attend multiple sites and programs throughout the week.

Researcher positionality. As the initiating researcher, it is important to engage in reflective practice about my own role within one n ten as well as with the one n ten youth. In some ways, I was positioned as an insider, which has the potential to create both opportunities and challenges. Early in 2010, I was introduced to one n ten through a professor at ASU who is also active in the local LGBT community. I was exploring empowerment practice and LGBT youth and thus began my relationship both with Micheal Weakley and one n ten. That year, I began volunteering once a week at the YEP house (drop-in center in central Phoenix) and eventually spent about 6 months working on activism with the young people there. Out of that work, came a webinar on LGBT youth homelessness that was co-created with the youth, and presented with a social work intern through a statewide webinar.

In the Fall of 2010, I began serving as the field instructor of record for the organization in order to allow them to take MSW interns. This enabled me to support student development through the School of Social Work, as well as stay engaged in programs, and peripherally in the lives of the youth. However, I did not have ongoing, personal relationships with any of the youth at the time of initiating this study, and did not volunteer consistently with any one program. I see this as an opportunity and a benefit to the research. I was very aware going into this study that I am a familiar person to the youth and seen as having access to power within the organization. I also have varying degrees of familiarity and relationship status with the youth, depending upon my past interactions with them.

During my involvement with one n ten, there have been times when I observed or heard about dynamics within and between groups of youth at one n ten that were conflictual and appeared to arise out of a sense of both youth ownership over the programs and a desire for perceived fairness. It is for this reason that the staff was not engaged in the research process itself, and that the sampling was done using random selection from within the racial/ethnic and gender identity subpopulations. Based on what I have learned about the young people, it was very important for them to understand that things were being handled fairly. It was also important in both phases of this study for me to emphasize that the research was not an evaluation of one n ten programming, nor was it being conducted for or on behalf of one n ten.

My perception was that there were existing divisions among the youth that I was aware of going into this study, and that may or may not have been present within the research team that was developed for the PAR component of this study. The youth, particularly those who faced extreme barriers to daily living, had very strong alliances and subgroups. Some of these appeared to exist along lines of race/ethnicity and class, and others did not. It was my sense, and my hope, that some of these issues would be explored within the PAR process. Conflict resolution was one issue that the staff members had raised as a challenge among the youth.

Due to my pre-existing relationships with one n ten staff and youth, as well as my preconceived notions about the youth and their interactions with one another, I engaged in journaling about my own feelings and observations throughout the process. These reflections were shared, in confidence, with my committee members as a check-point for my own reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis.

Sample Identification and Selection

Qualitative interviews. Primary recruitment for the first phase of the study occurred through one n ten. While it has been suggested that LGBT youth who seek services have significant differences from those who do not, other research contradicts this assumption (Elze, 2003). Just prior to the beginning of the recruitment period, one n ten had acquired space to open a youth center for its program participants. In preparation for the opening of the space, one of the central Phoenix locations that had previously served as a drop-in center was closed. In addition, a database was created for the new site so that participation and attendance could be tracked more effectively and efficiently. This electronic database, which was password-protected, was the source of the sample pool for this study. Given the significant transitions within the organization during this time (both in terms of staffing and space/programming), and a significant delay in the anticipated opening date of the youth center, the database was accessed prior to each random drawing for the sample in order to add young people who may have attended the youth center between sampling.

The first sample pool was identified on April 25, 2012, less than a week after the youth center's grand opening. After filtering the database for young people who fit the study's age criteria and had self-identified as fitting within the LGBT or queer-identified umbrella, there were a total of 64 young people in the database. Due to the low number of young people in the sample pool, the database was accessed again on May 3, 2012. At that time, 10 more young people were identified as fitting the inclusion criteria and were added to the sampling pool. In addition, the researcher met with the youth center manager to identify young people who fit the study criteria but may not have attended the

youth center. An additional 9 young people were added to the pool based on this discussion for a total of 83 youth in the pool.

This sample pool was then subdivided into five racial/ethnic groups based on how the young people self-identified in the database. The subgroups included; Native American/American Indian, African American, White/Caucasian, Latino/a, and Asian/Multiracial/Other. The young people falling within the last subgroup were combined due to the low numbers in each group individually. Within each of the five racial/ethnic subgroups, the young people were further divided into three groups based on self-identified gender identity. These subgroups included; male, female, and transgender/gender queer identities. At the time, all of the subgroups had at least one member in the sample pool except African American transgender, and Native American female. From the remaining thirteen subgroups, one young person was randomly selected from each group. Of these thirteen young people, eleven participated in the study.

On May 11, 2012, the researcher met with one n ten program staff again and identified an additional eleven young people fitting the study inclusion criteria who were not currently in the database. These young people were added, as were another twenty youth who attended the youth center between May 4 and June 3, 2012. With these additions, the database had a total of 113 (after one duplicate was identified in the original database). On June 8, 2012, an additional sample of six young people was drawn from the final sample pool of 100 (after removing those who had already been selected in the initial drawing). These six young people were drawn from subgroups that either had not been previously represented in the pool (e.g., African American transgender), or that had not yet been represented in the group of participants based on those who declined

participation or could not be contacted. Of these six youth, only two were able to be identified and contacted. Both of these young people participated in interviews. On June 25, 2012, a final drawing of three young people was done. Two of these young people were interviewed. The third was contacted but was not 18 or older. See Table 1 for the demographic make-up of the 15 interviewees. It is important to note that these identity categories are based on how the young people had categorized themselves in the one n ten database. This does not mean that it was how they identified in the interviews.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants (n=15)

Race/Ethnicity	**Number of participants**
African American	4
Latino/a	3
Native American/First Nation	2
White	4
Asian	1
Multi-racial	1
Gender Identity	
Male	6
Female	8
Genderqueer	1
Cisgender	11
Transgender	4

PAR component. All fifteen of the young people who participated in the interviews were contacted again in August 2012 via the form of communication identified as their preference at the end of their interview. Although the young people were given an option as to whether or not they could be contacted again, all fifteen gave assent. Form of contact included Facebook messaging, phone calls and email. One young person responded right away that she would be out of town for an extended period, and

therefore was not contacted again. Nine young people responded within a week with an interest in participating. Two young people expressed interest in participating but did not follow up with meeting to complete the consent process. Two youth did not respond at all, and one young person responded over a month later once the team had already been established and meeting regularly. The interviewees were contacted a minimum of three times each prior to beginning the PAR process of data collection to ensure adequate time for a response.

All nine of the young people who expressed interest met the researcher during open periods of time (one evening and one morning) at the one n ten youth center to complete the consent process. Table 2 summarizes the demographic make-up of the original nine participants who began the PAR process.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Original PAR Team Participants (n=9)

Race/Ethnicity	**Number of participants**
African American	2
Latino/a	3
Native American/First Nation	1
White	2
Multi-racial	1
Gender Identity	
Male	4
Female	4
Genderqueer	1
Cisgender	6
Transgender	3

**One participant was only able to attend the first meeting, after which she was employed in a job that conflicted with the team meeting schedule. This meant that the remaining team no longer had a Native American/First Nations representative.

Data Collection

Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative interviews focused on the first two research questions for the study – (1) what are LGBT young adults' experiences with and perceptions of school and community-based services aimed at meeting their needs, and (2) what role does identity play in LGBT young adults' perceptions of service needs and service experiences? Savin-Williams (2005) says of LGBT youth, "Their power and resiliency to overcome adversity are embedded in their life stories, and it is these accounts that we should attend to" (p. 192).

Institutional review board approval (exempt status) was granted for the qualitative interviews on February 15, 2012. The interviews took place between May 8 and July 4, 2012, and ranged in length from 42 minutes to just under 2 hours (1 hour 54 minutes). Interviewees were contacted via the contact information that was used by one n ten for communication. For most, it was via a Facebook message. Participants selected the date and time that was preferred for an interview, and the location. Although it was the original intention of the study to keep the data collection process separate from one n ten, when given the choice, eleven of the fifteen interviewees expressed a preference for being interviewed at the one n ten youth center. The researcher was given access to private space in the center during hours that the center was open, and was given keys to access the center during hours that the center was closed. Three of the interviews were conducted on campus at Arizona State University downtown, and one was conducted at a local drop-in center (Tumbleweed). All of the interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participant.

All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher. The interviews started with confirming that each participant met the inclusion criteria for the study, and with reviewing the information letter (See Appendix A) that outlined the participant's rights. Participants were informed about the sample selection process, and the fact that the study was not connected to, or intended to be an evaluation of, *one n ten* programs and services. Once verbal consent was given, the interview followed a structured interview guide (see Appendix B).

In addition to being asked the interview questions, participants were asked to draw or map the pieces of their identities after having described them verbally. Minimal instruction was given for this exercise, which allowed for individual interpretation. Each participant verbally explained the identity map once it was complete. Such a user-generated method of data collection that is grounded in the participant's knowledge has several benefits. Participants often find it easier to communicate using a mapping or more visual process (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009), particularly when asked to reflect on the meaning of more abstract concepts such as identity. Using visual processes of data gathering also allows for immediate member checking (Fisher, 2012), which enhances the trustworthiness of the data.

At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was anything else that was important to add that the interviewer had not asked about. The interviewer then told each participant that they would shift roles and the participant could ask questions of the interviewer. Finally, participants were given a brief description of the participatory action research component of the study, and were asked if they could be contacted again to be invited to participate if interested. All fifteen interviewees consented to be contacted

again, and were asked to clarify which contact information to use. At the end of the interview, participants were given a debriefing sheet with resources (see Appendix C) in case of crisis or to access emotional support if the interview had raised any emotional distress. Each participant was also given $20 cash in compensation for their time and transportation costs.

PAR Research Team

The participatory action research component focused on the third research question for this study – (3) what value does participatory action research (PAR) offer as a research and service approach with LGBT young people? Institutional review board approval (exempt status) was received on August 3, 2012, to study the PAR team process. The team members (n = 9) met for the first time on August 20, 2012, for 2 hours. Based on the team members' schedules, it was decided collectively that Mondays from 4:30 until 6:30 pm would be the weekly meeting time. After the first meeting, one of the participants obtained employment that conflicted with the team meeting schedule. Because there was no other mutually agreed upon time that the team could identify, it was decided to keep the team meetings as scheduled. So, the team was reduced to 8 participants.

The team agreed that meeting at Arizona State University's downtown campus would be most conducive to the project's goals. The room, day/time of meetings, and environment created will heretofore be referred to as the PAR team's "space". This term does not just refer to physical space, but includes the emotional and intellectual space that was created during the weekly meetings together. A sign language interpreter was secured for each meeting. Several forms of data were collected during the PAR process.

Participants were able to give consent for each one individually, as well as decide whether or not they wanted to be identified as a member of the research team (See Appendix D). Each month, the researcher had participants review the individual consents and decide if they wanted to change their consent for each form of data. This was also done during the last week (week 16) of meetings included under this study.

Consent to audio record all of the team meetings was required for participation. Audio-recordings were uploaded to a password-protected online system after each meeting. In addition, written materials that were generated through the process of the team's work were saved as data. For example, the team established guidelines and norms for working together which were recorded on flip chart paper. These guidelines were kept. On several occasions, the team members decided to have additional meetings during the week (generally on Saturdays) to move their work on the project forward. These meetings were not recorded because not all team members were able to be present and participate. However, the researcher did journal about these meetings, and they were reviewed or discussed at the following team meeting as a way of keeping the team members who could not attend in the loop of the team process.

During the one-on-one consent process with the researcher (see Appendix D for information letter), participants were told that there would be a journaling component to the study. As a second form of data, each participant was asked to choose the journaling option that would be most comfortable – writing in a paper journal, typing in an online journal, or speaking into an audio-recorder. Two of the participants chose an audio-recorder, two chose online journaling, and the remaining five chose to use a paper journal. During the first team meeting, each participant was given either a journal or

audio-recorder for their journaling. The two participants using online journaling signed up for free, password-protected accounts at penzu.com. Participants were given the option to take their journals with them between meetings, which some had expressed an interest in doing. Of the five participants who used paper journals, three decided to keep them with them between meetings. The other two were kept in a locked file cabinet in an ASU campus office between meetings. The audio-recorded journal entries were saved onto a password-protected online system, and deleted from the recorder after each meeting. Journals were given self-selected codes by the participants so that the researcher could not identify which journal belonged to which participant.

Journaling during team meetings was guided. Participants were given a prompt by the researcher that was related either to the development of the team's research study, or to the process and dynamics of the team itself. In some instances, the interconnection of the two was explored through journaling. At the end of the team's process of working together, journals were collected by the researcher. Participants were given the right to withhold any journal entries that they did not wish to share as a part of the research study.

A third form of data collected was through a Facebook group that was established for the team by the researcher. The Facebook page was set up as a secret group, which means that members had to be added by the person who established the page (the researcher) and any communication on the page could not be seen by those not in the group. All of the participants consented to being a part of the page, although access to and use of the page varied between participants. The page was primarily used to remind members about meetings or tasks between meetings, share documents such as drafts of the survey instrument or relevant articles/links, or to track (on the part of the researcher)

who had seen reminders so that other forms of communication could be used with members not accessing the group page.

As the group progressed, additional forms of external data were linked to the data collected through the research process. These included articles that some team members used as discussion prompts about difficult issues raised in the team, song lyrics from songs identified by the team members as providing inspiration and emotional support, and online videos that were used by team members to teach one another about their experiences or about issues that were important to them.

The team was given a 4 month timeframe within which their work on the research study would take place. The team agreed that a target for finishing their project would be early December of 2012, which included 16 weeks for meetings. The team members were compensated in the amount of $20 for each 2-hour team meeting that was attended. The incentives were funded through two sources from within Arizona State University – a Faculty Emeriti Fellowship, and a Graduate and Professional Student Association research award. In addition, team members who used public transportation were given a one-day transportation pass at each team meeting. Those who used their own transportation were given money to cover parking expenses at ASU. The incentives were intended to (a) address barriers to participation, (b) honor and value the time of the participants as co-researchers, (c) decrease attrition over the time period of data collection, and (d) develop a sense of ownership among participants over the project. Several of the team members were in and out of homelessness during the time that they were engaged in the PAR process. The incentive allowed them to continue participation despite the instability associated with their transitional periods.

Analysis

The qualitative interviews were transcribed by an online service. The qualitative interview data (both transcripts and identity maps) were analyzed using NVivo software. NVivo allows for both text and visual data to be analyzed, which supported the simultaneous analysis of both the maps that were co-created during the interview process, and the transcribed interviews. Following the process suggested by Wheeldon & Faubert (2009), the identity maps were analyzed based on the concepts raised both in the map and in the discussion surrounding the creation of the map.

A hermeneutic approach was used in analysis, which allowed for attention to be paid to the social context of the interviewees' experiences, and the positionality of the initiating researcher. The hermeneutic approach is also of value in this study because it requires a negotiation and renegotiation of the meaning of the analysis between the researcher and subjects (Stafford, 2004). During initial analysis, themes and patterns within and between the interview transcripts and identity maps were analyzed using an open coding process with the existing research questions used as a template. Particular attention was paid to both similar and dissimilar experiences of identity, service experiences, and the intersections of the two. Concept maps were developed from the identified themes and patterns using the researcher's understanding of social context and the impact of power relations on experiences of non-dominant groups.

During the final weeks of the PAR process, the research team was presented with the preliminary findings that had emerged during analysis of the qualitative interviews. The PAR team engaged in a dialogue about what aspects of the analysis resonated or did not resonate with their own experiences. This feedback was then incorporated into the

final analysis. A few weeks later, the PAR team engaged in an analysis of the PAR process as a way of serving LGBT young people. PAR team members assessed the aspects of the process that they assigned value to in terms of personal growth and understanding. This process included identification of moments during the process that were most impactful. The reflection on the PAR process was used to identify key points in the audio-recordings of the team meetings, which were transcribed and used to further explicate the reflections of the team members.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is aimed at increasing confidence that our findings reflect the meanings shared by study participants (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). Qualitative methods assume that a co-construction of stories and meaning has occurred between the researcher and the research participants. As opposed to research conducted from a positivist perspective, objectivity is not viewed as either achievable or desirable. Instead, the position of the researcher is made explicit (Shenton, 2004). Attending to trustworthiness in qualitative research is important to increasing the quality of social work research intended to increase the depth of our understanding, as a profession, of the experiences of marginalized populations (Lietz, & Zayas, 2010). What follows is a description of the ways in which trustworthiness was attended to in this study through the use of (1) reflexivity, (2) member checking, (3) prolonged engagement, and (4) thick description.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to a process of deconstructing who the researcher is, and how the beliefs, experiences and positionality of the researcher intersect with those of the

participants (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). Reflexivity is a process not an event. Several methods of engaging in reflexivity were included in this study. First, memos and journaling were used throughout both phases of the data collection and analysis process. Journaling was primarily used during the PAR phase to align with the reflexivity engaged in by the youth researchers. Journaling and memoing included reflections of my social position and its impact on the research, both in data collection and analysis. This is explored in depth in the findings chapter on the PAR process in order to make explicit my positionality. Second, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing with committee members regularly throughout the study. Peer debriefing involves engaging with peers who are not part of the research team, but who have knowledge and/or expertise in the research area. Third, reflexivity was incorporated into the PAR component of the study so that all of the co-researchers were involved in identifying the key aspects of the process that should be further analyzed or explored. It is this aspect of collective reflexivity and analysis that PAR scholars increases the contextual validity of the findings.

Member Checking

A second aspect of the trustworthiness of this study is the multiple points of member checking that occurred. During the interviews, the identity mapping process allowed for an immediate member checking similar to that of other visual methods (Fisher, 2012). In other words, the identity mapping was conducted at the completion of the identity-focused portion of the interview. Once the map had been completed, the interviewee explained the map verbally and the interviewer was able to request clarification about meaning or other aspects that may have been unclear or misunderstood during the interview. After preliminary analysis of the interviews was completed, a

presentation was made to those members of the PAR team who voluntarily agreed to stay after a weekly team meeting. The researcher provided dinner, and the young people gave reactions and feedback on the analysis after the presentation. The feedback was incorporated into the analysis.

Prolonged Engagement

A third component of the study that increases its trustworthiness is prolonged engagement. While there was not prolonged engagement with all of the research participants, the researcher did have a longstanding relationship with the organization serving the young people (over three years) and was involved in the site from which the sample was drawn on a regular basis. For those involved in the PAR component of the study (just over half of the sample of interviewees), the engagement was extended to weekly contact (at minimum) over a four month period. In many cases, the stories that were told in the interviews were repeated in the PAR team meetings, which allowed the researcher to be engaged with the experiences of the young people both through the transcripts and through ongoing interaction.

Thick Description

Finally, the use of thick description is used in the findings chapters to increase trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). Particularly due to the contextualized nature of identity for LGBTQ young people (McInroy, & Craig, 2012; Willis, 2012), and the localized knowledge produced through participatory action research, thick descriptions allow the reader to gain understanding of the places within which the young people are situated and have made meaning of their stories.

Limitations

Design Limitations

PAR has been criticized as not being a rigorous form of research (Fine, 2008). An important note with regard to understanding issues of objectivity, validity, reliability and generalizability is that PAR is not a method in and of itself. PAR studies have included a wide spectrum of methods from purely quantitative, survey-based to mixed methods to purely qualitative. First, the idea of researcher objectivity in the positivist sense can be criticized as a cloak for inherent biases on the part of the researcher and a traditionally white, western, male-dominated institution. In PAR, reflexivity and collectivity in many ways enhance the notion of objectivity (Fine, 2008). In other words, when data are collected and analyzed in a collective manner with multiple researchers who are also undergoing a reflective process to understand how their own experiences and biases might shape their interpretations, greater objectivity is more likely to occur. In PAR, researchers explore alternative explanations and challenge their own and others' analyses. "Strong objectivity is engaged as a social practice of relentless deliberation among collectives of researchers working through differences" (Fine, 2008, p. 223).

With regard to generalizability, many researchers who use PAR have given up on the traditional notions of what gives knowledge and its production value, and some even call for a reconceptualization of the notion of generalizability (Kirshner, 2010). However, while PAR is intended to attend to local context and relevance, many PAR projects with youth across the country have found that there are key themes or threads that the projects have across settings (Fine, 2008). In this sense, generalizability is achieved through these deeper themes or threads, while the specific findings are locally and socio-historically

contextualized. In the same sense, this study aimed to identify the value of PAR for the young adult participants in their specific, local context. This is not to say, however, that PAR and the components identified by the young people in this study may not also have value for LGBT youth in other contexts and/or other subpopulations of young people. The attention to context and utilization connects back to the original intention of Kurt Lewin (1946) in his vision for a new form of research – an action research.

Finally, with regard to validity, PAR calls into question the idea that research that is designed, and knowledge that is created without the voices of those who embody the experiences at hand cannot in fact have validity. Validity, in terms of expertise and content/construct, is rooted in the PAR approach.

Sample Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that given the make-up of the sample and its limited size, it cannot represent the population of LGBT youth and young adults. That is not, however, the intention of this study, which is focused on local relevance and application as well as the use of a critical methodology with the target population, and its potential as a service and research approach. The findings from this study should be understood and used with this in mind and not to make generalized inferences about LGBT youth as a whole. Given the complexity of identities and experiences within the target population that have been discussed, the researcher questions external validity claims of any research conducted on LGBT youth. More specifically, it should be acknowledged that the young people in this study may have higher levels of "outness" because of their connection to an LGBT youth-serving organization. They may also have higher service or support needs given the source of sampling. Also, although attempts

were made to reflect the heterogeneity of the population, a true identity matrix cannot be included given the scope of the study. Therefore, important perspectives were excluded, such as Native American or indigenous female.

The primary limitation to this study was the attempt to apply a critical methodology like PAR within a very limited timeframe, and with some pre-identified research questions. The structure that was imposed on the study was based in large part on the limitations of time and resources. This contradiction was addressed openly with the research team, and any boundaries that had to be placed on their work were made explicit whenever possible. Other decisions were turned over to the team for their own discussion and decision-making.

Chapter 4

EXPLORING IDENTITIES

Introduction

Data from the fifteen interviews were analyzed to address the first two research questions for this study: (1) What are LGBT young adults' experiences with and perceptions of school and community-based services aimed at meeting their needs? And (2) What role does identity play in LGBT young adults' perceptions of service needs and service experiences? In keeping with the theoretical framework of the study, the interviews began with a discussion about self-defined identity. Interviewees were asked about the aspects of their identities that were important to them. The themes that were identified from these discussions lay an important foundation for answering the research questions. Without a thorough understanding of how the young adults perceive, talk about, and understand their own identities, our understanding of service experiences and needs is limited.

In all 15 cases, interviewees shared multiple aspects of their identities that are important to shaping who they are as young adults. This first theme – the multiplicity of identity – is broken down into subthemes. What follows is a discussion of these subthemes which include; important aspects of identity, key themes related to how those aspects of identity came to hold meaning for the young people, and the ways in which these aspects of identity function in relation to one another. The identity maps that were created by the interviewees are used to illustrate some of these key subthemes. The identity map was a tool used in the interviews to allow the young people to visually represent their identities, in parts or as a totality. Very little structure was given to this

activity. Interviewees were given a blank piece of paper and colored pencils, and asked to draw or illustrate their identities in whatever ways made sense to them – using words, symbols, pictures, etc.

Another important theme that came out of the interviews is the way in which identity is both influenced by, and used to influence, the young adults' environments. This was true both for the immediate environments as well as the larger systemic influences and contexts. Given that LGBT young people face discrimination and harassment as they maneuver through their lives, the relationship between identity and environment is relevant to the findings of this study and will be discussed as well. The multiple layers are illustrated in Figure 1. The critical role of environment in understanding identity will be explored in detail in this chapter, and set the stage for deeper understanding of service experiences and needs.

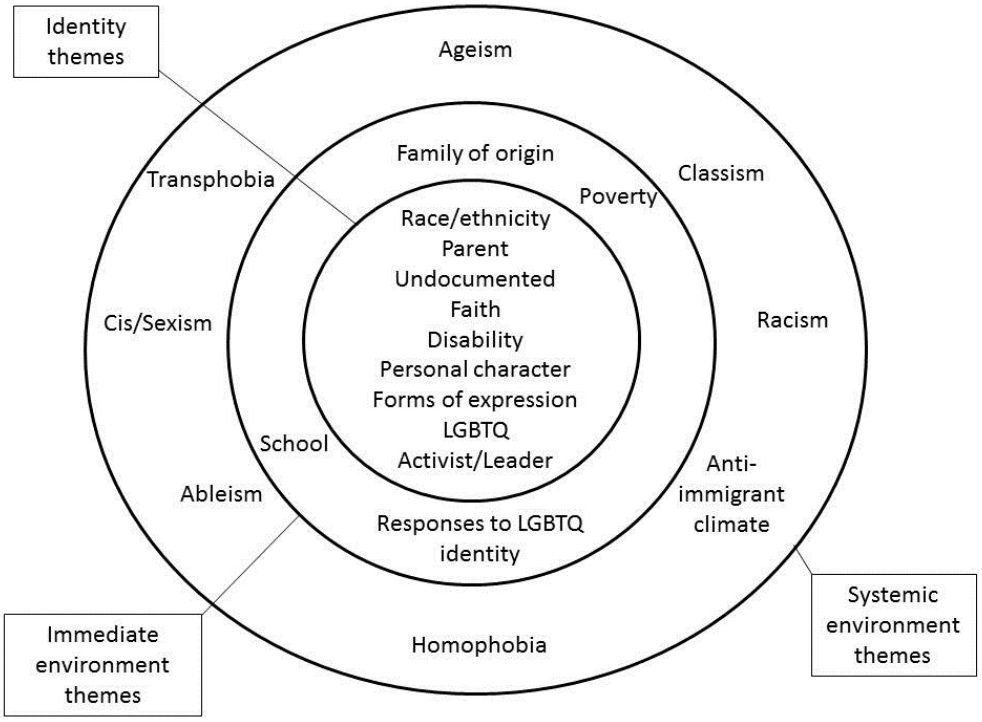


Figure 1. Identity and environment themes that emerged from the interview analysis.

Resisting Identity Categories

As previously discussed, an important theoretical principle to understanding identity is to create opportunities for people to self-define. This approach was taken in the interviews. A strong theme that emerged for the young people was their resistance to identity categories.

> *Well, um, I really don't like to classify myself or put myself - or you know categorize myself into any you know little groups. I just - I don't know.*

In some cases, they went on to discuss the limitations of existing identity categories. Many of the interviewees discussed the fluidity of identity, or the ways in which it has changed and shifted over their lives. Some of them anticipated that this change may continue to occur and saw the acceptance of a label or category as being counter to their openness to such change.

> *I honestly - to be honest, I - I think it's everything. The - LGBTQ, LMNOPZTS. That - that's what it is. Because how I am is I - I don't - love is love. And it - it's an emotion and a feeling. So, how can I say oh, I'm a gay male? That means what I - I - I can only love a male. I - I don't like putting that stop or that stop light, stop sign right there or you know categorizing myself. Or, I don't want to be considered trans just because you know I - I want to be a - a female. You know I - I don't like that. What if one day I want to date a female or be with a female?*

While there seemed to be an understanding of the potential need for categorization or labels, the negative impact of labeling was a reality for some of the interviewees. For those who had been given diagnostic, mental health labels from a young age or had faced the stereotypes and assumptions that accompany labels, identity categories were seen as limiting or as negative. The "agency" or sense of power and control associated with being able to self-define was articulated by one interviewee in the following way:

> *And really the only identities that are valid and real are the ones that are self-defined, not the ones that are coerced. Um, but for some reason we give more validity to the coerced identity as opposed to the chosen one. Which just like sets up this culture of removing agency and autonomy from queer people, which is really weird, and I don't know why people would ever support that.*

This does not, however, minimize the importance and relevance of "coerced" or socially imposed identities to the young people in this study. The young people talked openly and candidly about their identities as they perceived them. In some cases, interviewees shared that this was a topic that they had reflected a great deal on. Others expressed gratitude for having an opportunity to reflect on it, and to consider where they had come from.

The Multiplicity of Identities

When asked about the aspects of identity that have been most important to shaping who they are or who they have become, the interviewees included both socially constructed and individually constructed identity labels or categories. For the socially constructed identities, the young people had mixed opinions and experiences with incorporating these identities as a part of their own. This varied experience is illustrated below with the multiplicity of race or ethnic identity and LGBTQ identity.

Several identities claimed by the young people challenge commonly held stereotypes or generalizations about who LGBTQ young people are – including being a person of faith, a person with a disability, and a parent. The identities that were individually constructed by the young people were often based in skills/talents or personal characteristics, as a result of or in response to personal experiences (including trauma), and sometimes were shaped in response or resistance to the social context within which these young people are living. As the young people described the ways in which

their identities have taken shape, it is clear that they are simultaneously complex, shifting, and multi-layered.

Socially Constructed Identities

Racial and ethnic identity. From a social construction perspective, it is not surprising that many of the interviewees talked about race and ethnicity as important aspects of their identities. Some of the young people viewed race or ethnicity as a very important, positive aspect of who they are, talking openly about land-based connections, cultural connections (such as food or traditions), and family connections.

> *Yeah. It's just because [clears throat] my - my dad is originally from Santa Domingo and so he's Dominican and Puerto Rican and my mom is African American. And so I've always - I've grown up - learning nothing about my culture, l - or well, learning nothing but about my culture and where my family's come from. We've been over there plenty of times and that's just something that when we were younger and we did have strong relationship ____ that's something that he wanted to instill in us because he wanted to always make sure that we knew where we came from. And he wanted us to never, ever, let that go because that helps shape who you are. Because if you don't know like where you've come from and your history and what's your family's been through and your ancestors then you don't know where you're going in the world. And so that's something that's always been strong and instilled in me. And so that's something that is very important.*

The young people identified cultural values as being important to shaping the kind of person they have become as illustrated in the quote below from a young woman who self-identified as Black.

> *I don't really hear this in other cultures, but I know in our culture respecting your elders is like a big, big, big, big, big like to do thing. Like, growing up, I always called—I always called my mom, ma'am, and my dad, sir, 'cause my Dad was in the Army. And for the longest, I didn't know my mom's real name 'cause I would just always call her ma'am. And it's just—it's just a sign of respect, like, respect is a big part in our culture.*

In some cases, the importance of racial and ethnic identity became a source of identity tension. The youth discussed these important connections while also sharing

moments of rejection from the families that had instilled such a sense of connection and pride in their racial/ethnic identities. One interviewee shared that it was his ethnic identity, as a Filipino, that gave him access to positive gay or LGBT role models, which became crucial to the development of a positive identity as a gay male. As he watched a transgender-identified TV star come out and transition while maintaining popularity in the Philippines, he also faced homophobia from the strong faith-based ties that some of his Filipino family members held in the United States. It was the affirmation and identity reflection that he had culturally that helped him through his struggle to be accepted by his family.

> *I think so. Because, like in the Philippines it's very open. Like, because, like, there's a – like I would watch Filipino shows and everything like that, because my mom has, like, the whole Filipino channel thing. I would watch shows, I would watch movies, because, like, they're so open that it kind of helped me to be open. Because there's a whole lot of gay guys that – like gay people who play in movie roles and everything like that. I actually looked up to this Filipino celebrity. And he, he was a gay actor, but he played a straight role. He played a straight role and everything like that. And, like, I never – when I was little, I never knew he was gay or anything like that, because, like, he played the straight role real good. And when I found out he was gay and everything, I was like, wow, that's cool. And then I heard that he started to transition. And I was like, oh my gosh. What? Because, like he – like, back in the day he was like this muscular guy. Like, he was just, oh, sexy. And now she's very beautiful. Like, I don't remember her name, but she's very beautiful. Like she has the, like, face of a woman and everything. Like, I was just like, wow, she's very pretty. I just look at that and I'm like, oh wow. I can't see the guy anymore. Yeah, she's still acting. She actually was in a movie recently where, like, she played a girl role and, like, she was with this guy and everything. And like – but that guy was straight, but he was muscular. But yeah, like, I look up to her and everything. Because if it wasn't for her, I still would have never been out. And all the other gay people, gay Filipinos, like, I love it, because for some reason I feel like that I should go to the Philippines and be famous there and everything, because, like, they have a lot of gay actors in the Filipino community, gay community.*

This experience juxtaposed with the following quote from the same young person describing his family's response to his gay identity illustrates the different messages he received.

> *Yeah, because, like, my mom, she loves my courageousness and she's glad that I came out. She's very accepting. The whole – the only reason why she did the whole like – you're going – like, it's bad, it's bad to be gay and all that other stuff was because my aunt doesn't like the whole gay situation. I mean, like, I mean – not situation. The whole gay thing. She – like, every time I go over to my aunt's house and everything like that, she would just be like, "So, are you not gay yet? Are you still gay? Do you have a girl yet?" Yeah, my mom's sister. And, like, it would hurt me a lot. I mean, like – but I would tell her, I mean, like, I am still gay and I'm going to stay gay. And, like, love has no gender.*

For others, racial or ethnic identity was talked about as something that they longed to have more connection with, as reflected in the following quote from a young person who grew up in a home with Cuban immigrant parents. His mother racially identified as "White" and raised her children to think about themselves as "White."

> *So I grew up being really whitewashed, like the goal was to assimilate into a really white dominant culture. So I didn't learn how to speak Spanish. I wasn't really brought up with a lot of Cuban food. I mean, with some, rice and black beans and chicken and rice [laughs], like a lot – a lot of chicken and rice – and sometimes platanos fritos – but nothing beyond that.*
>
> *So, I mean, wanting to learn Spanish is a really big part of my identity, and wanting to connect more with a culture that was taken from me. Like I never even got the chance to like connect with it at all, is really important to me.*

Some of the interviewees also talked about race and ethnic identity as only in response to, or in a context of, racism or racial stereotypes. For example, a Latina interviewee specifically talked about her perception that others see her race as being important, but that she just wants to live her life.

> *Not - or I don't know I really don't see my race very important. As I know that a lot of people do here too, but I - I don't. I really - I try to live my life, I try to be who I am and not really pay attention of who's what race and what it is, you know. I try to live my life and try you know - 'cause life is too short right now –*

However, later in the interview, she acknowledged that racism challenges her sense of self, and it is a struggle to not let it get to her.

> *It is hard here because it's a lot of racisms you know and it's just like you need to keep yourself of who you are and think about it you know this is not who you are. You're different than you know - than what they making you see that you are.*

Similarly, a Navajo interviewee shared the following response when asked if this is an important aspect of her identity.

> *Um - um, no, not really. I mean you know when people think Navajo or Native American and they think you know transsexual or gay, you know y - people think we have it easy because you know that's how - you know back in the day you know where's - that - you know people consider us sacred people and they're a little more lenient towards that. It's not like that. You know we don't get it easy because you know back in the day gram - old grandpa and grandpa used to tell us you know that those were sacred people. We don't' get it like that. Not anymore. You know it's whatever you have anywhere else is the same back where I grew up. You know all the horrible things that happen here, happened where I live.*

The interviewees shared specific examples of being harassed or teased because of their racial identity. One interviewee talked about the importance of his Mexican identity, but because he is multi-racial, his lighter skin tone caused others to question his identity and perceive him as not Mexican enough. This conflict between how one sees him or herself and how one is perceived by others was a common theme related to multiple aspects of identity.

> *I was always proud of my Latin heritage. My dad he's - like if you saw him, you would know he's Mexican. You know where he came from. But like my mom, she's more light skinned and I got like my dad's features, like face, but I have my mom's skin tone. And that was kinda - always kind of an issue in hi - growing up. Like it was always like - like whenever anyone wanted to attack me, they would attack me either to through how light my skin was or my pink roller skater things.*

As a young adult, he continues to experience this sense of being out of place among others who are Mexican-identified in the gay community.

> *But there's other places like I guess there's some bars where it's like - a bunch of like blonde guys with - are white, white and I kind of blend in more. But when I*

go to like a Latin like - a Latin bar or club like [name of bar]*'s, I kind of stick out. And I'm like - it's not a bad thing but it's just - it's like they don't - they don't put me with them. Where I want to - I want to be part of the Mexican community.*

The social construction of race and ethnicity was also intricately tied to other aspects of identity for the interviewees. For example, one interviewee who was undocumented saw this as both a separate piece of identity from his Mexican-origins, but also as being deeply connected. It wasn't until he became a young adult and entered college that he was faced with the constructed identity of "illegal" or undocumented as a result of state legislation that caused him to lose his scholarships, and ultimately put him in a position of not being able to find stable employment. But he did not see the anti-immigrant policies affecting his deep connection to his Mexican identity.

When I's – when I was so excited because I couldn't find a job and when I was 16, about years – eight years ago, that's when all these laws started coming in, like E-Verify and Prop 200 came in later on and then the DREAM Act being killed twice already and then I didn't realize how important it was because I couldn't find a job when I was 16. So I wanted one when I was 16. My parents said don't worry about it, graduate high school. We'll have you covered. I had a scholarship, a Bridge Scholarship from my high school to college and I had another scholarship on top of that and so I was going to college for four years, full paid. But then Prop 200 came along and it made it hard for me to go to college because everything's been too expensive. So one of my scholarships was taken away.

Well, also – well – well going back to the whole laws and shaping who I am and being from – being from Mexico, I'm very proud – I'm very proud of who I am. I will never – I will never deny that I'm Mexican even if residence to citizenship – citizenship comes to me, I will never deny that I'm Mexican. I will – I would never say I'll never go back to Mexico, ever. I have – I have friends that said that. You cannot forget who you are. You gotta be who you are.

LGBTQ identity. As with racial/ethnic identity, LGBTQ identities and the stories associated with them varied across the interviews. For some interviewees, the identity labels within the acronym of LGBT seemed to fit and feel comfortable for them.

Well, I always kind of knew I was gay. Like when I was a kid I liked playing with Barbies and I loved like the boxes, they're so pretty. Like I always wanted one,

but my dad never bought me one, he bought me a dinosaur. Which I loved, like I love dinosaurs. And, um, so I always kind of knew and then when I turned 15, I came out as gay.

For others, there were non-binary identity labels that seemed to fit better and resonate with their sense of identity (hence the addition of "Q" or "queer" to the acronym).

I identify as a gender queer trans guy.

I guess in terms of sexual orientation it's really fluid at the moment and goes back and forth a lot, I don't really know what's going on with that. I feel like hormones are, uh, really changing my interests. Um, so I don't, I usually just identify as queer in terms of my sexual orientation, but I definitely like women.

And for others still, the LGBTQ aspect of their identity was not one that they saw as important to shaping who they are as a young adult and no identity labels were used.

Interviewer: *Okay. So in terms of your—you said you identify as bisexual?*

Interviewee: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *Is that an important part for you of who you are, or what role does it play?*

Interviewee: *Not important, but it's there. I mean, it's not—it doesn't define me. I define me, so. Yeah.*

For the trans-identified young people, the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity was an important emphasis in understanding their identities. For example, one trans-identified young person emphasized that her identity was as a straight female, and she resented having to identify as transgender in order to access programs or services.

Similar to their sense of connection to an identity label or category was their varied responses in terms of connection to an LGBTQ community or population.

Although all of the interviewees, either at the time of the interview or in the past, had been participants in LGBTQ youth-specific programs, not all of the young people

identified as being in an LGBT community. Others discussed the subtle nuances associated with being members of other identity groups and trying to be a part of the LGBT community. For example, one interviewee shared his sense of not fitting in based on his class background when he tried to attend an LGBT-specific youth program.

> *There was just a lot of like - back then were a lot more wealthy kids. Like there were - there were a lot of kids from - kids from* [city] *and* [agency] *would go there and they were just so - like I grew up poor, I grew up in this neighborhood. And I didn't - I looked more scruffy and - I showed, but I just looked not as nice as they did. So it was just kinda like - I just felt like back then you had to have a certain look to fit in. And I was just like not the look. So after a while, I just stopped showing up.*

Many of the young people shared their journeys of coming to understand that they were different, finding the terms (and the negative connotations associated with them) to describe or identify this "difference", and the disclosure – either of their choosing or at the hands of someone else – of their LGBTQ identity to family and friends. However, just as the identities of these young people are complex, so are their relationships with family. Even for those who had experienced rejection and homelessness as a result of their family's reaction to the LGBTQ identity, some shared the ways in which these relationships shifted and changed over time. For example, one young man was kicked out of his home by his mother and finished high school while living behind a "Circle K". The following quote describes his current relationship with his mother.

> *And you know she said a few things that I know that she would have never said to me and you know of course it was the whole getting kicked out. You know being homeless, being all that. And it - it took her a while. It took her about I'm gonna say a year and a half or something to really adapt. Because I'm the only male, um, I was the - the last male of you know my family to carry the last name and do all this stuff. You know mentally she was like okay, no grandkids, no wedding, no you're not carry on the last name, you're not gonna do this. But then when I think she finally realized that it has nothing to do with her, nothing to do with "grandkids" or wedding. It's about me and not to be so selfish. That - and that's -*

that's all it is. And I think that's what really made her just [snap] click into it. Now we're just two peas in a pod.

For the young people who already faced barriers to achieving stability, such as childhood abuse or a disability, the rejection of family further intensified their instability as described by one young man who had grown up in foster care and finally, as a teenager, was adopted.

And I was like 15 or 16, I told her, my adoptive mom that I was coming out, you know, and she was like, "Well, if you're going to be in my family, then you can't be like that; you have to go." And so, I was on my own, I was on the streets at 15. And trying to figure out – I didn't know – I didn't – I didn't – I didn't know anything about Arizona. I didn't know nothing about Arizona; I didn't know nothing at all. You know. I got beat up a couple times, I got jumped just for being gay. But like, I didn't know – I just never understood Arizona. It took me a while to trust in Arizona.

The interviewees discussed the challenges they faced from within the LGBT community to developing a sense of identity that fit with who they saw themselves as, and that would be accepted and affirmed. One interviewee described his experiences as follows.

And the LGBT community is the friend who's secretly an asshole. I know that sounds terrible, but – and I love my cisgender gay friends, I really do, but they're not really affirming of me, and they're not really affirming of trans people in general, and they don't really work at all to make safe spaces for trans people. And they make so many concessions with their transphobic gay friends that they know that I don't know, that they don't have that right to make for me.

For one young woman, her identity as a feminine lesbian was challenged by others in ways that she continued to struggle with. She did not want her gender expression to define who she should date, or to dictate when and how often she should have to "come out" or self-identify. She identified the stereotypes within the community as limiting.

Well I don't – I don't know because it's like that's why I'm still like – like deep down like I still have that self-acceptance problem because like I don't fit that stereotype that everybody has and like I can talk about it for hours and hours like

here or like at places that do like know that I'm gay, or like the people who do know that, but it's not like getting me anywhere.

You know, like why should there be a stereotype and like that's what I'm fighting with like with to myself. It's like, "Okay, I don't have to dress a certain way. I don't have to put on like, you know, combat boots or anything," like, well, that's what I want to do because I like the style, but like I don't need to like wear a rainbow like bracelet, I don't need to like tell – I don't know – be physically like changing myself to meet everybody else's needs.

So it's like – it's hard though because it's like okay, like all my friends would be like, "You're too pretty to be gay. You're like such a girly-girl. You love getting your nails done and like your hair done and all this stuff."

I'm like, "Okay, like I'm gay though." Like why should that, you know, be something that – like I can't be gay because I have long hair, or that I wear makeup.

Identity acceptance as an LGBTQ-identified person was a key component of the descriptions that interviewees gave of their journey to understanding the meaning of this aspect of their identities. Unlike many of the other identities that they claimed, LGBTQ identities were ones that required a process of identifying with others, and affirming that there are multiple ways to live as an LGBTQ person. For some, the point of acceptance was a catharsis of sorts, as described below by a young woman who grew up on a reservation and had limited access as a child and adolescent to information or role models. It was her mother who encouraged her to leave the reservation to get access to the resources she needed to become the woman she knew herself to be.

And then slowly, you know being so - more social, doing research. I kinda stumbled upon you know the whole transgender era and I just kind of educated myself and that's where I - that's where I felt the most relief and most comfortable when I found out the information. Because you know I - I don't know how to explain it. It's just I knew I belonged somewhere. I knew I - I knew that you know I was supposed to do great things and I don't know, as soon as I found the word transgender and you know other people like me. I mean they're normal as - you know as I should be.

Faith-based identity. Research is limited in its exploration of spirituality and connections to communities of faith among LGBTQ young people. For several young people in this study, growing up in a faith tradition was an important foundation and source of strength that did not change as they began to identify as an LGBTQ person. This does not mean that they did not face challenges from others within faith communities. In fact, they did. What is important to share in this context is the language that they used to describe how they viewed their relationships with God or a higher power.

> *Yeah, you know. I'm not here for, you know, for friends or all of that. You know, I'm here to – you know, and – and also, God – I feel that God sent me here to tell people something, you know.*
>
> *And I was like, it doesn't matter what he created, you know, he still loves us no matter what, whether we're gay, bi, straight, purple, you know; he still loves us. So, for – for them to say, "Oh, the Bible said this," the Bible said nothin; that's not what I believe in.*

Some sought out faith communities that were affirming. In one case, a faith community that was affirming of LGBT identity became a space where a young person experienced racism, and therefore was invalidated in his racial identity. Others chose to engage with members of their faith communities and directly challenged their positions towards LGBT-identified people.

> *And actually my father's a pastor back home, back in D.C.; he has his church and everything. And the way I think it, like your relationship with God is yours, its individual. No one else can tell you how he loves you. No one else can tell you how you have to be in order to receive his love. All you have to do is give him love and give him praise and walk - like try to walk as much with him as possible. Like try to keep - get your life as in tune with him as possible. And for me, like before I started this, I - I did, I prayed a lot. Like there - this was not an easy decision for me. I - I prayed a lot, there were a lot of tears, there was a lot of fear and everything. And I was just like well, this is what I want. I'm trying to be happy. And I know you want nothing from me but to be happy. And I tell people - like I've had people who tell me, uh - well, you know you're gonna go to hell for*

this and stuff like because you're - you're not being who - he - you were in his image before, but now you've changed. I was like no. I was like he's telling me you know what, you're doing what - you're trying to be happy. And I know that he supports me because there could be - there could be so - my life could be on the other side of the spectrum. I - I couldn't be in school. I could be homeless. I could be struggling. I could do - I could be doing God knows what to try and survive, but I'm not. I was like everything - everything I need he provides for me.

Based on the experiences shared, faith appeared to be a foundational component of identity that was a space of intersection between personal and public identity. As reflected in the identity map (see Figure 2), faith is a central point that appears to connect the other aspects of identity for this young person.



Figure 2. Identity map reflecting faith as an important aspect of identity.

Parent. Similar to faith as an aspect of identity among LGBTQ young people, parenting is rarely considered in the literature as a potential aspect of the lives and

identities of LGBTQ young adults. In this sense, it is an invisible aspect of LGBT youth identity. The young people who were interviewed for this study talked about parenting as (a) an existing and important aspect of their current identities, and/or (b) an aspect of identity that they planned to incorporate into their lives in the future. These are reflected in the following two quotes.

> *Because, like, his mom doesn't – his mom doesn't want me to have his number or her number or anything. So, I'm fine with him contacting me. Like, I know he's young and everything, but he's really smart. I don't know. Like, I remember he contacted me for father's day. I kind of cried just a little.*

> *I have my own - my own dreams g - and goals. I want to be a mom someday. I want to have - I want to have seven kids. And that's just because I'm so used to coming from a big family that I w - I want to raise a big family. And my goal is to in adopting my children; I want each one of my children to have a different ethnic background. And I want them to grow up; I want them to learn about their heritage. I want them to know where they come from. If there is a religion specific to that group I want them to be able to explore and understand it. Even if it's not something that they want to devote themselves to I still want them - I want them to know where they come from. And I want them to be able to teach that and share that with their siblings because if they're growing up - if they're growing up with a diverse family and a diverse life, they're not gonna see race, they're not gonna see color. They're gonna see hey, this is my brother, this is my sister. They get on my nerves, they break my toys, they take my stuff, but we're family. This - this is the family that you know. And the reason being is because I feel like that there's so much hatred in the world just because it doesn't affect people directly.*

These ways of thinking about their identity as a parent were not mutually exclusive. For example, one young woman was in the process of working to regain custody of her children from Child Protective Services at the time of the interview. In her identity map (See Figure 3), she visually split her current identity and her vision for her future. Her identity as a parent is reflected in both.

> *For me it is a big thing of my life. And I'm a mother too. I'm a - a mother of three kids too. So you know I consider my family more important than any - anything right now.*

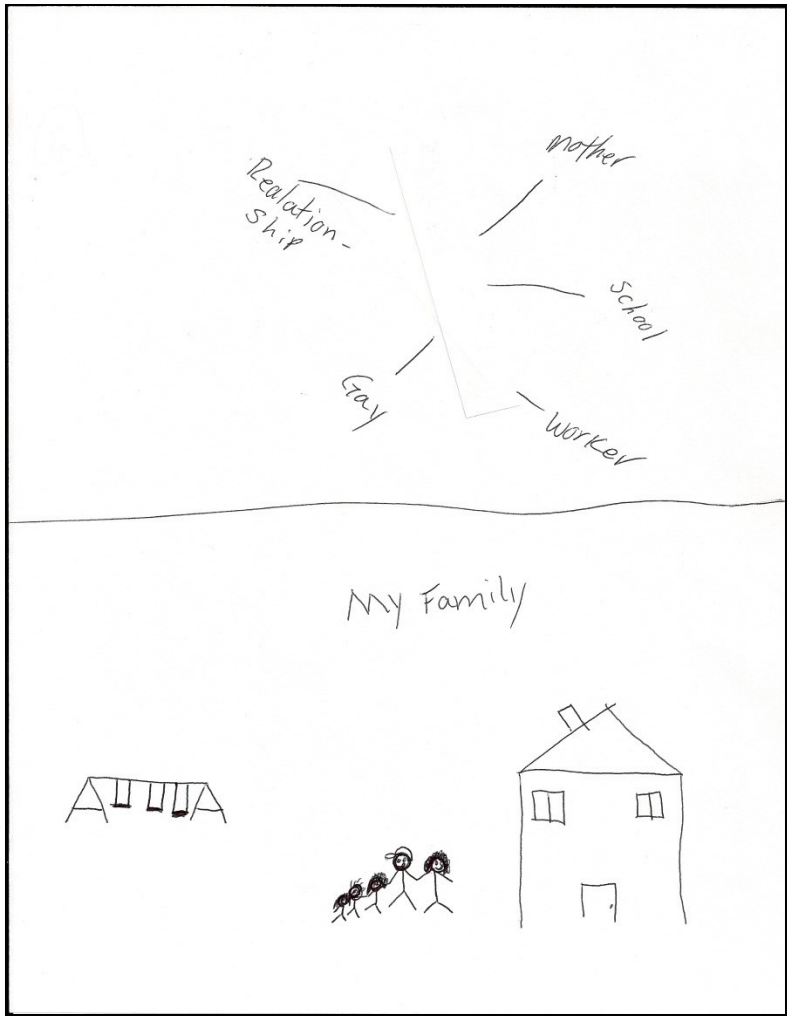


Figure 3. Identity map reflecting parent as an important aspect of identity.

Person with a disability. One interviewee shared his perception that disability is an aspect of identity among LGBTQ identified people that is rarely discussed or seen reflected in the community.

> *And also like a lot of the time the disabled community is really, really invisibilized, especially if they have invisible disabilities, like people who have fibromyalgia or heart disease etcetera etcetera.*

This feeling was echoed by an interviewee who identifies as deaf, and who has faced challenges to connecting with the LGBTQ community, which is predominantly hearing and largely uneducated about the experiences of people who are deaf.

> *But see, they are clueless about deaf people. They don't learn about deaf people and deaf culture and deaf history, nothing. So I sort of feel like it's not fair. I've already learned about their hearing culture and history and world, and they're so clueless about mine. So I'm trying to teach people about deaf culture and history. And when some of them learn, then they're interested and they ask me questions about cochlear implants.*
>
> *The deaf, gay, lesbian youth, people think that – the hearing people think that people who sign, can't hear, are retarded and that the only thing that we can do – we can do anything that they can do, but the only thing that we can't do is hear. So it's been a really tough thing to go through being identified as deaf.*

He shared in his interview that despite his challenges, he felt grateful to have attended a high school with both hearing and deaf students. He noted the added challenges he sees his peers facing who socialized primarily within the deaf community.

Individually Constructed Identities

For most of the young people who were interviewed, identity was something that was, at least in part, created or discovered. These individually constructed aspects of identity came in multiple forms and from varied experiences. For some of the interviewees, these aspects of identity were related to their abilities and personal characteristics. For others, they were created in response to personal experiences. And for others still, they came out of a personal knowledge of oppression and a conviction to be a part of changing society for the better. Some of the young people, as described briefly under LGBTQ identity, created new identity categories or labels where one did not exist for them. These are described in more detail below.

Personal character. The young people identified their personalities and character traits as important aspects of their identities. For many of them, it was a way to begin the discussion of identity and to help me (the interviewer) to understand who they were as individuals as opposed to jumping right into a list of identity labels or categories that felt

limiting. These descriptions of identity were often clarified as ways in which others perceive the young people. It was as if the interviewees were using the feedback and affirmation of others to help to define themselves, or to provide guideposts as they searched for their own identities.

> *Well, um, I've been called quirky a lot. A bunch of random things combined to make no sense. I don't know. I -- Well, um, I'm really I guess random. I've been told I'm really random and I have just random thoughts. I'm like la, la, la. And I've been told they're so random that they're adorable. Oh, that sounds so cheesy.*
>
> *Mm, I think it all just like falls together though, because like I like realized like my energy, like my sense of like I walk into every room and I'm just so excited to be everywhere. And I'm like very – I'm a social butterfly. I think that's like a big quality to me. But like everybody – that everybody's starting to see, and like – my family kind of see – like has already seen it like since I was little – but like – it's like here it's like I walk in and if I – if a new person walks in I'll be like, "Hi, I'm [interviewee], like what's up girl? Like how are you?"*
>
> *A lot of people, and myself, like I characterize me as a very passionate person and, um, I'm pretty much the person that if I had one piece of bread left and there was another person that needed it, I would give away to it, like no questions asked. I am definitely that person. Um, at times it does cost me people stepping all over me, but it's something that I have to learn and grow with. So other than that, like that's just how I identify and – pretty much it [laughter].*

Personal identity traits were also identified as being in direct relationship to other, more socially constructed, aspects of identity. The quote below is from a female-identified, transgender young person who talks about the importance of "coming out" as transgender and beginning her transition to her ability to fully express her personality.

> *I would say a majority of it would be my personality and that's just because, um, this process of becoming [interviewee] has only been about five months now, I seriously committed full-time lifestyle, hormones and everything. And I feel before I was a lot more drawn back and I was never really interactive with people and people never really got to know who I was. But, I realized that going through this I'm more comfortable with myself and so I can show my personality. I can show how I love to have fun or how when it comes to studying, I'm just such a goofball because I like to do it with a group of friends and things like that. So, I feel like this process and, uh, becoming [interviewee] is mostly about being able to express my personality now and so that's one major thing that was important to*

me because, um, I've been - I've been struggling with this decision for about ten years.

Similarly, the following quote is from a young person who had been identified as needing special education in school, which shaped the sense he had of his own abilities growing up. Here he talks about where his personal drive comes from, referring back to proving his abilities.

- I think it's because [laughter] my, myself, [interviewee], is very hard headed. Okay. And I want to prove to myself and then to other people that I am good. That I'm capable of things. That I can learn. I can help others. And even from a young age, super young age, and I think that's what the motivation is.

Forms of expression. Being able to express oneself, including one's personality and individuality, was another important aspect of identity and reflects personal qualities and traits. Many of the young people identified as artists, musicians and dancers. A common way of relaying this important aspect of identity was in its value as a form of expression that was not solely reliant on verbal communication.

Well, um, you know ever since I was a kid, I've always been interested in dance, just moving and the art of dance and how that is kind like, um - it's like a language where you can express yourself without literally saying or communicating at all. So - and I picked that up at a very young age.

And the young people shared its importance particularly as they faced trauma or other challenges in their lives. The following quote is from a young woman who underwent years of harassment at school, including physical and emotional bullying. She reframes this experience of being "different," which is what she perceived as attracting the negative attention from peers, as something that is important to making her unique.

Well, me being able to express myself without using words. I really love fashion, and I'm really interested in—it's like my passion. As you can tell, I'm like, different. [Laughter] But yeah, fashion's definitely up there. And dance is up there. Any way I can express myself without using words, I jump right on it. Just from always like a young age, I've always been different, been odd in some kind

> *of way. Like I pick out different hairstyles for myself that isn't like the norm hairstyle, I guess. I just always—I just always stood out. Like at first, I thought it was like a bad thing. I was always one of the weird kids in school. Like the little weird emo kids in school no one really talks to. Yeah, I was there. I don't know. It's just—it's just always—I've always—I've always just had a niche for it.*

It is important to note that with regard to drag identity, not all of the young people who were involved in drag saw it as a form of expression, which will be explored in more detail later. One of the quotes below is from a young person who does identify drag as art, but it served different purposes with regard to identity for different interviewees.

> *Not really. I mean, like, what I think drag is, is it's an art form. And like, to me everything, like, when I do drag and everything, I love to have fun. I love to act, I love to do everything that makes me happy. You know what I mean? Like, I love living the guy life, wearing guy clothes and everything like that, but it's just, it's just fun to me. Like, I love to perform because I love when I see people and they look at me and they love what I do and everything. It's fun.*

The identity map below (See Figure 4) was drawn by a young person who grew up in a home where her mother and stepfather fought a lot. She talked about finding music at a young age as an escape from the fighting, but also as a form of expression. As she got older, she continued to develop her interest and at the time of the interview was taking college classes to pursue a career in music. Her identity map reflects the ways that music became integral aspects of her identity. For example, her ears are speakers that can be turned on and off as needed to filter out the fighting (as a child) or negativity (as a young adult.)



Figure 4. Identity map reflecting form of expression as an important aspect of identity.

Overcoming trauma: Survivor identity. Overcoming traumatic events or experiences in life was an important aspect of identity for some of the interviewees. The trauma experienced by the interviewees in this study was severe in many cases – family inflicted abuse, rape, being disowned or devalued by loved ones, as well as experiences of homelessness, violence and harassment. The interviewees talked about their identities in ways that reflected a personal attribute of strength as a result of surviving, but it also meant more. One young woman talked about the choice she perceived herself as having – incorporating a victim identity into her sense of self, or incorporating a survivor identity. For her, this was a crossroad.

> *So instead of, um, becoming a victim, I started like becoming more of a quote, unquote survivor, I guess you could say, from it. Um, I just learned that the –*

what happened to me is what happened to me and there's nothing I can do about it. But I can grow from it because it's experience that I've had that I can pass on to other people. Um, now why – the reason why I say that that's something that makes me a more stronger person, I grow from it, is because, um, not every story is alike. So my – my story could change somebody else's life. And so, um, I just gained power, or control of the situation by realizing that I'm not a victim. That I am somebody that can help current victims become survivors.

The young people talked about being happy with the person that they had become, and acknowledged the role that traumatic experiences had played in the shaping of their personhood.

No, I mean every - everything. Just the whole environment itself was just not appropriate. Okay. And, um, you know I - I went through certain obstacles in my life within a - within a - a short [sigh] you know - okay, let me put it like this. I should have not been exposed or seen things at a certain age. You know that normal people usually experience when they're 16. I seen certain things or heard things, or visualized things at the age of 7. You know, um, my mother went away for about almost six and a half years, seven years. Okay. I was, um - I did the whole foster care, um, you know going through the system. And then you know got to, um, a family member finally stepped up and said blah, blah, blah. Let's just say that was - okay, here we go. Fasten your seatbelts because this gonna be huge. I'm just gonna start listing certain - okay. It's - that was scary, traumatizing, hurtful, memorizing - I mean just all of this stuff. I mean every letter that defines an emotion end of story was there. I mean I was emaciated, I was abused, I was neglected. Certain things and no, no, no, it's not a negative thing because like I said, this is what brought me to [interviewee] you know. And if I can change it, would I, you know that's where it's borderline because I - I don't want to because then [interviewee] wouldn't come out like this you know.

Being a survivor and developing strength from the process of overcoming gave them strength to face the next challenge, as well as wisdom and experience that could be used to help someone else. In the identity map below (see Figure 5), the young person visually represents the strength that she has developed and how it helps her to fend off the negativity that comes her way.

And this rectangle here, I'm gonna shade blue, cause it's some of the things that help me in my life to be fearless and brave and to conquer the things in my life that I have done. And then I have all of these little smaller circles, like little positive neutrons that, you know, just are there - memories, little accomplishments. Every time I, like, I fall into my negatives, and it seems like I

can't take it anymore I, you know, rely on my little positive neutrons to get me back to being this whole person that I am.

She continued:

See that's -- See and that's why there's many of them. And there's only four negatives. You know no matter what, you know at the time it could be negative, but the positive always outweighs you know the negative - 'Cause there's only four things. I have hundreds, even maybe - even more of positive neutrons you know that keep me on track.

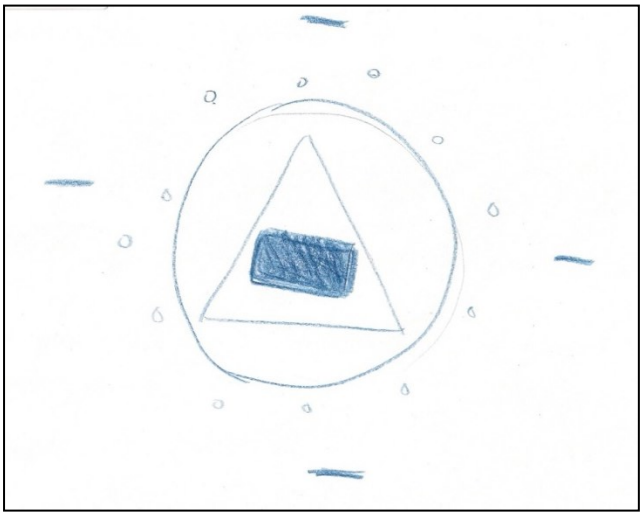


Figure 5. Aspects of identity that come from overcoming trauma.

Resisting binaries. For the interviewees, the production of identity was also the result of experiences in which the young people had no identity category or model to look to that would best fit who they had become as a person. In many ways, identity is fluid and the interviewees shared journeys of moving within and between existing identity categories over periods of time. For some, however, their identities moved into realms for which there was no existing category. In these instances, instead of being invisibilized, they sought to create identities, or produce spaces for themselves, as described by the interviewee below.

And then, um, I ended up meeting my significant other now when she – when he was identifying as a female. And, um, then I came out as full lesbian and we've

> *been together for about a year and a half. And then he told me that he was transgendered female to male. And so in respect to him I told him that – I asked him like how he wanted me to identify, 'cause I am very big on his safety. So, um, he said that he really didn't care.*
>
> *So then that's when I came up with trans-straight, um, unless we're in like a public thing that don't support transgender. Then I'll just say I'm straight.*

Acts of identity resistance, as this young person described, often resulted from the constraints that were experienced from existing socially constructed identities, and/or from their understanding of the social constraints they experienced from oppressive institutions and systems. The topic of identity resistance is revisited in a later section.

Piecing Together Our Identities

Up to this point, we have looked at the aspects of identity that the young people in this study identified as being most important to who they have become as young LGBTQ-identified adults. We have also explored both socially and individually constructed identities, including the multiple ways that these identities were perceived and incorporated into their sense of self. It is clear that identities do not function in isolation. They are shaped and impacted by a variety of factors, including other aspects of identity. In this section, we explore how varying aspects of identity are perceived in relation to one another. All of the young people identified more than one aspect of identity. Identifying the ways that these aspects come together to make up a whole person is vital to understanding the intersections of identity among LGBTQ young adults. As the young people developed their identity maps, they were asked to visually represent the relationships between aspects of their identities. The three primary themes that emerged from these discussions include identity cohesion, identity conflict, and intersectionality.

Identity cohesion. Identity cohesion was identified when aspects of identity were perceived as fitting together well without conflict. Just as identity itself is fluid and

changes over time, identity cohesion can be increased or decreased based on environmental factors, relationships, or frame of mind. For example, in the identity map below (see Figure 6), this young person had recently joined a group that was for queer undocumented youth. He described how the existence of this group, and his involvement in it, had raised important connections that he had not considered before. He began to see the similarities in experience of those who are undocumented in the U.S. and those who identify as LGBTQ. In fact, the group's agenda was to begin to bridge the two communities and help them to see the ways in which their efforts to achieve equal rights would be more effective if they worked together.

Identity conflict. In contrast, identity conflict was identified as occurring when two or more aspects of identity did not fit together well and created a source of conflict for the young person, either internally or externally. If we look again at the identity map in Figure 6, a conflict was identified by this young person between his strong identity as an athlete (signified by a soccer ball) and his gay identity (signified by rainbow colors). In fact, he shared that he delayed coming out because he felt that he could not have both aspects of his identity in his life simultaneously. The young person visually placed these aspects of his identity far from one another to represent the disconnect between them, and as can be seen in the identity map, there is not an arrow connecting the two as there are with other aspects of his identity. This interviewee spoke about his efforts to build a sports program within the LGBTQ youth serving organization in his community. He felt that this would be a way to reduce the conflict. So, as with identity cohesion, identity conflict can be shifted or impacted by environmental factors.

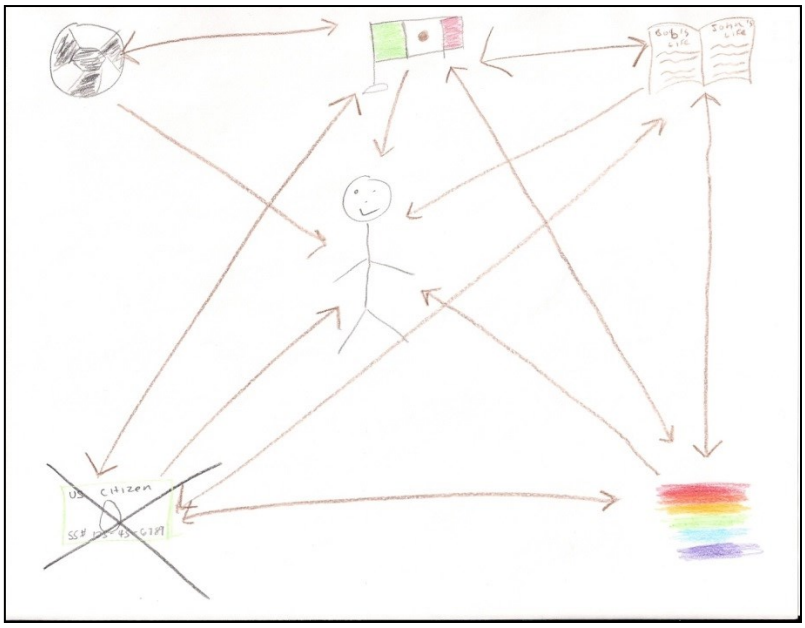


Figure 6. Identity map of a young person who illustrated identity cohesion between his undocumented and gay identities.

Intersectionality. As compared to the identity map above, another theme that emerged from the interviewees' discussions of the relationships between aspects of their identities was intersectionality. Intersectionality occurs when the aspects of identity are so interconnected that they cannot be pulled apart, and one's experiences cannot be understood through the lens of only one aspect of identity. This is described in the quote below, and further illustrated in the identity map that follows (see Figure 7).

> *Like the - their - theirs - [interviewee]'s not without that, but both. A - it's like - t - it's not too separate things it's not. We just [slap] it's just one big 'ol huge package for me. There's no - you know for me there's no such thing as oh you know gay and - and dance and school and [interviewee] over here and then you know of course you know spirituality and all that. Uh-uh. Uh-huh. We do this big thing and what's it's a - it's called [interviewee]. That - that's what it is. So it's everything just bunched up. So --*

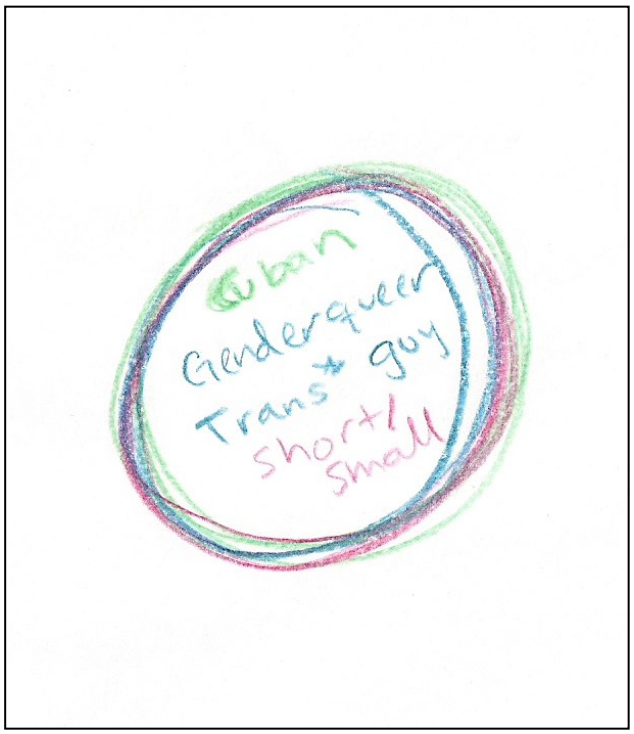


Figure 7. Identity map of a young person reflecting intersectionality in the relationships between aspects of his identity.

The young person who represented his identity in Figure 7 talked about his exposure to intersectionality as a theory and its importance in validating his sense of identity. For example, his experience as a "trans* guy" is shaped by his identity as the child of Cuban immigrants. They are interconnected, and as such his experiences of transphobia are impacted by racism.

Environmental Influences on Identity

The identities shared by the interviewees were both impacted by and even created in response to the environments within which the young people had been as children and adolescents, and were currently functioning as young adults. These environments were both immediate, and more systemic or institutional. The young people shared their stories of maneuvering within and between these environments. They described the ways that

contexts impacted who they had become or hoped to become. The environmental impact on identity was often unexpected and at times traumatic for the interviewees. However, their responses to the environment and the ways that they incorporated these experiences into their identities can be viewed through a lens of resilience.

Immediate Environment

The immediate environment in which young people grow up and become adults is often the most relevant environment to explore, particularly due to its salience for the young person who has experienced it. Immediate environments may include family or household, access to resources and basic needs, school, and the community or neighborhood environment in which the young person lives. These are seen reflected in Figure 1 as the middle ring of influences on the inner circle of identities. As we have already heard in the interviewees' discussions of their identities, aspects of their immediate environments were vital to affirming, challenging, and even spurring the creation of their identities. Key aspects of immediate environment are discussed in more detail in the following section. These aspects were selected because they reflect what we already know from the literature about LGBT young people's experiences (such as family), and what is rarely considered as a part of the lives of LGBT young people (such as poverty).

Poverty. The young people talked about the impact of living in poverty on choices that they made and on their sense of self. For example, one interviewee described the situation in his family that impacted his employment as an escort as a teenager:

> *Oh, my mom, like, when, when my mom and dad got a divorce and everything like that, like, my mom had to take care of us, all of us. Like, I even tried to go find a job and everything like that, but it wasn't very – it was hard to find a job because I was still 15, 16. And when I found that job, I'm helping you out, mom, you*

know. I had two jobs in high school. Because, like, I did not want my mom to be in that stress because, like, she was taking care of all of us, she was paying the house bill, and then a whole lot of hungry.

Despite the fact that it had been years since he had worked as an escort, this interviewee included it in his identity map with other events from his past that had shaped who he had become as a young adult (see Figure 8).

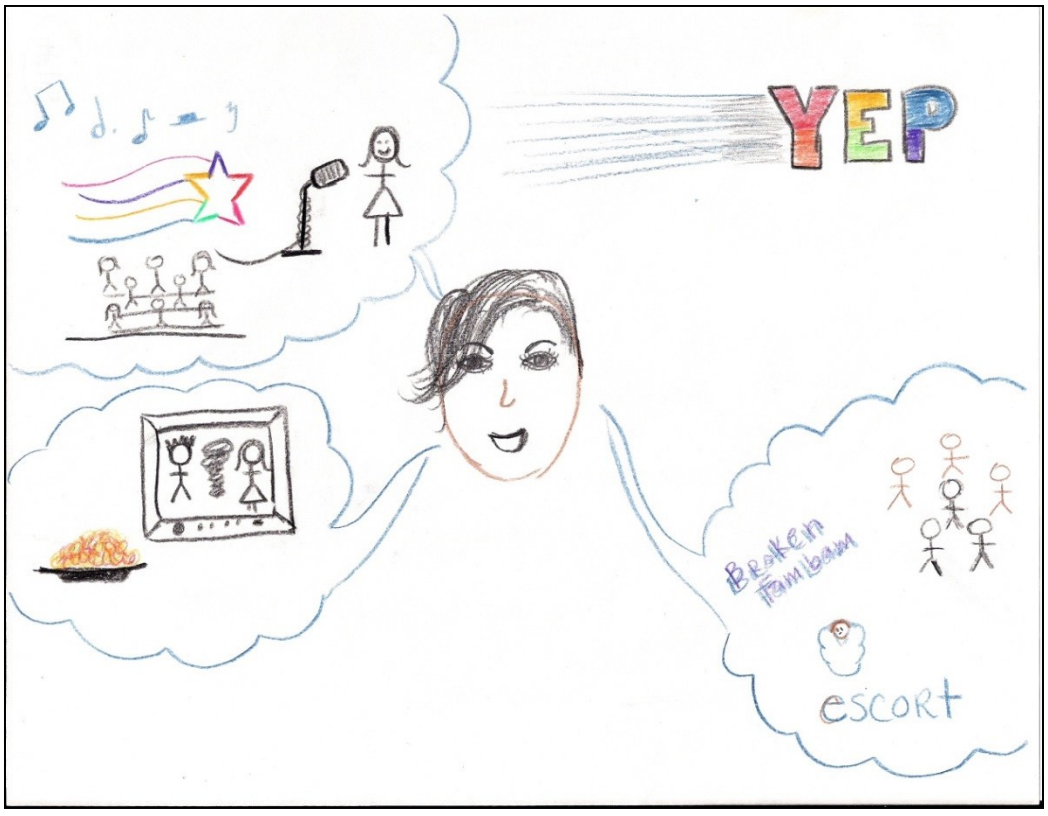


Figure 8. Identity map reflecting the impact of poverty through employment as an escort.

Another interviewee made a decision to leave her hometown and family to escape the poverty. She describes the community her family lives in and her choice to come to Phoenix in the following quote . In her case, the experience of poverty was intricately connected to her identity as an undocumented person living in the United States, which limited her access to employment.

Yeah, they see their lives the same way, and the same place, the same town. That town is dead where they're at right now. Ain't nobody there, immigration comes there every day. And it's just like you know - you'd rather see yourself in Mexico than you know have yourself a good life. Okay. My mom is from California. My oldest brother is from, uh, the same place I'm at. So we gotta run away from immigration. Every time we see them we have to hide from them. Because we do get deported. And it's just like you know my mom gets her check - my mom gets $800.00 a month okay in her cancer assistance. She pays $800.00 in rent. So for me to try to make her - you know things easier, why not pay $400.00 or something with electricity included and everything you know.

And that's why I'm tired of like you know you gotta move out from the hole you at you know to get to where you want to get to. And that's what I had to do, get myself out of that hole to get to what I need to get to. And I did.

Family. The impact of family origins, upbringing, and family relationships was the most prominent theme in understanding environmental effects on the identities of the interviewees. Just like identity, family is complex and in a constant state of flux. For some interviewees, family was a source of trauma and pain. For others, family was a source of support and strength. For most, it was a combination of both, and changed over time. Many of the young people had faced rejection from their families as a result of their LGBTQ identities as previously discussed. But this was not the only source of family-related trauma experienced by the interviewees. The young people experienced abuse from their families, unsafe living conditions that resulted from substance abuse, and family exclusion. The quote that follows is from a young man who is describing the impact of his family's decision not to learn sign language on his ability to build relationships with family members:

Okay. I am deaf, yes. It's been very tough, wow, really tough. Communicating with family, I couldn't. My mom and sister, they know some sign. It's okay. My dad does not. He does not sign at all. We write back and forth. My brother has Down syndrome, so it's tough to communicate with him anyway 'cause he doesn't really understand. The sides of the family, my mom's side of the family, they are clueless. They have no sign language. They might know a little bit like no and sign and food and drink and that kind of thing, really basic. On my dad's side of the family, there's only one aunt who knows sign language. All the other ones,

they don't know sign. It's very disappointing because I would expect family to want to communicate with me, but they're not motivated. So it's been tough for me to go through all of that with my family.

Even for young people who faced trauma and/or exclusion in their families, there was a desire to have a family connection as described in the quotes that follow from two young women. In the first, we hear a vision for family that the interviewee hopes to create for herself. In the second is reflected an ongoing desire to have family support, and the impact that its nonexistence had on her ability to achieve her goals.

I guess since I was a kid I always wanted a family because I never saw that in my family you know. I always wanted Christmas to sit down and have a nice dinner with your family you know. And it's like - it never happened and I was you know - regardless of how I had then or what happened to me, it's just like you know I still love them. They're still my family and I'm waiting to have that family that I always wanted. To sit down on Christmas day and turkey day and you know have them laugh you know. Not just fight, you know just laugh about the day you know. Enjoy yourself, that's what I want.

It was a lot of like drugs involved with my mom and stuff so I got my own place and – so out there you can get a place when you're 17, and I had a job at, um, the airport, which was really cool; I met a lot of stars. Um, I stayed away from home. I stayed away from that woman. I was always focused, like, um, like I would – I had good grades – and I didn't start like failing my grades until I got like 17, 16 – right around when I was supposed to graduate. Because I was like going through a lot of emotional things like – like graduation and stuff. Like I was a senior and like I had a little job but yeah, I just wanted my parents to like be there, so, I was just really weirded-out by it all, so – I gave – I quit school and then I enrolled myself back when I turned 18 and I graduated when I was 19.

The young people also discussed how traumatic experiences with family have shaped their own ideas about family and the development of support networks of their own. The same young woman quoted above describes below how she eventually gave up on her attempts to connect with her family of origin to get the support that she needed, and built her own network of support.

But, um, me and my mom we don't really talk. Um, so – I kind of have my own little support system. I have a lot of older friends so – they're like 30 or older, so that's my support system; with my friends.

The quote below is from a young woman who described how she creates family with those who are around her.

And like anyone - like friends that - regardless, 'cause like I don't have like any biological, any blood relatives or anything out here with me, so my friends are my family. Like you can ask anyone I'm around. I have - I'm a mothering, nurturing type. So I'll be the first one, I'll come in the house like are you guys hungry, 'cause I'll cook. Or, I'll just start ___. And so it's like my sense of family. And that's just because like I want to be - I want wherever I'm at to be a safe environment.

For other interviewees, with family was a place where they could be themselves, and where they were given opportunities to grow and find their strengths. One young man, who struggled to find places where his gay and racial identities were both accepted, described his family as the one place he was wholly accepted.

Yeah. Like my - my dad and my mom support me and they don't really care anymore. So home is probably the only place where I can be myself. Like I can - like I don't know, just be gay and be light skinned and it doesn't matter.

Families were described as sources of strength and rejuvenation that allowed the young people to face the challenges that they had in life, as described by the young woman below who went home to the reservation when she needed to "rub off her mom."

You know my mom [Sniffle] No matter what people did to her and said to her, she's still there. That's why I go home. I go home to rub off my mom and [sniffle] to try to be a positive woman, positive female. I want to be like my mom. You know I want to overcome everything and still be standing there and tell everybody you know I'm me. You know I did it. So I go home to s - to my house - to my house to reenergize and rub off my mom. Because sometimes being away from your mom for a long time - long periods of time, you know you kind of - you kind of get s - you slowly get soft because of the people that you meet. So I had to go home and rub off my mom. You know get that energy back from her. Yeah, so I had to go back. So that's why I still go back till this day.

Another young woman shared that her mother, and other women in her family, helped her to identify the underlying reasons that she was engaging in destructive behaviors, and "pulled her back."

> *And um, it's just the women in my life—my mom, my sister, and my aunt. They just like—they've really, really helped me come into my own, and just be happy I am the way I am. It's really cool. They've like empowered me, in a way. Yeah. My mom would always make sure that she tells me she loves me, and that I'm beautiful, and just like little stuff like that. I think it's the little things that count. Yeah. It just—it's like if you don't like find love at home, you'll try and find it everywhere else. And so my mom, she was seeing that I was trying to find love in like the wrong people. So, she just pulled me back, and helped me out a lot on that.*

One interviewee reflected on the role that her family played in getting her involved in activities that built up her sense of self and shaped her identity, including chorus and church. She saw these activities, as well as those she engaged in on her own as a young adult, as rungs in the ladder that were leading her to finding her true purpose and voice (see Figure 9).

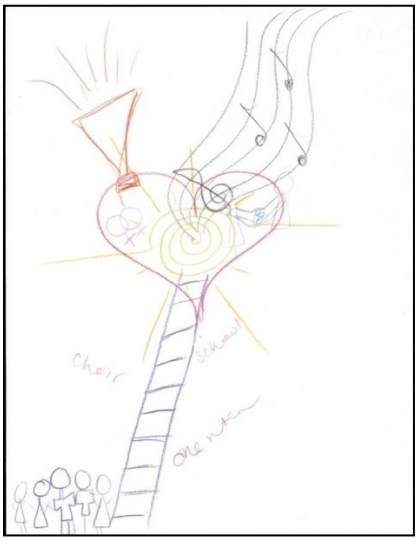


Figure 9. Identity map reflecting the role of family in shaping the journey to self-identity.

Interestingly, the youth who described family as a source of strength and support shared that for many of them acceptance of their LGBTQ identities was not at the level

that they wanted from their families. But there was a sentiment that either it was moving in a positive direction, or that they were at least given the space to be LGBTQ without facing judgment.

> *It's like, um – it's weird. Like I – like they're my foundation, you know, like when I fall it doesn't matter, like – I don't know. Like any of the time like I need help like I know I can like go to my family, like my parents and stuff, and like my aunt and uncle, they're so supportive of me, like all the way; they're like, "Yes, like move to* [city]*," like, "Come here; there's so many gay people here." You know? But it's like I appreciate them because like my family, like even though they don't really want to get it in their head that like I'm gay, they still are like, "We all support you," you know, "We want you to be happy and like the best for you," so whether that is being gay or what, you know, it's like even though it's not all what I want, like they always say, "We'll meet you half-way." I'm like, "Well, I want you to meet me all the way, but half-way is fine right now."*

Family was also referenced as a source of certain skills and traits that the interviewees identified as being an important aspect of who they are. For example, many of the young people who identified as artists and musicians shared that their talent and love for the arts came from a specific family member or a familial trait.

> *Like, everyone—everyone in my family is either—they can either sing or write or paint. Like, everybody in my family is like musical, in some kind of way. My grandma writes books. She sings. She does poetry. I mean, she's—she plays like a number of instruments. Like, and my aunt—she sings. My sister—she sings and she dances, too. Yeah. So everybody in my family like is really musically gifted. It's weird, but yeah.*

Systemic Context

In the outer circle of the diagram in Figure 1 are the contextual factors at a societal level that the young people were aware of either directly or peripherally as having an influence on their identities and their sense of self. As has been discussed previously, the young people who faced anti-immigrant policies and immigration enforcement strategies as undocumented people were acutely aware of the impact of these systems on their lives. Other young people shared that their experiences of racism,

ageism, cissexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism impacted their lives in important ways, including their ability to gain or maintain employment, and personal victimization. These systemic factors, as they were reflected in personal interactions with others, also impacted their sense of self.

Below, an interviewee shares his challenges with communicating at work because he is deaf. Interestingly, he perceives his connection with others – "Spanish people" - who may have a communication barrier in an English-speaking environment as being easier to speak with. The unwillingness of other customers to communicate with him creates a sense of frustration:

> *I worked at Target before and I was a cashier. There was a lot of Spanish people there. They were easy to communicate with because we all just gestured with each other. Older people, I don't mean to, like, insult older people, but I offered to write things to them to be able to communicate. They would just take their stuff, put it back in the cart and go to a different cashier.*
>
> *And I sort of felt like, uh, I was willing to communicate and make an effort and they just refused – didn't even want to try. I understand that people become accustomed to a certain way, but, you know, deaf people just don't know that. Sometimes old – some older people are willing to try to communicate. So when I'm working and I can't hear them – when I can't hear them talking to me, they'll call the manager and say, "How come he's not talking to me? How come he's not responding? I'm trying to be friendly."*
>
> *And then the manager will explain to them, "Well, he's deaf and if he's focusing on what he's doing he can't hear you can he's not gonna talk back to you." So then they get upset and get frustrated and just huff off.*
>
> *In their minds they think they are above us. They think that because they know how to read and they know English and they know everything*

Another young person described the challenges of gaining employment while undergoing a gender transition.

> *And unfortunately, you know being you know a hot mess of a transsexual walking the streets and trying to get a job is not really - you know it's hard.*

The interviewees shared experiences of violence that were perpetrated as a result of their identities, both from those they knew and from strangers. These hate-based attacks, such as the one described below, raised important questions about whether or not identity expression was a good idea. This young person was attacked at age 14 as a result of being more openly gay in his school and community:

> *And the community started noticing. I got stabbed, um, five times in my lower back. Um, it was almost two centimeters from hitting my spine, which would have paralyzed me completely, you know. And just by - just by being who - who I was. So that was a huge like halt. Like okay, do I really want to put my foot in this. Like, or should I just keep my mouth shut and just kind of you know just not be out there like that.*

Even as the young people began to engage in the community and try to get others to support their involvement, they faced systemic barriers. The interviewee quoted below describes her efforts to raise money and gain support for a leadership program that she joined that was specifically intended for LGBTQ-identified young people. Similar to the intersectionality of identity that was discussed earlier in this chapter, this young woman blends her perceptions of ageism and homophobia in this experience. It is not just about being young or about being gay, but the intersection of being gay and young creates a feeling of not being taken seriously.

> *And like it's awesome that you're like doing this because like seriously so many young people, we don't know like the – like people shut us down, you know? Like I'll walk into a store and I'll be like, "Hey, I'm like working with [group], like it's a gay organization," and they're like, "We don't have time."*
>
> *I'm like, "Okay, let's think of other ways I can say it," you know, or like, "Oh, I'm working with a camp that's like a –" you know, like if I word it differently and don't say gay and like come – like looking all nice and like dressed up then they'll, you know,– but if they see like a young 20-year-old girl who's like gay, who's like, "Oh, I love gay people," you know, like "I'm gay," then they're like – they just shut me down, you know? And it's like, okay, so many youth just like get looked at like, "What are you doing?"*

Creation of identity in response to systemic injustice. One response to experiences of harassment, discrimination and injustice at a systemic level was to develop an aspect of identity that was in direct response to it. As a form of resilient resistance, many of the young people identified ways that they had been driven, inspired or motivated by their intimate knowledge of the inequalities to help others or to make an impact on the broader society. For some this was described as being "caring", "helpful", or "compassionate." Others identified as leaders and activists – describing specific issues and strategies that they wanted to employ (or were already employing) to effect change. Several of the young people specifically referenced their "story" and the stories of others as being tools for change. As illustrated in Figure 10, a young person used his identity map to show how the story of his life and all that he had overcome became his mouthpiece. This allowed him to work for the kind of change he hoped to see in the community.

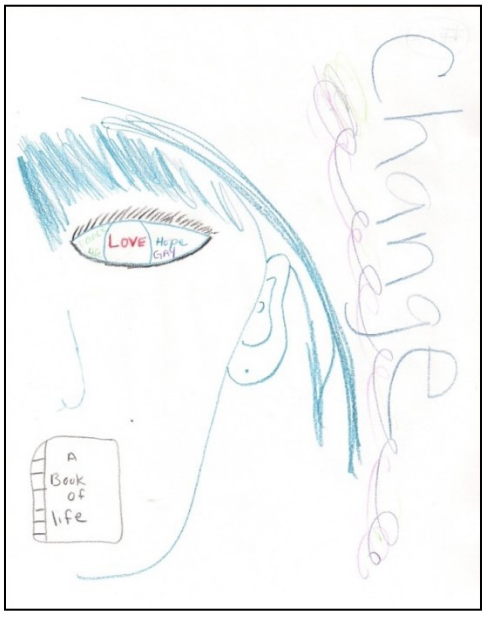


Figure 10. Identity map reflecting incorporation of life experiences as a tool for creating social change.

Similarly, an interviewee describes how he used his leadership abilities and the personal quality that he has for offering advice and support to others as a way to share his story. In this instance, he used his story as a motivation for a friend who was feeling disheartened about being undocumented:

> *I had a friend that just graduated high school. I'm like, well, what are you going to do after school? It's like, well, I'm going to be a bum because I don't have papers. I said, well, that's not – that's not true. You know, you can just stay at home waiting for life to go by – excuse me – and just let it go like that. It's like you have to – you have to fight it. You have to – you got to struggle. You might struggle, but it's gonna payoff. You know, it's – you can't just sit there with your arms crossed waiting for someone to offer you something for you to do in – with your life.*
>
> *You gotta take control of your life and you got to start doing it when you're young because if you're not doing anything from now till when you're 22, 23 – when I was 22, 23 – you'll be like, oh my god, I do not like to feel like I'm useless. And at 23, at 22, I was unemployed, nothing to do. I had nothing going in my life. I was out of school. I was with my parents. I didn't have any money. I said I'm 22, I am not supposed to be doing this. You know, so I – I – I found a job and I told him you do not want to be that guy I was. You do not want to be that.*

As referenced earlier, drag identity was an aspect of identity that had different meanings for the young people. For some it held importance as a form of expression. For others, it was an aspect of identity that allowed them to impact the community. The following quote is from a young person who used drag to support the "caring" and "helping" components of his identity. He describes an experience of a local drag queen who was the victim of a hate crime, and his involvement in raising money to support the recovery of this community member.

> *It means to be like, I dunno, like just helping out in the community, giving – do what you can do to give back to the community. For example, one of my friends does drag, and he got attacked really bad. So, they were doing fundraisers, so I did every fundraiser that I could to help raise money to pay for his surgery. You know, we did that routine, raised lots and lots and lots of money. I did every show there was to help raise money for him.*

Activist identity was explored in relation to other aspects of identity for some of the interviewees. For some, as reflected in the quote below, it was a preferred identity to those that were socially constructed. The young people wanted to be seen and known for what they had to contribute to the community as opposed to solely by their identity labels:

> *It's like a big question I still have kind of like who I am, like – and what qualities, because it's like I do different like activities – or I go to different like leadership camps or something and like I usually – you know how you begin like, "Hi, I'm [interviewee]. I'm 20 and I'm a female," or something. It's like well, why do people have to know me, like my sexual identity, or that I'm a female. Like, "Yeah, I'm a female," but, you know what I mean? It's kind of like all visual, and I think that me personally it's like the qualities to who I am are like that – I am a leader, I am a, like, activist, I want to change and create equality.*

They described the issues that were important to them as agents of social change. These issues were in direct connection to their own identities and social networks as reflected in the following quotes from two interviewees:

> *Like I just - I kinda want to be part of like the HIV prevention thingy. Like I want to - I want to see an end to the spread. Obviously I'm gay and it affected most of my friends. So, yeah. I kinda want to work in that but I don't know how.*

> *If something happens, involved in, I want to make – improve that situation like – like deaf youth. When they feel like they – their – they can't come out and they get a lot of advice telling them they can, but their parents tell them no, so they're scared about that.*

As will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, the ability to use one's skills to impact those in the broader community had great value for the interviewees in this study. Being able to impact one's environment has benefits for LGBTQ young people both in terms of supporting their development into adulthood, and in working through the challenges and trauma associated with growing up in a world that can, at times, be hostile and unwelcoming as an LGBTQ-identified young person.

Chapter 5

EXPLORING SERVICE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

Introduction

The second half of the interviews conducted with the LGBTQ-identified young adults who participated in this study was focused around experiences with services and support, both in and out of school settings. The services did not have to be LGBT-specific, and "service" was broadly defined, often including informal supports. The young people were asked to identify where they had received help or support as a young person.

In the chapter that follows are three main themes that emerged from the interview analysis: (1) service experiences, both in general service settings and in LGBT-specific settings, (2) barriers that were faced by the young people in accessing services, and (3) vision for services for LGBT young people. These themes will be explored in the context of identity to understand if and how service experiences and needs are interconnected with the young people's self-defined aspects of themselves.

The first theme reflects experiences with services that were primarily focused on basic needs, school-based experiences, and LGBT-specific needs. The second theme relates to barriers that the young people faced in accessing services. These barriers were intricately tied to aspects of identity, and were experienced with LGBT-specific services as well as services intended for more general populations. Finally, the third theme relates to the interviewees' visions for how services should be provided to LGBTQ-identified young people based on their experiences and perceptions. The visions that the

interviewees had were also tied to aspects of identity, and offer concrete recommendations for how to serve this population from an intersectional framework.

Service Experiences

The young people spoke in their interviews about the kinds of services and supports they had accessed as LGBTQ young people. The issues that were explored in depth were what kinds of services had been accessed, what service systems they had interacted with, and their perceived experiences with these services and systems. Their experiences fell into three broad areas: basic needs, school-based, and LGBTQ-specific. Each of these are further explored below with descriptions of the themes that emerged with regard to the impact of these services, the responses of service systems to the young people's needs, and the engagement of the young people in the interactions with service providers and systems.

Extent and Array of Services

It is not surprising that the stories shared by interviewees about their experiences seeking and receiving services varied a great deal based on family background, geographic location, and access to informal support. For many of the young people, being a service recipient in one way or another was an aspect of their lives for which they knew no other way. For others, becoming "in need" of services and support was something that was newly experienced as a young adult. For others still, they did not perceive themselves as ever having been a service recipient, such as the young person quoted below who only perceived her involvement with the LGBT youth organization as a social opportunity rather than a "service" and could not recall receiving or needing any other

kind of service-related assistance. When asked if she had ever received services or support from somewhere, she replied:

> *Um, not really that I can think of, no. Not something that's not a - like having to be with LGBT. Not something that - whenever it's been something like that, it's always been like, um, an LGBT youth center or a community center or something like that. Something that was like specifically for that group. But as far as out in the world, um, no I really haven't. And I could more or less say, um, it's kinda like two things. One, I've never really like see myself as needing like support and stuff like that and two, I've never really gone out and like tried to explore it and look for different things.*

The stigma associated with receiving services or being on the receiving end of some needed support or program became evident in the way that the young people talked about their experiences.

> *Like I'm not – I'm not a big person on like gaining support, I guess you could say. Because I've had to do it by myself my whole life. So I'm learning like how to be more interactive with different like organizations and stuff, more like on a personal level rather than just going there to help others.*

This became an important aspect of what they perceived as vital factors in a service relationship – mutuality and reciprocity – which is further discussed in this section.

The kinds of services that the young people shared experiences with fell into those for whom services and support are offered among the general population, and those that are provided to LGBT-specific populations. Both the extent to which they needed these services and support, and the array of services that they accessed varied between interviewees based on the aforementioned differences in experience and location. Below, I will share themes that emerged in their experiences related to (1) basic needs services, and (2) school-based services. The young people's experiences in these two general service settings is further explored through their stories of the impact of these service settings, which were both positive and negative, and their own assertions of agency with the services or systems.

Basic needs services. Almost all of the young people in the study had experience with some kind of basic need service. These included services such as housing/shelter, food/Food Stamps, clothing, bus passes, health care, educational services (such as HIV/STI workshops), job seeking, showers/hygiene, substance abuse treatment, mental health, and legal assistance. Some of the youth were intimately involved in service systems. For example, one young person had grown up in the foster care system and had been a service recipient of multiple services through that involvement. He described how he got involved in that system below:

> *When I was two – I think I was, yeah, I think I was almost two – my mom, my birth mom, moved to [city]. So, they took me away from her when I was five, 'cause they said my mom was doing drugs or whatever. And they put me in foster homes, and I moved from foster home to foster home to foster homes.*

Similarly, another young person was involved in the child protection system as a result of her children being in custody. This system extended her involvement into housing services, legal services, and other kinds of basic needs programs that were aimed at assisting her in achieving reunification with her children.

Housing and shelter services were by far the most used service in the area of basic needs. The young people in this study had a variety of experiences with this kind of service from day shelters, to youth housing programs, to Section 8 housing vouchers. The barriers faced in accessing and receiving these services is discussed later.

School-based services. The young people in this study generally did not see their high schools as places where they received services or support. For those who did describe support they received from school, their experiences were with specific school staff members providing some kind of service or connection to a resource. One young

person talked about a support group that was offered in school for a place to talk, which he described in the quote below:

> *There was a support group in, um, my high school. Like -- Yeah. It was really awesome. They were nothing but lesbians though - but I loved it. It was really awesome to be like, um -- Um, it was just a counselor there. She would talk to us about how, um, we felt about our sexuality and she would tell us about - I don't know we would just talk about stuff. It was so random but I - it was awesome.*

Impact of Services

The impact of the services and service settings described above were both negative and positive. Shelter services were perceived as having a negative impact on the young people who had to utilize them. The young people described a limited knowledge about what it was like to be on the receiving end of such services. In some cases, their service experiences further complicated previous experiences of trauma and exclusion that were explored in the findings chapter on identity. One interviewee describes her first experience with homelessness and the shelter system below.

> *Yeah, I was about 20 and – yeah, it's not joke. It's no joke out there. And – like if you've never been through nothing before and you're like 20 or 18 it's really going to be – it's best to just like not know anyone because, um, it's really only bad for you. It's like putting a little goldfish in shark water pretty much, yeah.*

Later in the interview, she goes on to talk about her experience witnessing violence at the shelter and its impact on her mental health.

> *It's just something you don't – it's something you don't really look forward to. Like I'm in a good mood and I come from school and I'm just like, "Yeah, even though I'm living in a shelter, yeah," and I'll just walk down the sidewalk, get off the bus, chew, chew, chew, chew* [shooting sounds]*; dead, like that. You know what I mean? It's stuff like that where you just – it's just like really weird. So… And it's not even like – it's not even like you're in the ghetto or in a bad neighborhood or something. It's just like you're in the middle of the city and it's just going on like that. And it – it just makes it really – I think it makes it really like – like – I was like depressed. Like I really was depressed, so…*

In contrast, support provided by specific people in the school setting was perceived by some of the young people as having a positive impact. Two young people were encouraged by a specific teacher or counselor at school to apply for programs or resources that had an impact on them after high school. One was encouraged by a teacher to apply to participate in a youth leadership and diversity camp. She described this experience as something that altered her sense of herself. Below she is quoted talking about her reaction when her teacher encouraged her to apply.

> *– and like it's a leadership camp for like high school kids – and I remember like my math teacher was like, "Oh, [interviewee], you should go," and I was just like, "What?" Like, what – like what – "Why?" Like, "Why me?" And she's like, "You, like, will love this," and everybody else saw that in me before I saw it in myself kind of, you know? Like where I was just like, "Oh, I guess, yeah." Like if all my teachers are like, "[interviewee] will be a good candidate for it," you know?*

The second was encouraged by a counselor to apply for college scholarships, which he received. This altered his trajectory after high school, which he described in the quote below. He recalled that the scholarship offered him more than just financial support as he transitioned from high school to higher education.

> *And now that you mention it, I guess that they did give me a service because they assigned every scholarship awardee a personal counsel, a mentor. So I – I had a personal counselor that I had to meet with every month to talk about how life – well, what's going on in my life, about school in general. I consider not signing up, because at the time I graduated, my mom was in Mexico and she just wanted us to go back over there with her and I was about to. So, you know, just fill that out, if you get it, then stay and if you don't, then you come home. And I signed up and I got it. I stayed and it – it was one of those things that – that you say, well, things happen for a reason, you know, because I was – on the very day of the deadline, my counselor calls me and say, I need your application right now and I told her well I didn't fill it out. So what do you do? Do not leave this office until you fill it out.*

Inadequate response. Interviewees shared instances in which service settings or systems, such as the schools, inadequately responded to a need that they had. Two of the

young people shared that they were homeless while finishing high school. Neither of them shared experiences of receiving support or services from school during this time. One young woman is quoted below describing her experience during her last year of high school.

> *And I was finally - I was like - I was getting up the courage to tell my mom. And it - it kinda happened the wrong way. It happened out of an argument and so at first she seemed okay with it and then she slowly started to show that she wasn't too okay with it. And actually what happened was she wound up putting me out because of it, and so halfway through - halfway through my junior year of high school. So, my junior year of high school and my senior year of high school, I was actually living out of my truck. I was living out of my truck and I was working two full-time jobs. But I couldn't get my own apartment because technically I wasn't emancipated and she wasn't - she wouldn't willing to sign - uh, co-sign for me or, uh, sign to - for my emancipation.*

Harassment in school was a common experience for many of the interviewees to which they perceived having received little or no response from adults. One young person faced harassment because of her gender identity, and dropped out during her freshman year.

> *- and I just went to school, but I didn't finish school 'cause you know it got so ugly. So everything just got ugly at school and people were calling me names and you know pushing me and you know I didn't like it. So I only went to ninth grade, to freshman - and then I dropped out.*

Yet another shared experiences of harassment based on her racial identity.

> *Yeah. I'm—at first, like I'm—I guess I'll say it for the tape, I'm black. At first, 'cause I was in like a school full of white kids. At first, I was like—'cause I got teased all throughout middle school, 'cause of the way I talk. I speak like no one around here. Like, and they used to call me whitewashed. All this stuff—all this stuff. I'm like, 'Why? Because I speak proper English and you can understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?' Like—Kids at school. Like, they'd just be really mean. Like, they would spit in my water, and trip me in the hallways, push me against lockers. Like, the whole nine. I got the whole nine.*

Another young person talked about facing harassment in school and dealing with homelessness. He specifically recalled that no one from his high school picked up on the signs that he needed help, and he eventually dropped out.

> *And you know then the names really started affecting me. And then I was scared for my safety, you know. And it was to the point, you know, that the thought of w - why do this. Why do this right now, you know. So I was like I - I - I'm - I'm not gonna do this. And then it started affecting the education part. Because then I didn't w - I don't want to go. I don't want to sit in the room. What to be judged and sit - sit in a corner by myself. And just do absolutely nothing. I didn't. I - why. To me that was a reason for me to s - get up and just leave. There - there was no reason. And especially with nobody else's encouragement, or anyone else motivating me, I was like okay. Well, you know what I see everyone else dropping out of high school and they're okay.*

Later in the interview, he described what he would expect from a school as far as recognizing and supporting a student who is homeless.

> *Oh, yeah. The - the education aspect of when I was homeless. They didn't - I mean o - of course you should - just being aware of certain signs of someone being in distress or you know me knowing like right now if I seen someone let's just say storing food in their backpack. That gives me an alert. I'm not gonna say hey are you, blah, blah, but hey you know here's this. I - kinda almost helping.*

For this young man in particular, his high school experience came after going through earlier grades in school while experiencing abuse and neglect at home. In the quote below, he reflects on the lack of response he experienced from his school.

> *You know of course there was plenty of signs. Even back you know those seven years when I was getting abused and neglected. You know because think about it. You are in school for how much time of your life. So I mean schooling really gotta open their eyes, huge. Huge. 'Cause especially a - a child coming to school with bruises. I - I know that now it's a big thing, but you know 1997 you know, 2000, it was - it wasn't huge then. It l - it wasn't huge at all. At all.*

For the vast majority of the interviewees, school was either a place to survive or a means to an end. Two of the interviewees specifically shared the lasting impact of harassment experienced in the school setting on their sense of self. One young person, who had been identified as needing special education in elementary school, talked about

the impact of this experience on his drive to prove that he is capable. A second young person tied her experiences of racial harassment to depression and substance abuse that she continued to struggle with as an adult.

Assertions of agency. Despite the fact that a majority of the interviewees described their school experiences negatively, there were still assertions of agency in their responses to the school environment. Certainly dropping out of school is a form of agency, albeit one with negative consequences for success in adulthood. But other young people shared their experiences of changing schools, or talking with school administrators about their experiences. These acts of agency are reflected in the quotes from two different interviewees below.

> *I - it was about I'm gonna say - actually you know what 17 was when I dropped out and 18 was when I came back into school. I was a legal adult, I can sign into a school. I went to another school, um, that had a popu - a - a higher population of LGBTQ students. So I felt comfortable. Okay.*

The second quote below is from a young person who changed high schools after being suspended based on an anti-gay harassment incident in which he felt he had been targeted. In his second school, which was faith-based, he took it upon himself to speak with the principal to make sure that his gay identity wouldn't impact his ability to graduate, which is described below.

> *It's a charter school and they, you know, they can't tell you that you have to be that religion. So later, when I was getting closer to graduation, I did come out to my principal. He was wonderful. And I said to him, "Look. I wanted to tell you and I know you're Mormon, but I just wanted to let you know I'm gay." And he said, "Oh, that's why what happened – that explains what happened at [other high school]." I didn't want to go through the same thing that happened at [other high school]. I didn't want that. I – I'm smarter than that. But the principal supported me and said, "Hey, that's – that – you are who you are. The only thing it says in the Bible," and I said I just didn't want to discuss the Bible in school. So he said, "Fine," and he respected that.*

It should be acknowledged that despite the lack of support and services experienced or received in grade school, many of the young people were involved at some point in the college education systems. While it was not directly expressed, it came through in their discussions that college was a space where they had access to the means necessary to pursue their goals. Some of them also were involved at varying levels with LGBT-specific groups on the college campuses. For most of those not taking college classes or who were finishing a high school program at the time of the interview, each of them had specific goals that included higher education.

LGBT-Specific Services

Given the nature of the sample, and the fact that it was drawn from a group of young people who had been engaged with an LGBT-specific youth organization, all of the interviewees talked about their experiences receiving services or being involved in programming offered by this organization. It was not, however, the only LGBT-specific organization or service that the young people had experienced. These experiences are described in more detail below using the following themes that emerged from their stories and experiences: (1) isolation, (2) like family, (3) stability, (4) social support, (5) role models, (6) common experiences, and (7) need to learn about LGBTQ-specific services.

Isolation. The overwhelmingly dominant theme that emerged from interviewees' experiences with LGBT-specific programs and services was related to the connection to others who were LGBTQ-identified. This theme was directly connected to an underlying theme of isolation that was described by the young people in relation to their LGBTQ identities, as articulated by a young person in the quote below.

I was isolated. I didn't know where to go. I don't know. So I just stayed home in my room on the computer all day and all night, playing games day and night.

The quote below is from a young person who described how LGBT identity becomes central when you are the only LGBT-identified person in social settings. He shared that once he connected with other LGBT-identified youth, that aspect of his identity became less important or prominent in his interactions, forcing him to identify other aspects of his identity.

Connecting queer youth to each other I think is really important. It's really hard always, always being the token like LGBT person. In fact, I'm so used to being the token LGBT person that I'm just like, "what the hell" around like other trans people, and just like, "what? I don't have to explain things to you?" And I have to figure out what my actual interests are, so I've been trying to figure that out and I learned I liked cooking.

Similarly, the quote below is from a young person who found herself in a housing situation that was uncomfortable and uncertain, but the lack of connections to others made it difficult for her to remove herself from the situation or figure out how to handle it. In her case, it ended in her becoming homeless. In her case, the isolation she experienced challenged her ability to make adult decisions about her life.

And – it's just one of those things where, um, if you don't have like any family or know anybody it makes it like difficult, you know, make a decision by yourself.

Like family. The relationships that were established in LGBTQ-specific programs served for some as a second family. The quote below is from an interviewee who had left home to find the resources necessary to transition. She described the importance of connecting to others when her family was far away.

Well, m - me being you six and a half hours away from my family. You know now that they're very, very accepting now. You know and I can't go home all the time for that. I could call 'em but I can't get the same feeling - as I get when I'm there, when I'm interacting with this - my family. And when I was going to [organization] that's what it was.

Similarly, the interviewee quoted below described the feeling of family and how that is related to being in an organizational space that is LGBT-specific.

> *I - um, I've been there a few times and it's an environment where you can just go and just relax and be yourself. And so that's something that a family - like you should be able to do with a family. Like you should be able to come home. You're going home to hang out with your family and just relax and let your hair down. And so like my sense of family for sure is what I take from that. And that's just because that's what I was raised with. Like your house is always gonna be a safe place.*

For others, the opportunity to connect with others served as an affirmation of their identity.

> *Yeah. Just to be you, and no one judge you, and no one will be like, 'Oh, why are they doing that?' None of that. It's just like a place to go hang out, and be able to be free, and be yourself, so.*

The young person quoted below saw the organization as a place to connect with others "like me."

> *And then I came to [organization] because - you know I - I come here to see other girls like me to have something in common to talk to.*

For this young person, she saw the LGBT organization as a place where she could connect with people who were taking a path in life that she wanted for herself. She describes wanting to make a change in her life and the role that she saw the organization playing in the quote below.

> *You know I want people to see me and notice you know oh - I don't want them to see oh yeah, she's an escort. You know I want them to see me as something different, some - someone successful, someone who made it. You know I don't want anybody to bring up the past. So I - I decided to do something else. So then I came here trying to look for positive little you know friends.*

Stability and social support. Particularly for the young people who had faced a great deal of transition or uncertainty in their lives and relationships, the organization and

those with whom they connected served as points of stability and certainty as described by an interviewee below.

> *Um, and it was just like, it was just a support system that I needed in my point and time, someone to talk to, someone to be there, and know that it's going to be there and it's not gonna go away.*

The young people talked about the value that having a place to connect with friends and build a social support network – both of peers and adults – had on their lives. These connections and relationships had utility as sources of knowledge and information as well as support. For example, one young person described the lack of information he received in school on sexual health and the importance of gaining this information from adults and peers who were LGBT-identified.

> *But, um, definitely it gave me the opportunity to be exposed to my community. Education, you know like I said before, um, on STDs and STIs and the prevention. And that's huge. I - I think like - like I even say - like every sentence has something to do with education. If we educate then we can prevent, help, everything, you know. So - so that really helped me. Because that's usually the age when puberty kicks in and that's when - especially if you don't have anyone to relate to, you are going to research yourself, right. You are going to investigate and you are going to do things and that's why the moment being exposed, especially in that specific time frame, it gave me, yeah, like I said that education.*

Role models and community. The connections that were established with adults through LGBT-specific programs were an important aspect of what the young people described as being valuable to them, as role models as well as resources.

> *And I kind of like – it was just like, "Whoa, there's like cool like older people here that like are so awesome."*

The young person quoted below described meeting a transgender-identified adult volunteer who was seen as a source of knowledge.

> *Then I met [adult volunteer] who was also transgender, but he was going from female to male. You know and he was older. You know big arms. You would never think you know he has such an amazing turn out. You know I - and the first time I saw him I was - I was - the only thing I could think of was oh my God he's*

> *you know really attractive. And then after you know I found a little more about him, you know how he came here and was very open with his transition. You know I was really shocked. I was jaw dropped. But you know I knew. You know he has knowledge. He has knowledge that I need. You know had - he's been down that direction.*

In a broader sense, the young people talked about the connections and relationships as being part of larger connections to an LGBT community as described in the quote below.

> *They're like my family. There's a lot of support, a lot of resources. We've learned so much there. It's like this gay and lesbian community is amazing. I was never involved in gay and les – lesbian community when I was in high school or any of that. I – I was very isolated. I'd go to school, go home, go to school, go home. Visit people in my family, some deaf friends, go to work. I really didn't know. I had none of the experience yet about being involved in the LGBTQ community. So I feel really connected with them.*

As will be discussed later, this "community" was not always perceived or experienced as being fully inclusive or supportive, but the idea that one could go from isolation to being a part of something larger was important for the young people.

Common experiences. The connections and relationships that were established through the LGBT-specific organization were also around common experiences. These were not always LGBT-related experiences. The quote below is from a young person who described the connections she made with peers who had "been through a lot". She went on to describe how the young people she met through the organization would ride together to and from the homeless shelter and serve as a form of protection for one another in places where they did not feel safe as LGBT-identified young people. So, the relationships served both as emotional and physical sources of support in some cases.

> *I was around people – like LGBTQ – but I was also around a lot of the people that are going through the same things as me. And there were, um, there were LGBTQ and a lot of them were like kicked out of their house and stuff. So, um – it's just like – and those were my – those are my friends.*

> *I won't surround myself with no one that I can't relate to or won't relate to me or just – and, um, most of my friends are people that are like, you know, been through a lot and just we can all related.*

While the theme of connections with others was present for the transgender identified young people as well as the LGB-identified young people, the trans-identified interviewees did talk about the need to have a trans-specific program or place to receive support. They spoke openly about the limitations of trans-inclusivity in LGBT-specific organizations based on their experiences. This is explored further in the section that follows on barriers to services and the intersection with identity.

Learning about and connecting to LGBTQ-specific services. There were a number of different ways that the young people would learn about and become connected with services that they needed. For the most part, interviewees became connected with LGBT-specific services through online searches, and informal connections such as friends. An interviewee described in the quote below how he learned about services and resources when he moved to a new city.

> *But as soon as I got here I instantly like started researching like LGBT organizations and groups and who's who and what's what and where should I go and etcetera etcetera.*

In a few instances, young people in this study received more formal referrals to LGBT-specific programs through a high school or college teacher, inpatient psychiatric staff, or other service providers. The trans-identified young people had more experiences of having to find their own resources for services, whether that be through online resources or seeking out others who had used services. In two specific interviews, the young people talked about having to travel long distances from home to access trans-specific support and services.

Many of the young people had established connections with services through service providers that used a case management approach to service provision. In some cases, this was through a drop-in center or other kind of space that helped them to access things like food and health care coverage. The shelters also often worked as this type of resource.

Mutuality and Reciprocity in Service Experiences

An underlying theme in the stories that interviewees shared about their service experiences and relationships with service providers was a desire for mutuality and reciprocity. This is reflected more generally in the quote below from a young person who described her feelings about receiving services.

> *You know I want a - I don't want you know handouts, I want handups. That's what I want. You know I - you know getting help is really good, but do I deserve it? You know as - I - if I get something I want to work for it. You know I want to earn it.*

The young people valued experiences in which they perceived that providers engaged in a mutually respectful relationship and sought to understand things from the young person's perspective rather than solely from the provider's perspective. This form of mutual respect is described below by a young person who talked about the way that young people are often treated by adult providers.

> *Um, and people who are under the age of 18 are treated like property. They have no rights and they are the property of their parents. And so like, uh, treating people, treating young people like they are people is really important. And I know that sounds like weird, um, but it doesn't happen a lot.*

This was reinforced by another interviewee who described the importance of respect and understanding from service providers, particularly for young people who face hostility and disrespect in other parts of their lives.

You know give me what I need. If you can't, point me in the right direction where I need to be with kind and courteous - courteousness. You know as delily as you - delicately as you possibly can. You know I don't need an attitude. I get enough of it every day.

Most of the young people also expressed an interest in being a part of either helping others through the agencies that provided services (such as through volunteering) or being involved in making the organizations more effective. It was obvious that an important part of being a service recipient involved being in a service provider role of sorts. It was in the giving that they also received. This sentiment is illustrated in the quote below from a young man who volunteers with many of the agencies from which he has received help. In this quote, he is telling the interviewer what it feels like to give.

Well it – it feels good because some – so many who has helped me and you know, and so I feel like I should give back, you know, because so many helped me, you know. And I made some changes in my life, you know

Similarly, another young person is quoted below describing her plans to give back to youth in hopes that they can avoid some of the challenges that she faced while coming out.

I want - like my house is gonna be open to all walks of life. It's like I want that to be a place where they can come and feel comfortable and relax and things like that. Because like I said, the experiences that I went through because of it and I - I think that if I can actually help somebody if they're going through that, or help them avoid that situation altogether then I - I mean I'm - I'm doing my part.

This theme may be tied back to the common experience of isolation and a need to connect with others and build relationships on a deeper level. Many of the young people established long term relationships with service providers, LGBT-specific and otherwise, which lent itself to the establishment of new roles. While they certainly could go to the organizations to have their own needs met, they also engaged in ways that met a need for being able to contribute in some meaningful way.

Barriers to Services

As described in the section above, the young people in this study had experiences with services that were specific to their LGBTQ identity as well as services that were based on circumstantial needs. What we know, however, is that in many of their cases the circumstantial needs were created as a result of family and community reactions to their identities. For example, the young people who were homeless as youth and young adults were in many cases in that situation as a result of being kicked out of their homes after coming out or being outed. It is clear that the service experiences of these young people have been impacted by their identities. The section that follows explores this in greater depth by focusing on the perceived barriers to services that the young people faced, and more specifically how these barriers are related to identity.

The youth recounted multiple scenarios in which barriers to accessing or receiving services were experienced. These barriers were experienced from general service providers, or those who provided services to more general populations. The barriers were also experienced in LGBT-specific service experiences. Both of these kinds of experiences will be described below with a particular emphasis on their relationships to aspects of the identities of the young people.

Barriers to Basic Necessity Services

In the stories recounted by the interviewees about their experiences with basic necessity services, multiple barriers were faced. First, barriers to knowing of the existence of services and how to access them limited their ability to get their needs met. Second, multiple barriers were faced by those young people in need of shelter. Third,

young people faced barriers to accessing needed health and mental health services. And finally, documentation was identified as a barrier to accessing basic needs services.

Lack of knowledge about services. A number of the young people became in need of services after being on their own, whether by choice or by force. This became challenging for them because their awareness of services that were available was limited. One young man talked about his lack of awareness of services when he became homeless at the age of 14.

> *Well, the - the thing was - is, the only thing that I knew about was church. That's - that's the only thing that I knew because at 14 of course I wasn't - you know all these different hom - homeless shelters or drop-in centers or what they were or anything. So the first thing that I turned to that I've always known because you know I've been ex - exposed to that was church.*

Another young person, quoted below, describes her experience trying to make it on her own and the impact of not being aware of services on her ability to do so.

I don't think, um – even though I was in Texas and I was like – had my own apartment, I was just like I had my own apartment, like having parties, just not like doing the typical things. And then when I got here – because I wanted the responsibility but I didn't know. Nobody – like my mom didn't teach me everything, so I'm just doing everything how I see everybody else doing it. And so I – when I got here it gave me like, "Oh, we can get food stamps?" I was like selling my furniture to get food, you know –

Housing. The most commonly faced barrier to accessing services in general for the young people in this study was in the area of shelter. The community in which this study was conducted did not, at the time, have LGBT-specific shelter or housing services other than one program that had a few beds. The young people shared experiences in the homeless shelter in which their LGBT identities were not acknowledged or affirmed. One young woman, who met her "girl" in the shelter, described the way that they must act together when in the shelter even though they see their lives and futures being connected.

> *You don't have to just go to one person and pretend that you're not this thing you know just to get for what you want. And it's like - it's not right. At [shelter] you*

know it's just like - we gotta pretend like we're not together me and my girl - you know we gotta pretend like you know - like we just met and so it's like - it's not fair you know. Why should we have to pretend something you know when we already met each other for three years. Why we gotta sit there and lie about what we are. Either - they either like it or they don't. Really. Their - you're not here to judge nobody, you're here to help.

She went on to describe what she perceived would happen if she and her girlfriend showed affection while in the shelter.

They will kick us out. They - yeah. They already kick a couple out too, so - You just gotta be careful there too of what you do.

Similarly, a trans-identified young woman shared her experience in a youth housing program. Earlier in the interview, she had shared how difficult it is to find employment when you are "a hot mess of a transsexual walking the streets." She was aware of the perception that others would have if she did not put a lot of effort into her gender expression during her transition. Such perceptions would limit her ability to be independent. In the quote below, she described her interaction with the housing case manager who she perceived as being insensitive to this aspect of her identity and experience.

And then I got into that [clears throat] *got into the program. But like I said there's so many limitations and restrictions. I just felt like you know every time I went and seen my little meetings it was like oh yeah, you got your nails done again. You know you got your hair did again. And you know new makeup and whatever and new shoes and new clothes. [Sigh] They always made a little issue about it. You know whatever I put into my savings I couldn't take out. And it was just like oh you know I can't touch my own money. You know it's - how does that work. And there was one time, the last time I went to my meeting, my weekly meeting. And my case worker was [name] and I just had got my nails done after the week before she told me not to touch my savings. But I went on and did it. You know you just don't l - you know you just don't look like a female from being an all male. You know it takes work, it takes money. You know to be considered one. So I had got my nails done and then I went back to the meeting and it was like, oh you know this, and this, and this, and this, and this. And I didn't want to hear it. And I just got mad. So I just like kinda yelled at her and I up and left and I told her I want out of the program. And I said you know you don't know what it feels*

> *like to be me. You don't know my needs I told her. You know you can go home to your husband or to your boyfriend and he can take you as you are and as plain as you are, that's fine. I said not me. I said I have to be - I - you know I have to you know uphold my name, you know live up to my name. I have to be who I am. And then that was it, I said I want out. Two days later I moved out of my - the apartment they were helping me with.*

An important contextual factor related to the barriers that the interviewees faced in accessing shelter and housing services that were affirming of their identities was that housing programs, other than the emergency shelter, were very difficult to get into. Particularly with youth-oriented housing programs, interviewees described waiting periods of months, such as the situation described in the quote below.

> *Um, I was pushing trying to like balance everything and I was kind of use to balancing everything just from when I was younger, but I ended up having like car problems and just a lot of things. But, um, I can actually say that you're probably right about the social working, because I was really, really trying, like asking questions like what – is there anything possible for me to do? By the time that I did get into a housing program it was about six months down the line. I had picked up a really bad like alcohol problem, um, I like – I sold my car, I just lost it…*

Housing barriers were faced by the young people in relation to other aspects of their identities as well. In the quote below, a young woman described her experience with child protective services. She was given access to a Section 8 housing voucher in order to create a stable housing environment for her children. However, the young woman was undocumented and was unable to find employment that would enable her to pay her portion of the rent.

> *I lost it because on this pay - I have Section 8. They expect me to pay, uh - uh, $286.00 you know a month. But if I had no social, no ID or nothing, how do they expect me to have a job and pay that much a month? That much amount of money on Section 8, knowing that I don't have it. So most likely they set me to fail. So I lost my apartment.*

Limited access to health and mental health care. Others barriers that the young people faced in relation to identity were limited access to health and mental health care. The transgender-identified young people specifically shared examples of needing financial resources to get a letter from a therapist before beginning their medical transition, and access health care providers for hormones and other medical needs. Two of the trans-identified young people, and one who had begun transitioning but stopped, shared that they had accessed hormones through underground sources that were not affiliated with health care providers. This was primarily due to the cost. Only one young person had insurance coverage for her transition. Another was able to garner financial support from friends and blog followers to pay for transition expenses.

> *But a decent amount of people read my blog, and so like a bunch of people were giving me donations, like everybody's like $300.00 over night. When I asked that people just donate like $8.00. And then my friends here in Phoenix threw like three fundraising parties for me, um, and they all had like different themes.*

These barriers were compounded by the additional costs of changing their identification documents, and the challenges the trans-identified youth sometimes faced in accessing employment. In fact, two of the trans-identified youth shared that they had traded sex for housing and/or money. In the quote below, a young person described her decision to become an escort after becoming friends with a transgender woman who was in the process of transitioning.

> *So and she told me and she showed me bottles you know of what she gets monthly. And she paid about $317.00, around that - area a month, for a month's supply. [Sigh] So unfortunately, I couldn't get that you know 'cause I didn't have a job. So that's why I did what I did. You know I didn't - I was so determined to be a - you know to be and to get everything I need to be who I am right now. You know I wanted to be a pretty girl. You know I wanted to have everything to look pretty like some of the girls I saw back then. You know I wanted to be me. So to do that, I needed thousands of thousands of dollars. And I wasn't gonna settle for less, settle for nothing.*

As the young people entered legal adulthood, their ability to access health coverage and health/mental health services was limited, as in the case of the young woman quoted below who was at the time of the interview in a halfway house for drug addiction. Her father was paying for the treatment she was receiving, but she did not know how long he would be able or willing to do that.

> *But, I mean, I don't—I'm not qualified for insurance anymore. Um, they just shut it off because I don't have a family or anything, so. I mean, I do have a family, but not of my own. Yeah. And I get to put my mental problems on there. So they cancelled my—yeah, my AHCCCS* [Medicaid].

This extended to other social welfare support services as well.

> *But, yeah, in terms of official establishments, um, food stamps, I got denied for healthcare because I'm not a single mom.*

Mental health care was another service that the young people faced barriers in accessing through the public healthcare system. The young person quoted below shared that despite having multiple mental health diagnoses, she was not able to access counseling services once her Medicaid had been discontinued.

> *I, I didn't do the hormone counseling, but I had to do other counseling for my cutting problem…The last time,*[received counseling] *like, a year and a half ago. It's, it's been... They cut my insurance, so I can't do anything right now. Yeah, but, they only cut it because they took my Social Security away. They took my Social Security checks away, and then instantly, they saw that, and they were like, "Oh, this bitch don't got Social Security no more, so cut this bitch." They said I didn't have enough mental problems.*

Documentation. The barriers to accessing health and mental health care were interconnected to LGBT identity, as in the case below in which a trans-identified young person described the reaction he received from a worker because he had not yet been able to afford to change his gender on his identification.

Like the last time I went to go renew my food stamps they were like, they looked at it, they looked up at me, and, "You need to bring the person who's applying." Yeah, and I was like, "No, that's me, uh, yeah, that's me. No, I swear that's me."

Barriers Faced from LGBT-Specific Service Providers

The young people also shared examples of facing barriers to services from LGBT-specific organizations. Some of the barriers were related purely to geographic access, including such things as limited transportation, and limited resources that were intended to serve large cities or counties. Other barriers were intricately connected to aspects of identity, as the young people perceived them. These barriers included (1) exclusion, and (2) assumptions on the part of LGBTQ-specific service staff.

Exclusion. Exclusivity can be both overt and covert in the ways that it manifests itself in service settings. One covert example of exclusion that the young people shared was in relation to how the organization presents itself. For young people who do not want to be categorized, coming to a place that is clearly identified as LGBT can be off putting, as in the case of the young person quoted below:

Um, if there's one thing I don't like, it's when you go to a place to get assistance or services and it's - you know I'm sure you know the whole LGBQT, you know big logos and the big monikers on the side of the building are good. You know it's good for people to look at and see and you know, know that there's refuge there for people like us. But, you know I think it's just because of, you know, I don't like to be labeled. You know, I wouldn't you know - if I saw that it'd you know kind of disappoint me.

Another covert example of this was described in the previous chapter on identity in which a young person felt that his family class or economic background made him feel out of place. Because of this, he decided to stop attending a support group for LGBT youth. Another subtle or covert example was described by several of the transgender-identified young people. Use of language by LGBT organizations made trans-identified

young people feel excluded and unsupported. This sentiment is reflected in the quotes below that come from two different interviewees with similar experiences.

> *But I don't like most LGBT organizations at all, and I don't go for resources to places that aren't explicitly transgender affirming, because if they don't say that they are, then they're definitely not. And even if they say that they are, then they might not be.*

The other interviewee shared the following:

> *You know second, you know everything we do here is all like gay day. Gay day here, gay day there, gay games here, whatever. You there's always something about gay or homo in something that we're doing. You know and I don't feel that's - how is that supposed to encourage the transsexuals out there and help them when you're you know labeling everything like that?*

She went on to state:

> *You know there should be you know a gay Monday, a tranny Tuesday. You know something - you know they give you - I would give history about gays, transsexuals, lesbians and you know whatever else there is. You know I wouldn't focus everything on just the gays.*

Exclusion can also be overt, as in the example of the deaf young person who shared his challenges with accessing an interpreter in order to participate in LGBT programs. In his interview, he talked about how surprised he was when he first attended an organization and found that deaf youth had been participating without interpreters for some time. Below he described his first experience trying to participate, even with the services of an interpreter available.

> *They wanted to – you know, the group – groups were kind of flexible. They didn't know. They were clueless about deaf people. So they were putting the deaf people in separate groups. For instance, if they set up three groups, A, B and C, they were trying to separate the deaf people. We're telling them that's not gonna work if we only have one interpreter. It's impossible for that interpreter to jump among three groups to interpret for everybody.*

Assumptions on the part of LGBT-specific service staff. Exclusion can be subtle, and can include practices in organizations that are based on assumptions. Another

transgender-identified young person shared the story below of her first time visiting an LGBT-specific organization. During her visit, she felt that multiple assumptions were made by the staff she interacted with about her experiences and needs.

> *Talking to them, it's, uh, one thing that I know that they were - um, they asked me about which was kind of personal, but they asked me like how do I support myself. And at first I didn't understand what they meant. But one thing is going through this lifestyle it is extremely hard. Like especially in the beginning if your - if you're not already employed, to find employment because you have to realize that the person who may hire you may not be completely accepting of this lifestyle, or if you're working where some - where you have to deal with customers, you're not only like putting yourself in an uncomfortable situation, you might be making that, um, customer uncomfortable so they have to think about their business. Because it's like you have to be - society says if - if you're gonna do it, you have to be passable. You have to wake up tomorrow; you have to be like completely passable. You have to like an amazing girl all the time and it's not like that. And so one thing that I found out was in supporting and trying to support yourself, like the ones - there - there are some who like took a negative route with it and did things like prostitution or soliciting and things like that, that I'm - I'm absolutely grateful enough that I've never had to experience, nor would I never want to experience. And that's just because like I said, I would always, um - whether it be like money from financial aid or family or friends or things - like just doing little odds and ends or babysitting, stuff like that. I've always found some way to support myself going through this. And so when they were asking me about that, I kinda felt like - 'cause when they were asking me, um, I know at, um,* [agency] *they always make sure like there's like condoms and things there 'cause they want you - but they were like trying to give me like this special brown little baggie. Like okay, well this is might - what she's out there doing so we'll go ahead and make sure she's - and it kinda - I kinda took it as a little bit insulting because like I said I - I pride myself on the person that I am. And that's a - aspect that I would never, ever want to have in my life. And so when they were talking to me about it, it kinda felt like they were already assuming that that's what I had to do just because I am transgendered now and that's one of the negative stereotypes that go through this lifestyle. And so if - I felt like if they were a little bit more open and like their vision wasn't so distorted, then they woulda actually got to know me for me and they would know well hey, she's an amazing person, she makes good grades, she makes sure her finance - like so that way I wouldn't have to experience something like that.*

Vision for Serving LGBTQ Young People

Based on their experiences with services and support as young LGBTQ-identified people, the interviewees were asked to envision what services could and should look like

for this population. The young people drew from both their positive and negative experiences. In addition, they grappled with how LGBT-serving organizations could serve a population with such a variety of experiences and needs. Their responses fell into four primary themes that will be explored in detail below. These include; (1) space or place, (2) programs, (3) inclusion, and (4) dignity and justice. Based on this study's research questions, the themes will be discussed in relation to identity as an important factor in understanding how best to serve LGBTQ young people.

Space and Place

The theme of space and place was directly related both to having a physical space for LGBT young people to come for services and support, as well as to the climate or kind of environment that such a space should offer. Many of the young people spoke specifically about having a location where they could congregate, meet others and access resources. The fact that this was at the forefront of their minds may have been due, in part, to the fact that the only local LGBT youth serving organization had opened a youth center within a month of beginning the interviews for this study. In any case, the young people saw real value in having such a space.

There was, however, some difference of opinion about whether or not there needed to be population specific spaces. For example, some of the transgender-identified young people expressed a desire for a trans-specific space, as did the youth who identified space for LGBT deaf youth as being important.

> *Yeah that. That's the only way to get money, 'cause I really want to establish a deaf gay and lesbian community here in the state of Arizona. There's deaf/gay coffees. It's the third Friday of every month, but that's it.*

This was also the case for the young people who expressed a vision for providing housing. Some felt that the housing should be age-specific only, as reflected in the quote below from a young woman who had shared her struggles while living in the adult shelter.

> *I think it would make a big difference if they had a [shelter] for 18 to 24. And the reason I say that is because I think it'd be more construct – constructive than that in – you can focus better. Because even me, like I've been through some stuff and I was just like, "Wow. I want to go to work. I want to walk out there and go to work and pass all of that." It's too much going on over there. You know what I mean? Just like too much.*

Others felt that it should be LGBT-centric, but not exclusive of allies. Still others felt that transgender-only housing was important given the experiences of violence and harassment that transgender-identified young people face both from LGB people and heterosexuals, as was expressed by the young person quoted below:

> *Yeah. Um, yeah, [Laughs] A lot of trans people are physically and/or sexually assaulted at least like once in their lifetime, so like putting them with other people who aren't trans is inherently unsafe. But not only that, like I said, the majority of people who aren't really affirming of my identity are gay people. So even if it was like an LGBT house, I would probably have to deal with a bunch of shit.*

In keeping with their experiences with basic needs services, the young people identified that spaces and places intended to serve LGBT young people should provide basic items such as access to showers and hygiene items, resource materials, clothing, and food. This is emphasized in the quote below:

> *Um, definitely a - a drop-in center. Um, a 24 hour drop-in center. Um, with - with plenty of volunteers or staff. Um, food. Plenty of food. Plenty. And plenty of food. Um, shower - and you know personal hygiene products and showering, etcetera and clothing, um, is a must. Ab - absolutely. I mean top of the line. Um, resources. Plenty of resources kinda almost hidden away or put in a place where it's kind of nonchalant. Because if someone is in desperate need and is very modest a - you know they're not gonna go up and grab a pamphlet about a thing that says oh, I think I have herpes you see. So it's just a way on - on planning the resource and where to put the resources. Um, a telephone, access to a telephone. Because - especially if - if youth don't have that, you know access to that.*

Programs

The young people identified specific kinds of programming that they felt would be important to offer for LGBT young people. Interestingly, when the suggestions offered by the interviewees under this category are put together, they create a holistic approach to serving LGBT young people that attends to their social, emotional, physical and developmental needs. In keeping with the aspects of identity that the young people shared as being important to them, arts and sports programming were identified as important ways of serving LGBT young people.

Similarly, youth leadership opportunities were identified as important to include when serving this population. Again, this seems to be in line with the identities of the young people, but also fits developmentally as they transition into adulthood. As in the quote below, the young people talked about both their own leadership development and the development of leadership skills in other youth. For this young man, who had taken on the issue of bridging the deaf and hearing youth, there was a desire to have other young people engaged in this work as he anticipated his departure from the organization.

> *I wanted to see more half and half [deaf and hearing], for them to work together. I think that would improve their leader – the kid – the youth's leadership skills and we can also learn from the staff. That would really empower the youth to become leaders. And the staff could be there to learn more and do research and add new projects, new programs based on what the youth want to learn, not only up to the staff to decide that. I disagree with that. The staff shouldn't be the only ones leading. I want the youth involved in leading the groups at the same time.*

The young people saw value in programs that allowed for peer to peer support, including discussion groups on topics that were relevant to the young people's experiences as well as to the larger LGBT community.

> *So it's like I feel like it's a place like – you know, like you come in and like, yeah, we have like food for you if you need help. Like, we have like game nights or*

> *something. But I think like getting people to like just sit down and like focus on like issues that are very like serious like in the world, like equality and what we feel about it, or like, you know, like aggressive behavior – like abusive behavior, like – I mean even like sexual abuse. Like I'm sure like every – like almost everybody I've ever met has had that. And like even more like of those serious like – I don't know. It's like I feel like I relate to more of the serious topics. Like I want to be a part of those because I've had a lot of serious things happen in my life, you know, things that relate to like the youth. Like maybe everybody that comes in fills out a survey. What – like what do you like feel is like your biggest need?*

Support from staff members or other "adult" figures was also identified as an important aspect of serving LGBT young people, which is keeping with the value that the interviewees placed on the relationships they had established with role models and mentors.

> *I think they have a lot of understanding, you know, so it's an understanding of we – well, here's a gay environment so the staff at least knows what it's like to be a gay youth, you know. And a lot of staff didn't have things like this. So it's like understanding. They understand you. You know, they will always listen to you and will – will act like a counselor. You see the staff every day so you start getting comfortable with the staff. So they – so it's almost like for you can approach them and talk about your problems, other than like someone – a counselor that comes in once a week.*

Support from mental health providers was identified as a need as well, as reflected in the following quote.

> *More like counselors. Like – that's what I feel is like very like – it's like hard finding somebody to talk to. Everybody just wants to talk, you know? Like in group sometimes it's like, "One person at a time." Like, "One diva; one mic. Calm down."*

Education and prevention programs were identified by some of the young people as having importance for serving LGBT young people. As previously mentioned, the young people identified the limitations of their knowledge coming out of high school of sexual health. One young person in particular expressed concern about HIV prevention and its relevance for himself and his friends.

Like I guess they would have to know like about HIV. Like that's a really big thing. Like I kissed a guy when I was 15 or 16 and I thought - I was like oh my God, now I'm positive. So I went to the clinic and I got tested. And I didn't like - I didn't know about HIV or how to get it. Like I didn't know - I was like - I wasn't informed about it. And that's something I feel young people need to know.

Inclusion

The theme of inclusion under vision for services aimed at LGBT young people is interconnected with both of the previous themes of space/place and programs. However, because it is so important to understanding the role of identity in providing services, and because it was such a prominent theme, it has been separated from the others. From a physical standpoint, the young people were aware that any kind of LGBT-specific space needed to also be equipped in such a way that differently abled young people could access it (e.g., having an elevator), and that all young people could feel included in the facilities (e.g., gender neutral bathrooms).

Drawing from their own experiences, many of their reflections and suggestions for serving LGBT young people were aimed at the process that organizations must undergo, on an ongoing basis, in order to make inclusion a priority. Such a process requires attention to marketing and outreach of programs and services. This perspective is articulated by a young person quoted below.

And they need to like explicitly invite people, that's the thing. I know it sounds weird that it's like, well, we're not going to invite the white gay men, but we're going to invite the lesbians of color, the trans women and the trans guys and the gender queers and the non-binary trans people etcetera etcetera. And it seems weird to like explicitly invite those people, but the thing is is like in a white supremacist home in normative like heterosexist culture, every space is a safe space for those people. In terms of gay spaces, every space is a safe space for white gay cisgender men, but it's not a safe space for all the other non-hetero queer people.

As was discussed in the section on barriers to services with LGBT-specific providers, inclusivity requires attention to the subtle ways that people can be excluded, including use of language, attention to privacy and safety.

> *I also think that there's like way too much stress on outing people all the time. Um, like we glorify outing people for some reason. We don't really ever like put people in their place when they out someone non-consensually. It's not their story to tell. But for some reason we're like – especially with like Ellen Paige and, you know, Lindsay Lohan, even though she's not – I don't know what she identifies as – but she had like a gay fling. And so like we're just constantly like, "Oh, that person needs to come out," and like we shame all of these people for not coming out. And so like instead of shaming all of these youth for not coming out, we should instead create safe spaces for them to be out in, and respect their privacy, because they have a right to privacy, young or old or in between.*

The young people also discussed the importance of actively combatting forms of discrimination and oppression that occur and manifest themselves in spaces that serve LGBT young people. One young woman stated the following as she described what the staff in "her organization" would be required to do:

> *And then on top of that maybe like, even attending like a diversity training, um, because everybody is different. Some people tend to be close-minded in that aspect. So I would definitely like, have them go through that.*

Again, inclusion requires that LGBT organizations are self-reflective on an ongoing basis.

Dignity and Justice

The final theme that emerged from the young people's responses about how LGBT young people should be served was also intricately connected to identity. In some ways, the reflections that fell under this theme were focused more towards general service providers who may be serving an LGBT young person. The young people expressed competing sentiments. On the one hand, they did not want to be treated any differently from anyone else, and expressed that service providers should avoid making

assumptions about their experiences and needs. This sentiment was expressed in both of the following quotes by two different interviewees.

> *Um, you know treat me as they treat everybody else. You know don't judge too quickly, too soon. You know you assume shit and it makes an ass out of you, you know. You're in that chair, you're behind that desk. You know you're a professional you know act like it. Look the part, be the part.*

And from another interviewee:

> *Don't treat – don't treat anybody different 'cause people – we're all the same in so many ways. 'Cause that's why, I like when you – when people go fill out applications, and it all says that we're, we're not allowed to judge you for whatever race, sexual orientation you are; if we do, then they'll get in trouble*.

On the other hand, they were aware of the challenges that they faced in society as LGBTQ young people. In this sense, the young people expressed a desire for service providers to have knowledge about the unique experiences of LGBT young people. The following came from the same interviewee quoted above.

> *Um… they need to know that, you know, we have – you know, we been through hard times, you know, it's not that easy, you know, being, you know, um, who we are, you know. Um, we didn't – it's not like we – weren't – it's not like we chose to be that way.*

They identified the importance for providers to use that knowledge, not to make assumptions, but to honor the differences among LGBTQ young people in order to provide appropriate services, which is reflected in the following quote:

> *Um [clears throat] one thing I think that they should make sure that they do is make sure they - they're going into each situation with like an open mind and an open heart. And that's just because every person you meet and their lifestyle is different. They're - I mean we're all the same because we fall under this one spectrum. But every person you meet is different and don't let that one person distort you from like what you're trying to do. Don't let that one person change your entire image of how you see this group.*

Chapter 6

ASSESSING THE VALUE OF PAR AS A RESEARCH AND SERVICE APPROACH WITH LGBTQ YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

As stated in the methods chapter, eight of the young people who participated in interviews consented to join a research team that used a participatory action research (PAR) process. For sixteen weeks, these eight participants engaged as co-researchers to design and implement a research study around a topic that was chosen by them. Appendix E outlines the questions and methods for their research, but the study itself is not the focus of this chapter. Instead, the findings that follow are focused on the potential value that PAR holds as a research and service approach with LGBTQ young people. As such, the findings are centered around the process that the team went through as they engaged in PAR, and the reflections that the team had about their process. In week 16 of their work, the team had a closing meeting that included reflection. One researcher got a second shift job at week 15, so there were seven of the eight researchers in attendance. During this meeting, the team reflected on three key areas: key moments in the process that promoted growth and learning, aspects of the team's process that were beneficial to the individuals involved, and what it takes to make a PAR team successful. These questions were answered in the context of understanding the value that a PAR approach holds for serving LGBTQ young people.

Because the team members, myself included, worked together as co-researchers, the language in this chapter reflects these relationships. From here forward, the young people are identified as the "researchers", "co-researchers", or "team members." My

specific role and reflections are delineated as the "facilitating researcher" because I was the researcher who brought the group together and facilitated the process. This delineation both acknowledges the power dynamic involved in the process, and allows for a distinction between my reflections and those of the youth researchers.

The data were drawn from the sixteen weeks of meetings that the team had together between August 20 and December 3, 2012. The primary source of data was the audio-recordings of the team meetings. Secondary to that were the participant journals. However, a word of caution is important to include with regard to the journals. The journals became a tool that was more or less accessible to various team members. For example, one team member wanted to use an online journal but then lost his access to it when his technology broke. After that, he did not engage in the journaling activities despite several requests for paper journals. In addition, team members requested the ability to take their journals home with them in between meetings. This resulted in two journals not being returned. Three paper journals and one online journal were retrieved at the end of the data collection period. Because of this, the journals are used as data sparingly given that they are not inclusive of the team members' voices.

Reflections from researchers and the facilitating researcher fell into four primary conceptual themes that align with the working principles that Stringer (1996) proposed for practitioners using action research. They include; (1) relationships, (2) communication, (3) participation, and (4) inclusion. These four themes are interconnected as illustrated in Figure 11. The sections below are divided according to these four areas, and begin with the reflective commentary from researchers. They are each further

explicated and illustrated using data from the team meetings and journals. Each section is then followed with reflections on the process from the facilitating researcher.

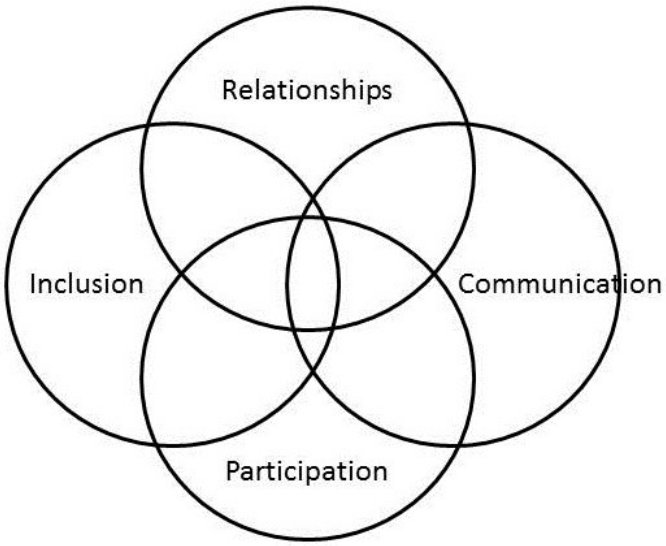


Figure 11. Conceptual themes of the value of PAR as a research and service approach with LGBTQ young people.

Relationships

Relationships were a primary component of the process for the team. The building and maintenance of relationships were at the forefront during much of the process. As the researchers reflected back on their experiences, three aspects of the relationship building process stood out for them: (1) having personal knowledge and understanding of one another, (2) valuing the diversity of the researchers and their contributions, and (3) defining roles and relationships. These are explored in more detail in the following sections.

The Process is Personal: Developing Understanding

The importance of having a deep knowledge and understanding of one another was vital to the researchers' ability to work together. The research topic was very personal for the team. It came out of their personal passions, which were often developed through experiences and first-hand knowledge. In fact, the researchers decided to embrace their privileged knowledge of the study topic, and incorporate it into the research design. Because of this, the process of designing and implementing the study became very personal. It was the relationships that were developed that allowed for their personalized contributions and supported equal participation. This sentiment was expressed by two team members, as quoted below, who were hesitant to speak up early in the process because the relationships had not yet been established.

> *My low was like I was really like anxious the first time I came here…I kindof opened up a little bit more. It's easier for me to talk to people now.*
> *I was kindof scared because I'm kinda shy and scared when I meet people.*

One researcher shared that her biggest highlight from the process was the sharing of our stories, which enhanced the ability to understand and build relationships with one another. The storytelling process began in week 14 and continued through the final meeting in week 16. Each team member was asked to tell his or her story in about 10 minutes (although many went well over) to share the things that were most important to understanding who each of them is as a person. During the storytelling process, the other team members were asked by the facilitating researcher to simply listen. They were not given an opportunity to ask questions or to seek clarification. They were asked to focus on the process of listening, and if thoughts or questions entered their minds, to consider why these thoughts or questions arose. Two of the young people on the team had

participated in a storytelling workshop, and suggested that the team use a ritual that they learned there – to say "yo" at the end of the story to let the person know that they had been heard. The researcher who identified this process as a highlight expressed her feeling that it should have been done at the beginning of the team process, and articulated that the stories gave us something that enabled us to relate to one another rather than focusing on differences.

> *I felt like I really didn't know everybody. Like I knew you, but I didn't know anything about your past or anything about you guys…When we share something and we all relate to it, in that sense it would be better.*

Another researcher responded to her by stating that it would have been "*preventative care*" to understand the life stories of one another and know where each other are coming from.

Valuing Diversity Among Researchers

The team reflected on learning the value that each team member brought to the process. Valuing the diversity within the team both enhanced and challenged the relationships. One researcher shared that it was the process of coming to understand and value others' opinions and contributions that enhanced his understanding of himself.

> *I learned a lot about everyone in this group and a lot more about myself also, that I can deal with so many different personalities. I have a very big ego and I always think that I'm right. Now I know how to understand people's thoughts and opinions and understand where people come from.*

Another researcher shared that learning from one another can happen equally between team members.

> *The advice that I would give to anyone else is to have an open mind and to be willing to expand your mind a little bit. Even like, there are some people who are really, really open minded and smart and wise, but everyone can learn something from somebody else.*

This was an important aspect of the relationship building process that included challenges about how power and privilege impact the perceived value of team members and their respective contributions. Team members had to both temper their perceived power and be willing to assert power depending on their positionality within the team.

Relationships Shape Expectations

A third important aspect of the relationship building process was coming to an understanding of what can be expected from one another, and to define what kinds of roles and relationships researchers will have in each other's lives. There were different meanings that were assigned to the relationships by the researchers. On one hand, some researchers emphasized the friendship role that researchers played for one another, as reflected in the following quote:

> *I love the group. I love everything, how far we got with it. There's times when I'm at my house and I can't wait just to come to group. 'Cause I got used to you guys. How can I say this? I don't got friends out there like I got them here. And I feel like I got friends in here…I never had good friends.*

On the other hand, team members reflected on the fact that the delineation of roles was important, such as that of friend and ally, to being able to establish realistic expectations of one another, and to tailor the relationship to the appropriate role. The quote below is from a researcher who reflected on this process:

> *I guess I realized through this group that an ally isn't necessarily the same as a friend. And that you don't have to be a friend to be an ally. And you can be a friend without being an ally. I guess if I've learned anything, especially when having conversations with people about this, there are people that straight up support bigoted concepts…and then there are people who are kinda like lukewarm who think we live in a post-bigoted era – post racism, post sexism - and then there are people who know it exists but think they don't take part in it, which is impossible, and then there are people who recognize it exists, recognize there are ways that we as human beings perpetuate it as well despite not wanting to, and then come and do the work against that. And something that I've been learning how to do is being able to identify who my allies are, even if they're in*

> *my community, who my actual allies are in my community, and how to adapt my language for the people in these varying levels.*

Being able to establish working relationships that may or may not become more personal relationships or friendships was an important aspect of the process, as reflected in the following quote from a researcher's journal entry.

> *this experience has taught me alot about myself, i learned that i am capable of working with people that i might not like, and might not usually share the same thoughts.*
>
> - October 29, 2012

Building relationships that were founded on respect was of primary importance to the researchers, as will be further discussed in the section on communication.

Facilitating Researcher's Reflections on Relationships

There were a number of strategies that were incorporated into the team's process that allowed for attention to be paid to the relationships between researchers. It was clear early on in the project that conflict between team members made it very difficult to move the research forward, and that the team members were dealing with multiple personal issues that could not just be bracketed from their time together. As such, it was important to create time and space during the team meetings to address both of these. What follows are descriptions of two ways that this was accomplished.

Creating Space for the Personal

The researchers regularly identified tools to use in the meeting time/space together to minimize the things that they identified as posing challenges to their ability to work together. For example, one of the norms that was established for the team's process was "Come in fresh and ready to work." This included a discussion about what should be left at the door, and what was important to bring into the team's work. It became

challenging, however, to come into meetings solely focused on the research project. In fact, some of the researchers wanted to spend time talking about what was going on in their lives, and in some cases, to get feedback on issues or challenges they were personally facing. This was a part of the dynamic among and between the team members, but it created a challenge to moving the research project forward. I then asked the team to develop a standard agenda for meetings, and they decided to begin each meeting with a "check-in". This became a way for the young people to get things off of their chest, get feedback, share where they might be at any given time, and get to know one another better. In some cases, the team members asked one another to "check-in" for them if they had to miss a meeting.

The check-ins became a launching point for relationship building and developing a deep understanding of one another. Instead of leaving our "stuff" or personal experiences, at the door, they were brought in and used in a way that fostered understanding. It also informed the importance of the team's work. For example, when a team member shared in check-in that he had applied for documentation under Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) executive order, it allowed other team members to understand the importance of this policy (or in some cases the existence of it), and reinforced the importance of LGBT leaders to understand the multiple identities of its community members. Similarly, when an undocumented team member was arrested and detained, the researchers listened to her check-in when she returned and responded with empathy as reflected in the following quote that comes from pieces of a check-in. Two undocumented researchers are talking to one another. One has just returned from jail

and the other is in the process of applying for a work permit under DACA. In between, a researcher who had been sleeping in the park and at friends' houses interjects.

> FR: *Ok – Let's do check-ins…*
>
> R1: *Well, me, my week didn't start til yesterday. I got out of jail on Tuesday at 3:00. I keep saying Monday for some reason. Um, it's been alright. I got a sue on the police officers cuz I had some stuff happen to me in jail that wasn't supposed to. But thanks to that, I become a citizen. So, they are going to take care of my citizen thing because of that…So, I'm back on track now. I am just glad to be here right now. Better than being in there…I got sent to a hold twice for defending myself in there…*
>
> R2: *…I wanted to say that I was happy to see* [researcher] *when she walked in. I'll tell her when she comes back in. And I can only imagine what she could have went through in a situation like that. I've never been in a situation like that. I just can't imagine it…I'm just waiting for the 7th so I can go for my fingerprints.*
>
> R3: *Wait, I want to share something else first. I think that I'm moving forward in my life. I think I'm starting to get a hold of myself, and be able to take care of myself, and be ready for the real world. So, hopefully this Thursday I'm going to get my own apartment. Finally. And I don't have to worry about staying with anybody. So, yeah.*
>
> R2: *When you walked out, I said I was happy to see you. Cause I can't imagine…like if I was in that situation and didn't know what was going to happen next…*
>
> R1: *Don't get me wrong, I was scared…I did whatever I could to made it out of there…*
>
> R2: *I'm glad you're out.*
>
> R1: *Me too. At 3:00 in the morning, I was like, I don't even care. If it's 1:00 in the morning. Just let me out.*

During this same check-in, researchers talked about birthdays, softball games, and going out to the bar. The differences in experiences among researchers were often reflected in the check-ins.

Happy Dance Songs

Another strategy that built understanding and relationships between researchers was the use of "happy dance songs". This ritual was started in week nine by the facilitating researcher as a way to encourage weekly moments of celebration for the team, particularly as the work got harder and the energy got lower. During the week 8 meeting, each team member was asked to write on a piece of paper a song or two that lifts her or his spirits or that they use when they are celebrating something in their lives. At subsequent meetings, one or two songs were selected and the music video was shown at the beginning and/or the end of the meeting. Written lyrics were printed for the interpreter and the deaf researcher. Before playing the song and accompanying video, the team member who had selected it was asked to introduce it to the team. When it was the deaf researcher's turn to select a song, he chose a video of an interpreter signing his chosen song.

An unintended effect of this weekly ritual was that the songs gave the team a glimpse into the life of each team member. The type of music, the lyrics of the song, the mood it evoked, all said a great deal about the person. For example, one of the first songs selected was India Arye's song called Video. The song was selected by a female, transgender-identified young person. The lyrics focus on God-given beauty and talent as being a source of value and strength rather than looking like a "video girl". Her introduction of the song to the team was as follows:

> *My happy dance song from India Arye is Video. And the reason why it's such a happy dance song for me is just because it basically epitomizes everything I feel about myself. When I began my transition especially, I was told that I had to be a certain way, I had to like make sure certain things are done, make sure I had to be around certain people. And at a point, I was starting to fall into that. But then I felt like it wasn't me. And so, now that I've found more of myself, I don't need to*

follow anyone's trends. Like, I am who I am, regardless of what I do, and what I do and don't have.

This ritual also gave dedicated time in each meeting to allow the young people to personally connect with one another and to be personally validated. This was a piece of maintaining positive energy and motivation. It allowed the researchers to invite other team members into their lives, if they wanted, to celebrate successes and provide support during challenging times.

Communication

The communication process was something that was not always easy and at times was taxing both to the team and to the individual researchers. One researcher, when asked what it takes to make a group like this one successful, described this as follows:

> *I think it takes emotional preparation on like an individual part. Like emotionally, there were things I wasn't expecting, a handful of things maybe. And that's not necessarily bad. Just a lot of processing that I wasn't necessarily prepared for ahead of time that would have been a lot easier to process if I had been prepared. Especially because you're working with other human beings, it's messy. That's just how it is.*

Reflections from the researchers that fell under the theme of communication centered around four main topics; (1) communicating across differences, (2) finding voice, (3) communication as a two-way process, and (4) handling conflict.

Communicating Across Differences

The team of researchers were diverse in many ways, some that were a reflection of the original sampling procedure for the interview participants (i.e., race/ethnicity and gender identity), and others that were based on other aspects of identity including researchers who had been or were homeless, undocumented researchers, researchers from varying class/economic backgrounds, etc. In the first week of the team's meetings, it was

apparent that the differences would create challenges to communication. There were at least three different first languages represented in the research team, and the meetings included a sign language interpreter. The communication challenge was reflected in the following journal entry from a researcher after the first team meeting.

> *I feel nervous about my own arrogance I guess. I noticed a lot of repeated suggestions or answers to the challenges and guidelines. I'm nervous that I'll get annoyed by things I perceive to be stupid, but that's on me.*
>
> - August 20, 2012

Challenges to communicating across differences did not only occur in the beginning of the team's process. In week 10, the team had established patterns of communication that are normal for a group experiencing some level of cohesion. This created a new challenge for both the team member who identifies as deaf and the sign language interpreter. There was no way for the interpreter to catch everything, and turn-taking in the discussion became very informal so the deaf researcher was raising his hand to speak for long periods of time. The deaf researcher and I came up with a strategy to present to the team, which was done in week 10. However, as the meeting started the deaf researcher expressed to me that he did not want to talk about how he was feeling until all team members were present. He asked, however, that I introduce the strategy. The quote that follows is from that introduction, and reflects the deaf researcher's sense of frustration in his comment about using a ruler. The team expressed no issues with using the strategy.

> FR: *Because I think we're getting so comfortable with each other, and because we're having heated discussions sometimes, last week especially we were talking over each other…*[researcher] *and I talked a little bit over Facebook. And we decided to have at least something that we can pass around so that one person is talking at a time. Is that ok with you all?* [Researcher] *suggested a ball…Is everybody comfortable with that?*

R1: *Or like a big ruler. You know? When someone slaps it on the table, everyone just shuts up. I'm just kidding.*

R2: *I have no problem with the ball.*

However, this new tool did not come without challenges. Someone had to wait to be "given" the ball by the person holding it which created a shift in dynamics. For those who could jump in and talk before, they had to wait to be given the ball by a peer. In addition, the informal communication patterns that brought an air of comfort to the team meetings were minimized. The young people found other outlets for them, but it definitely changed the tone of the space.

Differences in Understanding the Impact of Differences

Although many of the team members faced oppression and discrimination on a daily basis based on various aspects of their identities, they did not all have the same perspective on these experiences. At times, this was a barrier to communication, particularly given that the topic of choice for the research study was intra-community bigotry. For example, in week 3, there was a team meeting that involved a discussion about race and specifically White people. It was in response to reflections that were brought back to the team from OutDoors Gay Camp when two researchers facilitated a discussion on the selected research topic to get feedback. The dialogue below reflects differences both in understanding of oppression, as well as differences in how oppression should be responded to.

R1: *There was one person who said the whole world discriminates anyway, so we just have to deal with it. He just threw up his hands. Do you remember that? Do you remember when he said that? Discrimination is just something that we just have to deal with.*

R2: *Well, not White males for the most part.*

R3: *You can't make generalizations though.*

R2: *That's why they're like, "No big deal."*

R1: *Discrimination is illegal. He said too bad. I mean he's like, we'll just have to deal with the rest of the world. Discrimination is just inevitable. We said, "yes", but we want to change things for the better. And we want to hear your opinions but I felt like that one guy was just allowing the government to go ahead and control us and make it so that we can't really do anything and make it so we are so restricted and oppressed. I was a little bit offended by that comment because many of the issues are very discriminative, with the deaf community, with the gay community, with immigrants, with all of these different subgroups of humanity. Anyway, it was hard to argue with him because he was so hard-nosed…*

R3: *I think it's not really fair to say that because it was more White people in the group, it wasn't really diverse because I am White and I have diverse people in my family. So, you don't really know. What we're trying to do is get away from all the stereotypes yet we're still bringing them in by saying that. I mean, I'm not trying to bash you down, but it's true. Just because they're White males, doesn't mean they don't have a Hispanic mother, or some part of their family isn't White. I don't have every White person in my family. I have a huge, diverse family. And nobody really looks at it that way. And I don't think it's fair to generalize every White guy as like that, in a way. And I know that the majority, a lot of them are, like, haven't been through struggles, but I know a lot of are…Just because somebody is White, or just because somebody is African American, just because somebody's Hispanic. There's so many diversities, I don't think we should look at it like, it shouldn't be about physical features anymore. Like we said earlier about storytelling, you don't know somebody until you know their story. So, it falls back in the same place I feel…*

R2: *I think like in terms of the guy who offended* [researcher]*...I'm trying to be optimistic which isn't very common, but like yeah he was really offensive and he was a jerk, but on the up slash down side, without people like that we wouldn't be here. This wouldn't be a struggle. There wouldn't be activism. There would be no purpose for us or this group because these stories would already be told and people would give a shit. Conversely, I think it's important to recognize that there's a difference between putting all White cisgender males into a category, and recognizing that all White cisgender males have different stories but they all benefit from the same privileges of racism and sexism. So, like, yes, they may totally have different and completely diverse families and they all see through different eyes, but they all see through White male eyes. So, that could look like a kajillion different things but it does look like a viewpoint that benefits from certain forms of discrimination existing. It's hard to like, especially for me because sometimes I sound super bitter and I sometimes, and not on purpose, but sometimes I pocket people in my language, and that's something that I'm morally opposed to and I do it. So, like, it's hard to recognize these benefits exist but*

everyone is still diverse. They all have their own histories and everyone has their own struggle. Privilege doesn't necessarily mean that life is cupcakes and rainbows and glitter.

R4: *It's not.*

R3: *No, I wish.*

R2: *Privilege means certain benefits. Your life can still be hard even though you have access to them. But I think the fact that the group was largely White and male does make a difference. Not because they all have the same stories or they can't have the same families but because a lot of White men receive the same messages. That you can do anything as long as you work hard. That's a predominantly White message. Like, and, yes, a lot of people hear those things all the time. But as people of color, it's you can do anything if you work harder than White people. At least in my experience. I can't speak for anybody else. Or you can do anything as long as White people accept you and you act more like White people.*

R3: *But that's how it used to be, I feel.*

R2: *That's how I was raised. It's not that old.*

R3: *Ok. Well, like, yeah. Like, exactly. But I think that's like part of your story.*

R2: *Yeah.*

R3: *And that's your own interpretation. That's how you feel. But I feel like I totally accept that. You know? And I'm like wow, that's awful. And I don't like that I hear somebody my age that went through that. And I look at the past and I'm just like, wow, there's so much ignorance, so much going on, so much hate. And then it's like, with people that are working so hard to make change look at where we're at now. It's not all like White people running places anymore. It's like very diverse. Like our world is diverse. But still there's like a fine line of ignorance there with the whole immigration stuff going on. And like all of that stuff. There's still so much. Yeah.*

R2: *I think racism still exists but it just looks really different.*

R3: *Yeah. It's like in a little fishbowl.*

R4: *…Um, well, I was just listening to all of you speak about how you view different types of people, and it just kind of like scares me. I know how you guys react and the tone of your voice is kind of how people treat you guys. I just think it's really ugly how you guys get hatred, and I get hatred too. Sorry, I am getting nervous. Stop staring* [whispering]. *But you guys are reflecting this hatred*

towards them back. And I don't think that is going to fix anything. Like if we just attack the fire it's not going to stop the flames.

In reflection during week 16, one researcher had the following to say about what he learned from this process.

> *This last sixteen weeks has really tested me, like a lot. It's been very emotionally taxing, which isn't necessarily bad. Sometimes good things take energy too…For me it's been finding a place between the politics of identity and the politics of perception. Um, where a lot of people identify with the way they're perceived and a lot of people identify with the boxes they fit into, if they do at all. And meeting people where they're at, and finding the language to do that, has been frustrating - very, very frustrating. Because for me, I've always been told I'm articulate. I've always been told that's my gift or whatever. But being articulate and not being understood does not really mesh well. It's been really, um, interesting – not in a bad way – I'm learning to let people surprise me more. And that, well one, ICB exists everywhere including in myself, but that doesn't necessarily mean it exists in every moment. While it might be in the background, it's not necessarily in the foreground.*

Finding Voice

In many ways, the quote above transitions into the next aspect of communication which is about the researchers finding their voices. Even though many of the researchers had already been engaged in leadership activities and advocacy efforts prior to coming to the team, some of them found that you are only effective if your message is able to be understood by the audience. Learning how to find one's voice, and tailor it to the audience at hand, was a part of the process for the team.

For other team members, who had not had many opportunities to engage in leadership activities, or who had felt invalidated in other settings, finding voice was something that gave them a sense of power. During the final reflection, one researcher shared his concern that people within the LGBT community attack one another rather than "sticking together." When asked what specific things had been done in the team that might help people in the community with this, he responded:

Letting our voice be heard. Speak up for what they believe in and what they think is right or what they think is wrong. To be able to interject their voice. I think we haven't taught people this, or how to stand up for ourselves.

At times during the team process, finding voice included expressions from researchers about feeling silenced. This happened at a team meeting after the disagreement at a Saturday meeting about the use of the term "genderfuck" in the demographic section of the survey. One of the researchers shared that she felt scared to speak up about a topic that was an area of passion for another researcher. Another researcher had posted something about the disagreement on Facebook, which had fueled the disagreement. In the dialogue quoted below, two researchers work to find their voices to express a sense of being silenced. The quote begins with a researcher recapping what had happened at the Saturday meeting for those who had not been able to attend:

We went over the questions, and how we should word them, and how should we like talk about them, pretty much. How to word it and put it in a decent way. There was a lot of argument though, I felt. I think a lot of people were kind of uncomfortable. It was kind of hard to like, even though I was busy doing my drag stuff, I was still was obviously paying attention. I felt like I learned a lot of things I didn't know about. Also, I felt like a lot of people were uncomfortable when we were talking about like "genderfuck" and like that stuff. And I feel like it just got kind of awkward and uncomfortable. And I felt like, a lot of us, like, our expression of what we felt like that was, I kind of felt like, I couldn't say what I wanted to say. And then I left.

FR: *What was it that made you feel like you couldn't say what you wanted to say?*

No offense [researcher]*, but it's just kind of hard, like, I, a lot of us, or I'm going to speak for myself, so I personally don't know a lot about gender, I mean I do from what I've learned in workshops and stuff, but I feel like if I want to express my feelings on something, it's like, "No, this is the way it is." And I feel like a lot of us who want to express ourselves kind of don't really get to express our feelings about stuff like that because there are like set rules. Sometimes I don't want to say something because I don't want to get shot down.*

Later in the discussion, another researcher spoke up about the same issue.

> *Even though I wasn't at the meeting, I kind of agree with what* [researcher] *said, like, sometimes people are afraid to express themselves about what they feel about gender because they feel that if they say something, you're gonna be like, "Oh no, you're wrong." Or "Don't say that." So, for anybody to shoot someone down for saying something that they don't know about. They shouldn't be scared to say something that they feel or want to say or want to express. That's why I don't say anything about different genders, because I'm afraid that you or anybody else will say something.*

Moments such as these occurred throughout the sixteen week process. Learning how to share a differing perspective, and being able to receive it and incorporate it into the communication process meant that some of the researchers had to find their voices, and others had to make space for those voices to be heard, included and honored.

Communication as a Two-Way Process

The dialogue that occurred after the confrontation quoted above is a good illustration of the ways in which communication as a two-way process was an important factor during the team's work. After the team member who had been confronted asked if he could leave the room, the rest of the team engaged in a discussion about the importance of understanding what is being communicated both from the perspective of the person who is saying it and the person who is hearing or receiving it.

> R1: *I just think that we shouldn't assume that someone's saying something transphobic because that's how you start big fights. And I'm not going to take back what I said, because it's true. There's plenty of times that I've said things that I didn't know and he just went off on me. And I don't appreciate, you know, that. That's why I don't say anything about gender because I know if I say something he's going to try to say something mean to me and be angry. So, I don't bring it up.*

> R2: *We all have to consider that we all say our thoughts. And for us it doesn't seem… I may something that's sounds sexist but I don't think it's sexist. It's from my point of view. And* [researcher] *hasn't done that to me, but I feel like he's done it to other people. But I don't say anything because that's their responsibility to do it. And if they don't feel like they're being attacked, then they're not saying*

anything. Sometimes the way we think things and the way we say things, don't seem like it's bad to us. It might offend other people. But there's also ways of saying things. There's ways to express ourselves and there's ways to take up an issue. If you come across as being strong, and using strong words in a high voice, then of course it's going to piss someone off. And I'm saying about all of us. We all have to remember that we all have our ways of saying things. And our ways of thinking and our own opinions. You know I could be 100% transphobic. I mean, I'm not. I'm just using that as an example.

Laughing

R3: *I was getting ready to come across this table.*

Laughing

R2: *I respect everyone in this room for who they are because everyone at this table is here for a reason…And I respect every person as they are…You can't tell me how I feel and how I express myself. I think that's what everyone else is trying to do. When* [researcher] *is saying something, I'm pretty sure he's not thinking, I'm saying this to offend* [researcher]*, or to offend* [researcher]. *I'm pretty sure we all say what we say from our own feelings.*

R4: *Well, we also come from different backgrounds.*

R2: *Exactly.*

R4: *And we grew up differently. So, I grew up in a family that was super conservative and homophobic.*

R3: *Did you really?*

R4: *Yeah. And like, so I never knew about anything gay or trans. I was scared of the fact, I was like "What? What is that?" But it takes like our own selves to educate each other and educate yourself on that. And that's why I am so proud of like where I'm at now. But it's also like, everything I say, when I do say it and I don't know what it means, then I'm like, "Oh, shoot." But I appreciate when people come up to me and say like this is how I feel but at a lower, calmer…Not in front of everybody though. Like I feel like if you're coming up to me in front of a bunch of people and are like "That's this, and that's rude." Then I feel immediately, like, I'm scared to even…and that's why I don't say anything a lot of the time…*

R2: *We all have to understand that we all come from different backgrounds and we have our own thoughts. And there's also ways of saying things.*

R3: *And going along with what you said, there are ways of saying things, but at the same time we need to be mindful and respectful of how we're going to say it. Like, we all have things that we are here and we're passionate about. Like, you and legalization for illegal immigrants,* [researcher] *and deaf, and me and* [researcher] *about the whole trans thing. So, if I were to make a comment that kind of hit a chord with you and something you're passionate about, I completely understand you being upset because you have every right to feel how you feel. Same thing with* [researcher]*, when there are transphobic remarks made,* [researcher] *is like a big advocate for the trans community itself. So, that's one reason why he gets how he gets. So, I think we can be a little more mindful of how we say things and like just give it an extra second thought before it comes out to how we say things.*

R2: *And it's a two-way street. As much as we have to be mindful of what we say and how we say it and who's around, we also have to think like, "Well, he's probably not thinking how he's saying it." It's a two-way street. We have to meet each other half way.*

In reflection during week 16, a researcher shared how the process of two-way communication also extends to having an openness about what people have to say to you. In his opinion, this allows for personal growth and ultimately social change. He stated:

The thing about this group is that everyone was willing to hear everybody out. And everybody was willing to take responsibility upon each other's opinions and responses and we were all open to hear people's responses to what we have to say. I think if we could teach that…to understand that your opinion is not the only one that's going to be heard, and there's other people that have different feelings and opinions and the least you could do is respect it, and just live with it. Because if it's someone else, it's not bothering you. Just be it. Just live it. And that's what needs to happen. People need to be more open to first of all criticism, which is very important. Because if you can't take criticism from someone else, then, personally I believe criticism builds up a person. It's like advice, you either take it or not, but if you don't take it you're closing yourself off to who you are. Our values are not always right. And it's not to please anyone but to please yourself. So, I think if we could make that happen in a group outside of here, then that's when change could start to happen.

Handling Conflict

The conflict that was, in part, quoted above was referred as *"…butting heads for the first time"* in the final team reflection. Being able to work through that conflict and

learn from it was a turning point for the team as described by a researcher in the following statement:

> *I take a lot from that moment. And to learn to respect people and to give people their time and their space to express themselves.*

Some of the researchers felt that it was the diversity of the team that made it prone to conflict. Other researchers felt differently.

> *…in this space it was tactically designed to be diverse. And, yes, there was butting heads because we're humans, but that would happen in an all White space too. Or an all Black, or an all Brown, or an all Asian, or an all indigenous, or an all multiracial space. It would happen in any space basically.*

Procedurally, the team was intentional about allowing people to leave the room if they needed to during a conflict, but did not move forward with the work of the team until everyone was back and the concerns had been addressed – not necessarily resolved. Ensuring that everyone had an equal chance to be heard was an important part of this process.

It also became clear that the researchers had different triggers that could increase the likelihood of conflict, or that impacted how they reacted to one another during conflict. It was decided that the researchers would share these triggers in order to build a deeper understanding and enhance their ability to handle conflict when it happened. The researchers saw the connection between their passion/s for their research topic, their triggers (which were connected to their passions), and the work they were doing to shape the kinds of questions they wanted to ask their study participants. The following is an excerpt of the discussion from the point of conflict to how the team wanted to move forward:

> R1: *Correct me if I'm wrong, but it feels like things have settled a bit like the sand after an earthquake.*

R2: *I told you.* [whispering]

R1: *What?*

R2: *I was just saying that this is just the storm, and then it's all going to go down and then we're all going to be like*…[sound]…

R1: *But I feel like things have settled. I don't know about all of you. Unless it's not settled, in which case please interrupt me…I want people to feel like they can interrupt me if they need to…There was one thing that we talked about at the last meeting. I talked with* [researcher] *about it right after the meeting. And that was, does everyone know what a trigger warning is? Like has everyone heard of a trigger warning? It's ok, just ask me and I'll explain it.*

FR: *Explain it.*

R1: *Ok. A trigger is something that sets off an extreme emotional response, kind of like a gun of emotion. OK. Where the trigger is something that reminds you of something traumatic that happened or something that gives you really bad anxiety. For example, arguments are a trigger for* [researcher]*'s anxiety. And conversations of extreme sexual assault trigger* [researcher]*. So, things like that. Transphobic things trigger me. They make me really upset.*

R2: *Really?* [sarcastic] *They do?*

R1: *No shit.* [laughing]

R1: *Um, but, so like if you know that something could be triggering, give a heads up. Instead of just automatically going into a discussion that could be something really upsetting, especially if we're talking about sexual assault or extremely violent instances those are things you'd always put triggers on…From now on, I think it would be cool from now on to create a space where people can walk out for a minute instead of like having an emotional response where they have to walk out before they break down.*

R1: *…What brought us here is our passions about this topic and I thought it might be good to restart with our passions about this topic…*

R3: *We all come here passionate about our own specific things and we're all trying to make sure those things are covered in this research. And I just hope that we're all mindful about what does affect each other and take an extra second to think about what we're going to say. And like,* [researcher] *said, if you're not sure what you're saying is correct or offensive, then just making it known that you're not intentionally trying to make it come out that way.*

The team reflected during week 11 on how they see the LGBT community handling differences and conflict. Some of this discussion is quoted below with FR being used as a designation of when the facilitating researcher is speaking.

> FR: *The challenges that we face around this table and outside of this table are real, and they're challenges that people in our community face all of the time, Right? So, how do most people deal with conflict, and challenges, and arguments when they have them in our community?*
>
> *We drink.*
>
> FR: *We drink sometimes. Sure.*
>
> *We do drugs.*
>
> FR: *We do drugs. OK. So, maybe we do things to try to forget about the conflict or the problems.*
>
> *Like escapes.*
>
> *Ignore it.*
>
> *I think, well I do, I try to talk over it with the person. Instead of fighting, I try to resolve it by talking to the person. Tell them, like, "I don't like what you did. Can you not do that?" Or talk it over with the person. That's how I would do it.*
>
> *Anger. They get so angry they start fighting. Well, my partner, that's how she is.*
>
> *They gossip.*
>
> FR: *OK. Tell me more about that. What does that look like?*
>
> *Well, anything like jealousy or angry or upset – any of those feelings – and people go to another group of people and talk shit about them, or talk negatively about that person. So, then it gets around. And I know there's a lot of that in the community.*
>
> FR: *So, almost creating more divides or further dividing people by talking junk about them.*
>
> *I think, my form of gossip, what I think gossip is, is like the paparazzi, like how they're always in the famous person's face. And this person did this, or this person did this. And all different negativity of people. That's what gossiping is.*

FR: *To use your idea thinking about the paparazzi, what happens is then people tell stories, and they move between groups and they share stories and the groups never talk to each other. They just rely on the stories that travel from group to group that may or may not be true, which is what gossip really is, right? So, what's the result then of all of those things?*

You can get incorrect facts or incorrect things.

FR: *Yeah. You can be totally informed in the wrong way.*

Prison, jail, juvie. All those things.

FR: *Absolutely. If you fight or decide to do things that can cause trouble with the law, it can cause you to get into trouble. What else? What does it do to our community?*

Segregates us.

The researchers went on to reflect on some of the things that they had learned from working through and directly facing their own conflict. One researcher stated:

> *…It becomes a matter of how self-disciplined you are…How you manage your problems comes down to how you are and I think that the different the experiences you've lived…I think how I grew up made me how I am now, and how I handle problems now. And compared to other people, I don't think I had like a bad childhood. Sometimes it takes more experiences for people to mold into that. So, I think as a group we all have to find that link and that maturity that we have, because we all have that maturity, to solve these issues. A lot of self-discipline.*

Facilitating Researcher's Reflections on Communication

Establishing and Maintaining Norms

During the final reflection, the researchers were asked what it takes to make a team like theirs successful. One researcher stated:

> *I like that we had the guidelines and that they're always in the same place and always visible. It's accessible to everyone in the room.*

The process of establishing norms was one with which the researchers were familiar. In fact, at one n ten the youth have a set of guidelines that are posted in the meeting space

and reviewed at each gathering. It was discussed by the team members, however, that they wanted to be sure that this space was kept separate from that of one n ten. They seemed to have an understanding that the culture and norms of the organization would not work for them in this space. There was an acknowledgement that attempts to keep this a separate and unique space might prove to be difficult, especially given that many if not all of them had prior interactions and relationships of varying degrees that they brought to the team. The team members openly discussed the challenges that they anticipated and how they wanted to manage them. Based on this discussion in week one, as well as an open dialogue about the strengths and challenges the group saw in themselves, a set of norms for how the group wanted to work together was established.

The team norms (see Appendix F) were revisited at multiple points throughout the process of the team's work, and proved to be a valuable component of their ability to work through conflicts. In fact, starting in the third week, a researcher began falling asleep in the weekly meetings. After this happened a couple of times, the team brought it up in the week 5 meeting as a concern. The norms became a place to ground the resolution process, as well as a place to establish sleeping as something that was not an acceptable behavior in the group's work space. In the following dialogue excerpt, the team was addressing how they wanted to confront their co-researcher about his sleeping. This was prior to his late arrival during the week 5 meeting.

> R1: *I feel like it's not really fair. Twice I've seen over the past couple of weeks,* [researcher] *sleeping sitting over there while we were all having lively discussion, and if we see anyone sleeping maybe we would agree to ask them to leave for the day or maybe next time we'll have that discussion again. I don't know. What do you guys think?*
>
> R2: *Um, I wasn't sure, cause I was concerned about bringing it up before we get started in research stuff but I wasn't sure how I felt about it because of the fact*

that [researcher]*'s not here, but that being said, one of our guidelines is to like respect other people around here and like day one you told us that you've been saving up for the last year in order to make sure we feel appreciated. And like one of those ways that you've decided to go about doing that is by paying us. And I'm sorry but I'm not going to get paid $10 an hour to sleep at a table. That's not fair to anybody here. That's not fair to you. And that's not fair to go on and then complain and say that you feel like you're not being heard when you're obviously not listening to anybody else because you're busy sleeping.*

R3: *Um, along with what* [researcher] *said, last week he had also mentioned that he was feeling like his voice wasn't being heard. He was feeling like everybody puts his opinions down. But I feel like him falling asleep for two weeks now doesn't show his respect towards the group either. It's not like, we're not taking into account that you're sleeping, but how do you expect us to respect you when we're all putting in opinions for a group effort and you're over here sleeping.*

R4: *Exactly.*

R3: *Unfortunately he's not here, but I think it needs to be brought up with him when he does show up.*

R2: I like [researcher]*'s idea of like, "Hey, if you're too tired to be here, you don't have to be here. It's not that big of a deal." I don't know, but if I were you,*[talking to facilitating researcher] *I would say, "I'm sorry. But I'm not going to pay you $20 to sleep in this room. Like, you can sleep at home."*

R4: *But, if I were you, I wouldn't feel comfortable saying that.*

R2: *I'll say, it, shit.*
R4: *But it's like our group. It's our research thing. If we are mad, we all…even though we did bring it up last week, and he still fell asleep. He needs to be here, and when he is here, we'll say, "If you're too tired…" or add that to our norms. If you're too tired, don't come. Like, don't be here. 'Cause it's wasting our time. Trying to catch you up on stuff…*

R2: *I just don't know if it warrants him not being in the group anymore period. I don't want it to be that extreme but I just don't know what to do about it in a way that is fair and appropriate. Sorry,* [researcher]. *Go ahead.*

R5: *That's ok. I agree with what they say too. Cause we had this conversation today too. I don't think it's fair for you neither. And even talking to* [researcher]*, cause I've known* [researcher] *for a long time. Even talking to him, I think he's got to do something about it. I don't think it's fair for all of us really. Cause we're over here putting in our opinions and stuff and he's sleeping, when he wakes up and he wants his opinion to be heard and he says it's too low or too something, he*

gets mad. And it's not fair. And I don't think it's fair for all of us really. Cause we all putting in our opinions and we all working hard to do this.

R6: *How do you feel about this?*[talking to facilitating researcher]

R5: *I know, right? How do you feel about this?*

FR: *Let me hear from you first,* [researcher]. *And then I'll respond.*

R6: *I mean, I don't think it's right. You are paying us. It is kind of a job. Or is it a job? I'm not sure. So, I think he should gather his life from right there, or wherever he's at. But, yeah. But I really care what you think 'cause your our boss per se.*

FR: *I want all of you to feel respected. I also want him to feel respected. So, um, I like the idea, because we have the guidelines, and I love the idea of going back to them because we said we could always add to them. And I think that you as a group were really trying to say, "How can we include you? How can we make you feel heard? How can we make you feel like a part of this group?" So, we can all offer that one more time, and then maybe add that to the guidelines, and give him a chance to kind of speak to it. Does that seem fair? Does that seem ok?*

After his arrival to the meeting late, the team returned to their concern prior to the end of the meeting. Using the norm of respect that had been established by the group, they confronted the sleeping behavior. The following is an excerpt from this discussion. In it, we see the researchers not only holding the team member who is being confronted being held accountable to the norms and guidelines, but we also see them holding one another accountable to upholding the norms in the way in which he is confronted.

R1: *Are we gonna talk about what we talked about earlier, in terms of like guidelines and respect…?*

FR: *Do you guys want to go back to the conversation? We were waiting until everyone was here….How about I let you guys take the lead then?…*

R1: *Uh…awkward fest. Ok. Do you wanna…?*

R2: *I'll go ahead. Um, the issue was brought up that, and it's not that we're pointing fingers at anyone or anything, but we do come in here as a group that we respect each other's opinions and we all want to put our voice into this, but some of us felt somewhat disrespected when,* [researcher]*, for the past two weeks before*

today, you had fallen asleep during the conversations. And, I personally thought that when you voiced your opinion about you not being taken into account with your opinions and then that same day you fall asleep, it's kind of like contradicting that, it's not like we don't respect you, but we're all here wanting to be respected, and when you fall asleep on us and our conversation. Do you understand where I'm coming from?

R3: *We don't want to make you feel any way, like that or nothing. Like you brought up that we don't listen to you or we don't care about your opinions. It's the same with you. You don't listen to our opinions when you fall asleep. You don't listen to what we got to say when you fall asleep. We're not just picking on you. We just feel like, like for* [facilitating researcher]*, it's not fair for her neither, because she's doing all this. This is disrespect for her too. That's how I feel. I don't know about the rest, but I just feel like we should just all be in it if we can. I know you're tired. We're all tired. But you know, if we signed the paper, we signed the paper to be here.*

R4: *This is not all about me. So, I don't why you guys…*

R1: *It's not about you. If I had fallen asleep, people would be saying the same thing about me. It's not about you. It's about the issue at hand. Essentially, this is a part time job. I work three jobs if you count this as a job. I get paid more here than I get paid at either of my other jobs. And I don't get paid to sleep, just like you don't get paid to sleep here. It's just a matter of respect. One of our guidelines is to respect the people in this space. Falling asleep isn't respectful. If you're gonna fall asleep…we talked about this earlier and I don't know if everyone's on consensus about this, if not please speak up, but like, if you're gonna fall asleep, if you're too tired or too physically strained to be here, then don't be here. Because it's better to not be here then be here and waste people's time.*

R4: *And respect is also, when someone's trying to talk, you don't cut them off. And you have not been nice to me…So, it's not about…*

R3: *This is not like a fight. We're not trying to…*

R4: *I'm not trying to fight.*

FR: *Let* [researcher] *speak.*

R4: *Respect is when I'm trying to talk then you don't try to talk over me. That's also respect. And you don't give me that respect. So, that's why I get mad and I get really frustrated because you always talk over me when I'm trying to talk.*

R1: *I'm sorry you feel that way, but again, this is not necessarily about how you feel. It's about literally ignoring everything that's going on and going into unconsciousness.*

R4: *And for you guys to say this is all like me, because it's not just me. A lot of you guys don't respect each other's opinions. And, so, don't just say it's me. 'Cause you're making me feel like I'm just this bad person. I'm doing everything wrong. Cause a lot of you guys don't respect each other's opinions, not just in this group, but with other things. So, for you guys to sit up here and all say it's just me…*

FR: *OK – I want to hear from* [researcher] *and* [researcher]. *'Cause I don't want this to become all targeted at* [researcher] *either because I can imagine how you must feel. So, I want us to just talk about what the group had said, and they didn't want to discuss it until you got here, they were trying to be respectful and not have the conversation, but they had an idea of something that they wanted to do. So, I think if we can hear from you guys and share what that is.*

R2: *I think when you just spoke up right now,* [researcher4]*, and this is directed towards* [researcher1]*, when* [researcher4] *was expressing how he feels, that's actually what he means by we don't respect him how he feels. You know? When he told you that he felt disrespected when we talk over him or he feels like we segregate his opinions or don't care what he says, he's expressing what he feels. And he has a right to express that. Whether it's the point or not, he's expressing it now. And I think it's good that he's expressing it.*

R1: *Yeah.*

R2: *But I hope you understand,* [researcher4]*, that when you fall asleep and we're all putting in our opinion it's disrespectful for the group. I don't hold anything against you. I think you brought really valuable points to the group when you do participate. And I would like to hear you participate more. Because your opinion does matter to me…And we'll respect you but you've got to respect us too…*

R4: *I just feel like everybody is trying to gang up on me…This is why I fall asleep because I have fights with people I live with. And I have to leave and I stay in the streets. That's why I fall asleep.*

R1: *I think we all have our issues and I am sorry you have problems at home, but this isn't the time or the space to sleep, with all due respect.*

R4: *I know. I understand that.*

R3: *You know I've got problems. I understand what you're going through…*

R5: *I'm not trying to criticize you by any means, but you need to discuss what we're discussing here and everything. I've already told you one time, please don't sleep. I think it was last week I mentioned it. I want you to hear us and I hope you respect what you're hearing from us. While you're sleeping, you're not hearing what we're saying so you can't respect our part of the situation. So, it feels like what I've already told you that, I thought that you would hear what we had to say, and whatnot. But it seems like you don't want to hear our position and what we're saying about how we feel about when you fell asleep. Every one of us has been working very, very hard, but you've been sitting back relaxing. And here you've been paid to come here and to participate and work. And that's my personal thing. Yes, we know that you're personal life is not fair and everything but we're all here to work and earn the money, and we're all here to participate in the discussions. And the same goes, if you're feeling tired and whatnot, just don't show up…You can always come here a little bit, and express that and vent it out a little bit and maybe there is something we can help you with and help you feel better so you won't be as tired and you'll be able to focus on the group. And then you won't feel like you have to sleep during the group either. We are a team, and we're working together here. Also, if we see you sleeping again, we're gonna probably ask you to go ahead and leave for the day so that you can get your rest. And then if you're feeling as though, I don't want to work, or you don't feel like we're working together or something, it's just…we're not criticizing you, and I'm sure you feel that way. We just want you to be involved and work as hard as we are because this is a team and that's the purpose of it…Do you understand what I'm saying? We good? We good? Alright. Alright.*

R1: *Getting called out is hard…We're not talking about how we feel about you. We're talking about how we feel about you sleeping…If we didn't think you had anything worthwhile to put forward, we wouldn't ask you to put it forward. We wouldn't ask you to be mentally present to be able to put it forward.*

FR: *The group had talked earlier about revisiting the guidelines and adding that to it. And I don't want to ask you to defend yourself or speak, I just wanted to at least have the conversation and see how you feel about us adding it to the guidelines. Is that ok?*

R4: *Yeah.*

In week 15, there was a request from the member who only attended the first meeting to rejoin the group. She had gained employment and was working a shift that conflicted with the team meeting day and time. The request to return to the team came to me and I agreed to take it to the other researchers. The request generated some really important dialogue about inclusion and raised questions about how norms establish a set

of patterns and behaviors within a group. The group wanted to know who would be responsible for acclimating the person to the norms and "catching her up" on the history of the team, and to what extent her presence would alter the dynamics of the team that had been so difficult to establish. The following are selected excerpts from that discussion.

> R1: *So,* [researcher] *requested to come back into the group because she has time now and wants to be a part of it. She asked* [facilitating researcher]*, and* [facilitating researcher] *doesn't think it's her job to say yes or no, and it's our job. So, I know last week we discussed not bringing anybody new in because this is our group, and* [researcher] *only made it to the first meeting. So, even though* [researcher] *has a really big voice and a really good story to share in this research, we need to all get on the same page as to what* [researcher]*'s role could be if she came back. It depends like if we want her to be a part of our group, and come to our meetings, and just we'll refresh her, but there's a lot that like we have done. So,* [facilitating researcher] *suggested that we might want to have her in a focus group so her voice can be heard. And, or, I don't know. It's up to us though.*

> R2: *Before we agree to keep* [researcher], *that she could still come back in time, but she had health issues and she was just having a hard time, so, but, I guess…we were going to continue to keep communication with her on Facebook. We wanted to keep the privacy of our group integral to the whole thing. So, we decided to go ahead and include her on Facebook. So, I am assuming to let her back would be…I mean we've worked so hard, you know? So, having her come back…I mean she's very, very nice and yes her voice should definitely be heard but we've already worked so hard doing everything ourselves. I'm not being critical at all, I'm just saying…*

As the dialogue continued, the formal and informal dynamics of the team that had been established were illustrated as in the following excerpt.

> R3: *I think it's potentially a really awesome opportunity because of the fact that she hasn't been here. If she comes back, then she can participate in the focus group and then we can use her input as a participant towards our research as opposed to an observer but someone who was actually there as a part of the focus group. I think that would be really awesome. I also think that, even though* [researcher] *was only there for one or two meetings, she displayed like really awesome work ethic. Maybe she got a little annoyed by our side banter, but that's good. It's good for us. It's good for me cause I talk a lot.*

R4: *All the time.*

R3: *Hahaha. I have a ball, lady.* [referencing the talking ball used to ensure that one person speaks at a time]

[laughing]

R3: *Not like that. I'm trans. Hello!*

[laughing]

R4: *That's what made it so funny 'cause I was going to say something but I forgot where we were.*

[laughing]

R3: *But I think it's potentially like really cool, I also think. Because she made a commitment to be here in the beginning. I don't know if we ever said, "If you leave, you can't come back" sort of thing. We did say, "If you leave, we understand." But we never said that it was like a forever sort of thing either.*

R5: *That's true.*

From a process-oriented perspective, this point in the team's work was important because it raised reflective questions about whether or not norms and group/team culture become exclusive. If they do, how can they be altered in such a way that both includes newcomers and maintains the sense of togetherness that is developed. In addition, it became clear that despite having established a written set of norms and guidelines, there were unwritten norms and guidelines that had been established over time that would be difficult to articulate and share with others who did not have the common history that the team had.

Participation

Participation patterns among the researchers emerged as an important aspect of the process in the team's final reflection. The ways in which they talked about participation were associated with (1) investment and (2) ownership. One researcher

shared that the selection of the research topic was an important point in the process. She described it as follows:

> *You* [talking to the facilitating researcher] *said we need to choose the topic first. We all had different things we wanted to talk about. And* [researcher] *came up with something we all could agree on and then there was no going back.*

Another researcher shared that the point at which the team took their research topic out to others in the community to get feedback on it was an important point in the process for her. This process was researcher led – two researchers facilitated a workshop discussion at OutDoors Gay Camp (run by one n ten) with a group of youth and young adults. The researchers received feedback from some of the participants that the topic was emphasizing differences and would be counterproductive for the LGBT community. The researchers reported this feedback to the team the following week, and instead of feeling discouraged the researchers perceived this feedback as further evidence of the need for their study. As one researcher commented:

> *If everybody was like, 'Yeah,' then it really wouldn't exist, right?*

Another researcher stated:

> *I don't think we should change really what we talked about…We can't change what nobody thinks really. In my opinion, it's a good topic. We have a lot of stuff going on with immigration and gay people. Why should we change because of what one person said?*

Investment was a common theme in the team's reflections. One researcher stated that it required investment from all people involved in order to make a team such as theirs successful. She went on to acknowledge the need for an initial investment from someone (in this case, the facilitating researcher), but also spoke to the shift in ownership in the following quote:

> *You need a base, like around, and then you build up from it. Like, you invested your money, you invested…this is like YOUR thing. But now it's like OUR thing.*

There was also an acknowledgement that investment requires work and can be challenging, but there are rewards.

> *I'm enjoying it despite also being frustrated because, um, you're never going to build muscle if you don't put on a heavier weight.*

The sense of ownership impacted researchers as they began to talk about their work in the community and receive feedback on the value of their efforts. One researcher shared that being a part of the team impacted his sense of self. The connection and ownership he established with the team and its work carried over into his life outside of the team, and his ability to be recognized as someone who was working for an important purpose to help his community.

> *It can change a person for who they are. Helping a person feel highly of themselves. This group helped people feel highly of themselves. If you are walking on the street, and you tell someone about this group and what it's doing, it can make you feel better about yourself.*

Similarly, despite the fact that the team had not gotten to an action phase of the research at the time of reflection, the researchers shared feedback from others about how their work was being received. This enhanced their sense of investment and ownership. One researcher shared:

> *A few of the youths at one n ten asked me about what we were doing and they seemed more like open minded and they weren't really like making assumptions about this. They were like, 'Hey this is pretty cool. I'm glad you guys are talking about this.' So, I think people are going to be more open-minded about taboo topics.*

This kind of informal feedback fueled the team's sense of purpose and allowed them to begin to see a ripple effect of their work.

Facilitating Researcher's Reflections on Participation

The Role of the Researcher

Participatory action research can be done in a number of ways and with varying levels of participation from the co-researchers. One of the "dances" I found myself in with the team members as the facilitator was having team members take on tasks without overwhelming them. I knew from the interviews that I did with the young people in the first phase of the study, that the role of adult supporters and allies was something that they had thought about, as is illustrated in both of the following quotes from two different interviewees.

> *Yeah, I know that um with my friend who did a lot of organizing in LA, what they did was they had like the core members being only youth, and then the outside members, like the supportive members, were more like, of the adults, more people who had more resources. And they facilitated in like helping people get together so that they can organize. So sometimes it requires the help of adults, um, but it doesn't necessarily mean that that help should also come with an overpowering voice…I'm pretty stoked that this isn't just like "what can we do for young people?" but not listen to young people about it. [Laughs] Because that happens a lot.*

> *I wanted to see more half and half, for them to work together. I think that would improve their leader – the kid – the youth's leadership skills and we can also learn from the staff. That would really empower the youth to become leaders. And the staff could be there to learn more and do research and add new projects, new programs based on what the youth want to learn, not only up to the staff to decide that. I disagree with that. The staff shouldn't be the only ones leading. I want the youth involved in leading the groups at the same time.*

I wanted to support engagement and success, but not at the expense of attrition. I began asking for volunteers at meetings to take on a task. At first there was little response, but over time that changed. This may have been related to a change in confidence, comfort with one another, and/or the process that led up to the request.

Several key pieces that the team members enjoyed taking on were the development of scripts (for the survey introduction and the focus groups), translation of the survey into Spanish, developing a Facebook fan page for the research team, marketing the survey, facilitating focus groups, and developing the survey instrument, focus group questions, and observation instrument. In most cases, the team would brainstorm what needed to be included or the ideas they had and then one team member would attempt to draft something that reflected the ideas. These drafts were then shared either via Facebook (see Figure 12 below) or in meetings (or both) to finalize. Not all of the team members took on tasks outside of the team, but 6 of the 8 did.



Figure 12. Screenshot of team's private Facebook page used for sharing work between meetings.

Shifting Roles and Ownership

In week 13, the team ran their own meeting while I was out of town. They were responsible for the set up and facilitation. I gave them a facilitation outline with key

issues that were next steps in the planning process. Before the meeting, team members expressed confidence in their ability to "*make me proud*" and afterwards felt good about what they had accomplished. This experience seemed to be a turning point of sorts for the team, and increased some members' confidence in their ability to facilitate the process and get the work done. In the excerpt below, the team is discussing their feelings about marketing their survey and sharing how they ask people in their lives to take it.

R1: *What do we need to feel confident in marketing the survey?*

R2: *Copies, for sure.*

R1: *Why are we not spreading the word?*

R3: *I think that because, personally, a lot of the people I know they're just so…they don't give a fuck about that. You know? They just live their own lives. They're so caught up in their own business that it's not anything that like, so that's why I'm like, OK, well.*

R4: *I think that's an issue with activism in general, trying to get people involved. Cause it's like, yeah, we want to see the change but that doesn't mean anybody else does. You know?*

R3: *Yeah.*

R1: *So, who feels that they're not prepared to ask people to take the survey?*

R3: *Well, um, I don't know.*

R1: *OK,* [researcher]*, how do you personally approach people to take the survey?*

R4: *Well, I've been talking with the people in my life about how I've been doing this from the get go because it's something I'm super passionate about. And so they know that we've been working on it which makes it easier to be like, "Hey guys, you know that I've been talking about and working on this for a couple months now or whatever. Well, here's the end product and I'd really appreciate it if you took the time to take it." But, I honestly just like ask people. And I just say, this is what we're researching and it's my opinion that in order for the LGBT community to get better then we have to look in the mirror, and so help us do that.*

R1: *So, you use like a personal approach, like a personal story approach?*

R4: *Yeah. Like why it matters to me.*

R1: *...And we obviously all have had an experience with intra-community bigotry. So, like* [researcher] *said, we can use that experience to talk about it. You know?*

During the meeting, the team also discussed the roles they wanted to take on for the focus groups, the role that they wanted me to take on, and what words and definitions they use to describe bigotry.

A similar sense of confidence came as the survey was launched into the community and people began responding positively, including community leaders. A total of 126 LGBTQ-identified adults in the Phoenix-metro area participated in the survey. There were numerous requests from researchers to provide updates on the participation rates during the survey data collection period. After the formal study of the process (the 16 week time period), half of the team members went on to facilitate and observe focus groups. Three focus groups were conducted, involving 4 of the original 8 team members. The focus groups included a total of 14 participants who had also taken the online survey.

Inclusion

Inclusion was an important aspect of the team's process, beginning with the passions that the researchers brought to the project. Many of them had experiences of being excluded by the LGBTQ community and its organizations, which fueled their passions for specific areas under the intra-community bigotry umbrella topic that they chose to research (see Appendix G). The duality of inclusion through the process of the team's work together required an intricate balance. While the team members worked to be inclusive in their own study, they had to identify ways to be inclusive with one another. In reflection, the team members identified lessons they had learned about (1)

how to build spaces that promote inclusion, and (2) how to address exclusion when it is happening in already established spaces.

Creating Inclusive Spaces

In reflection, several of the researchers shared aspects of the inclusivity of the process that they felt could be shared and/or taught to others in the LGBT community. The idea that inclusivity and spaces that are safe for diverse groups of people must be built from the ground up is reflected in the following quote from a researcher:

> *Something that I've been learning through the process is, like, you know that movie The Field of Dreams, if you build it they will come? If I've learned anything it's that diversity only fills a space that is made for diversity. Diversity won't fill a space that is not safe for it. And why would anyone expect it to? Why would anyone go into a space that is unsafe for them or that they feel uncomfortable in? And, so what I've learned is, in this space it was tactically designed to be diverse. ...And so, I think a lot of organizations view inclusivity as "We will be inclusive of those we already accommodate. We will meet the demand." But I think it should be the other way around, based on my experience.*

This concept was further discussed after the first focus group that the team facilitated was completed. All of the participants had been LGBT adults (over 25), and the concept of "safe space" was difficult for them to imagine. This sparked the researchers involved in the focus group facilitation to have a conversation about their futures in the community, and how they could engage existing organizations in establishing spaces (other than the bars) where they and their peers could transition into adulthood and be welcomed/affirmed.

Confronting Exclusion

As the team reflected in week 16 on how they hoped that their research would impact the LGBT community, there was discussion about the need for confronting exclusion when it happens. The quote below reflects a piece of this dialogue, and not

only speaks to the need for directly addressing exclusion in LGBT organizations and spaces, but also to finding creative ways to educate the community on both the similarities and differences in experience between various subgroups within the LGBT population.

> *Everybody has a story. Everybody has a past and stuff. In different organizations, we need more of tapping into our similarities and we already know that we're going to butt heads and there will be people that won't get along. I think with our particular research study, if we were to bring that into different organizations everywhere, just the basic knowledge about how are you going to go about your life differently. Cause ICB is everywhere. We all know it. Like you said the other day, you saw a guy hit a girl and you stopped and got out. We need to start doing that in the community. We need to start calling it out. I don't think a lot of organizations, like, it happens in those organizations too. I usually put people in place and check them, but I don't often hear other staff or people doing it. We need to focus on how to open up these young people's minds. A lot of people can't just sit and listen. We have to think of different ways to teach it.*

As reflected in the Figure at the beginning of this chapter, the four thematic areas of relationships, communication, participation and inclusion are interconnected. The quote above reflects such a connection between relationships, including a deep understanding of one another, and inclusion.

Facilitating Researcher's Reflections on Inclusion

The Art of Compromise

As a part of the decision making process chosen by the group, there were times when all of the team members did not agree and had to decide the best way to keep moving forward. It is easy for groups to get caught up in disagreement. While the dialogue in these instances went on for a longer period of time, what seemed to happen in these instances was a process of team members gauging the level of importance of that particular decision to their reason or purpose for participating in the team. The selection of the team name is a good illustration of this dynamic in process. The team name – Elite

Leaders Defying the Odds – was a way to designate the group as its own entity. This also allowed for marketing of the online survey in a way that people in the community could connect with the group. The use of language, and different perceptions of words, became the primary place of disagreement. The use of the word "elite" was for some team members a way of setting them apart as a special group, and gave off an elitist air for other team members. But for those who disagreed with the word, there was an acknowledgement that it was less important than the work and not worth arguing over. The quote below is an excerpt from the same discussion about the team name, but is in regard to using the word leader. The team members had differing opinions about whether they were future or current leaders.

> R1: *The reason why I say that I don't feel like I'm a leader is because first of all, most of the time I try to help others but most of the time I can't help my own self. So, like, for me to go out there and say, I'm a leader and I can do this for so many people. No, I can't do that. I can only do certain things. That's why I say that I'm not a leader because until I can help my own self out, until I can be able to take care of myself, and not live with other people, then I can't call myself a leader.*
>
> R2: *But that's not the only point of being a leader.*
>
> R1: *To me, it is. I have to learn to be able to do things on my own and not rely on other people. You know. I'm 21…*

Inclusivity/Exclusivity

It is important to note that the dynamic between inclusivity and exclusivity was present throughout the team's process. The name that the team decided upon, despite disagreement, established a sense of exclusivity or set the team apart. This issue came up again during the team's analysis of its survey data. Some of the team members worked to identify themes from survey respondents about what is required in order to have a "safe space". Responses identified aspects of both inclusivity and exclusivity. If we apply this

conceptually to the team, a sense of exclusivity perhaps was seen as a way to protect them from what was perceived as unsafe spaces outside of the group, while inclusivity was identified as the goal of the group. Although this was not specifically addressed by the team in reflection, it is important to make explicit in this analysis. Having a sense of belonging and feeling valued are primary human needs. If the young people had limited access to spaces where these needs were met, it would follow that the team space could be established as a space to explore inclusion and belonging. However, through the establishment of such a space, the young people were both working for inclusion in the community and establishing exclusionary norms and practices. This raises important questions for service providers. Do groups of young people who have consistently faced exclusion in their lives need an exclusive space in order to build a sense of self and belonging?

Power and Privilege within the Team

As I prepared for bringing the team together and working on the research collectively, I was concerned about the issue of power. My concerns, however, were related mostly to my presence as an educated, older, White, middle class person who was affiliated with the university and had brought the team together. I anticipated the power dynamic that might create and the ways in which it might exclude the co-researchers from full inclusion in the process. One way that I attempted to minimize the effects of my presence was to limit my participation in the beginning of the process with regard to decision-making. What this did was force the researchers to work through their own process of inclusive communication and decision making. This is reflected in the following quote from a researcher in week 16:

I think what's really needed from someone who pulls together a group like this is a lot of strength and a lot of patience. Because you when we had our arguments, you kind of held back to see how we would deal with it, and when saw that what was needed was to pull together, you stepped in and pulled us together. But that patience of where we're having weeks and weeks of trying to come up with an agreement on something, to have that patience is important. And I believe strong to not be biased to a topic or not. It's hard not to take a side when there's so many different opinions and so many different personalities. It's hard not to have an opinion and lean one way or another. And to give everyone the equal space and opportunity. So, I think it's very important to have that strength and patience, and that ethic. That ethic is very important.

What I had given much less thought to were the power dynamics that would play out among the researchers involved in the team. This came up early in the process and became an ongoing theme. As the team was preparing for a submission to present at the Creating Change conference within the first month of the process, the issue of privilege came up as a topic of discussion. Some of the team members met on a Saturday to draft an outline for the workshop they wanted to present. As they talked, it became apparent that one team member in particular was being seen as the one to represent the group. As the discussion continued, this team member noticed the pattern and addressed it directly with the group. He shared that he had been raised in a wealthy family, which had given him access to a high quality education. Because of this, he felt like he had a privileged use of language that made him sound "smart". But he wanted to emphasize that it in no way made his voice any more important than those of the other team members, and that if the team's workshop proposal was accepted that he would expect for everyone to take part in the presentation.

Ultimately, my power did play out in a number of ways with the team's process. As the person who facilitated the process, I became acutely aware that my power to set the pace and the agenda impacted the process and the inclusivity of the team. I decided

when something got put on the agenda formally, as opposed to requiring that it be raised by a team member informally. Several of the youth understood this dynamic, and began bringing things to my attention as possible issues to address as a team. This process itself is a very western dominated way of doing business, and I found that I responded to the youth who knew how that worked more quickly than I did the others who did not bring issues directly to me. Similarly, in terms of language, I know that I was often looked to as someone who could bridge the communication between team members who could not understand one another. Again, this became a power dynamic.

Finally, the four team members who remained engaged in the project after the official period of the study had access to privilege. Three were living with their parents/families of origin and another had educational and class privilege from his family of origin. For me, this emphasized the importance of having the resources to support youth engagement financially over the long term. While some may not have maintained a commitment with ongoing monetary incentives, I do question the assumption that youth and young people should be engaged in projects/programs/activities that are deemed good for them with little or no way of honoring their time and contributions.

Tackling Inclusion/Exclusion as a Research Topic

Once the research topic of intra-community bigotry was selected and agreed upon by the team, issues of power, privilege and oppression became central to the work as well as the process. The selection of the topic of intra-community bigotry was in and of itself an assertion of power from the group – an effort to take control over how their experiences and voices would be included in the larger community dialogue. The team had important discussions as researchers about the value of their own voices and

experiences as a way to engage and collect data from others in the community. In fact, they chose as a team to honor the subjectivity of the topic, and to not try to be objective researchers.

While this was an ongoing dialogue, it came up in week 14 when a team member questioned why researchers were taking the team's survey. Some of the researchers' responses are below:

> R1*: I have a question about that. I think that we shouldn't be taking it. Other people should be taking it. We shouldn't count. Why are we taking it?*
>
> R2: *Well, I feel that I should take it because I'm also part of the community and I identify as a homosexual. So, I'm gonna take it. I mean, it's up to you really. That's what I think though.*
>
> R1: *But if the survey's supposed to be for everybody else, then why are we taking it?*
>
> R3: *I thought I should have taken it I've taken it just because, yeah, we are putting this survey together and we are doing this research, but that doesn't change the fact that our voice in this matters. Because if we're going to collect other people's voices, why can't we put ours with theirs?*
>
> R4: *I think it is important to voice our voice on something that we're researching. It seems hypocritical to ask for other people's opinions if we're not giving our opinion. Personally, that's how I feel…We are part of the statistics. If I don't take it, I would not be represented if I didn't take it. We're representing the part of the community that we're from. We're doing it for our representation…That's why I feel like everybody in the table should take the survey.*

They also discussed the importance of showing both the positive and negative aspects of the research topic. While they acknowledged that much of the research that exists on LGBT young people is focused on the negative experiences, they did not want to move completely away from honoring that the negativity exists and has a real impact on people's lives – including their own. They did, however, want to use the research as a

way to bridge subgroups within the LGBT community and to highlight the ways that people overcome the challenges that they face within the LGBT community.

Inclusion in the Realm of Research

Assertions of power in a powerful system come in important and dynamic ways. These assertions of power, or what I think could be categorized as forms of resistance, happened throughout the 16-week process. One came at a turning point moment when I asked the team to decide whether or not they wanted to apply for IRB approval for their own study. The responses and reactions of the team members varied quite a bit. After I explained the pros and cons of each potential decision, some of the team members became concerned about how this decision might impact me and my work. Others expressed a desire to move forward with the application and seemed to view it as a way of achieving legitimation. A third perspective related back to the researchers' feelings of having been traditionally excluded from research on LGBTQ young people. The decision was to intentionally exclude their research from the institutional academic process. The people they most hoped to impact with their research were not in universities and did not read academic journals for the most part.

> R1: *What was the downside from not having the IRB?*
>
> FR: *If we don't have their approval, then we can't present at academic and scholarly conferences, and we couldn't publish in their journals.*
>
> R1: *Was that part of what we wanted to do though? And this is for everybody. Because if that's part of what we wanted to do, if we want to get published, then we want to get the application in.*
>
> FR: *Do these people, do these groups of people with blocks around them read those journals?*
>
> R2: *I don't think it's impossible to reach the people we want to reach without the IRB.*

The discussion continued.

> R3: *I want this whole research to be known everywhere and not just in our community.*
>
> R2: *I just feel like the academic people in the world don't, on some level they change our lives…but in terms of like talking to individual people about how we interact with each other and how our culture influences the way that we think, we don't need academia to do that. And I think a lot of the time, especially when we're reaching out to minorities, just having an academic background adds a level of distrust potentially…We are reaching out to people as individuals, as members of this community, as people who want to create change.*
> R4: *Could we kind of like do our research local and then go bigger with IRB?*
>
> R5: *I like the idea of doing it small and local, and then going bigger.*
>
> R6: *Me too.*
>
> R2: *I'm not really concerned about ASU…I am concerned about the institutions that provide our resources. If they don't understand our experiences, then how are they going to truly provide for us? That's what I'm concerned about…I'm fine not doing the application provided that we put out a freaking, amazing piece of work. That's what I care about. I care about putting out something substantial, something accurate, something real. And whether or not academia can approve of that, I don't care. Because I'm not doing it for them. At least I'm not. I can't speak for anyone else.*
>
> R3: *Me neither.*
>
> R4: *I totally agree.*
>
> R1: *I just thought about this when we were talking about doing a small, local research, that goes with our research question.*
>
> R6: *Yeah.*
>
> R1: *I prefer the let's put time into this and come up with quality.*

Connections Between Thematic Areas

There are a number of spaces of interconnectedness between the four thematic areas discussed in this chapter – relationships, communication, participation and inclusion. For example, building a deeper understanding of one another as team members

proved to be a key factor to addressing conflict, handling differences, maintaining retention of participants, and building ownership in the project. Building understanding of one another as individuals also connected the team to the aspects of the research that may not have been an area of interest when they joined the team. Through a deeper understanding and connection to each other, the team established a sense of accountability to seeing the project through and to seeing each other every week.

Attention had to be given to all four working principles/key thematic areas throughout the sixteen week process. This became a delicate balance. For example, if too much emphasis was placed on the products of the work, or participation, then the relationships and the communication patterns did not receive the attention that they needed. When communication was not attended to, the inclusiveness of the process suffered. Similarly, however, if time was only spent on the process-oriented aspects – such as communication – team members expressed anxiety and frustration about not getting the work done or not being able to finish the project in the allotted timeframe. This balance of process and product was further emphasized in the individual expectations of the team members for being members of the research team as compared to their expectations of what their research would achieve. Below are quotes from three different researchers' individual or personal expectations of participating.

> *I hope to learn different things that I didn't know before, to better myself, and to try not to be offensive in any kind of way. So, learn how not to be offensive.*
> *I was hoping to get out of this, like, there's so many things around us that we don't even realize are around us, like within the community, you know that I might be ignorant about that and I should know more about it because it interests me to learn about. So, I want to get more knowledge out of this and share the knowledge along whether it's with a group of people, like my group of friends, or just one person or a whole country of people. Just share the knowledge and become more knowledgeable myself.*

> *I really hope that we can learn from each other's experiences, and learn about things that we really need to know, for example really seeing other people's problems, and really learning about them, and how to understand them – what's wrong with them, what's right about them, what the problem is, what the conflict is. That's what I hope to learn, is how to understand people's problems and help them.*

These reflect the importance of process. In comparison, the list below was generated by the team to establish a set of expectations for their study. These emphasize product.

- To help others.
- To bring awareness to the community about different issues.
- To create something tangible.
- To complete a research study that is thorough and respected, and goes beyond the existing research.
- To take it out and spread the knowledge!
- To form a group of leaders that will inspire others.

It is the working principles, and the interspaces between them, that capture the process of this team's PAR efforts based on the researchers' reflections.

Chapter 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The questions this study set out to investigate were: (1) what are LGBT young adults' experiences with and perceptions of school and community-based services aimed at meeting their needs, (2) what role does identity play in LGBT young adults' perceptions of service needs and service experiences, (3) and what value does participatory action research (PAR) offer as a research and service approach with LGBT young people? To answer these questions, I presented data from fifteen interviews with LGBTQ-identified young adults ages 18 to 24, and a sixteen week participatory action research project involving eight of the fifteen interviewees. The data fell into several primary areas. First, the multiplicity of identity was expressed by all of the interviewees. Aspects of self-defined identity were impacted by both immediate and systemic aspects of the young people's environments. In turn, they used their existing or produced identities to impact their environments. The young people faced multiple barriers to accessing affirming, inclusive services and supports. These barriers were faced in both general service settings as well as LGBT-specific service settings. Many of the barriers faced were directly related to identity. And finally, participatory action research offered value as a research and service approach in multiple areas, including: relationships, communication, participation and inclusion. These themes and concepts are based on one interpretation of the interview data with some negotiation with the young people from whom the data came, and a reflexive, team process that drove the conceptual themes in the PAR analysis.

The goal of this chapter is to reflect upon and further interpret the findings in order to help the reader consider significant implications of the study. What follows is discussion of the ways in which the findings from this study inform social work practice and research with LGBTQ young people. First, I discuss the findings in the context of service approaches, considering ways that they might inform a framework for inclusively serving such a diverse population. Second, I discuss the findings in the context of a research approach, and revisit critical theory and participatory action research as approaches to understanding the experiences of, needs of, and successful interventions for LGBTQ young people. Third, I discuss the ways in which this study's findings contribute to existing literature, and make recommendations for future research based on this study's findings. Finally, I discuss some of the limitations and strengths of this study.

Informing Service Approaches

As was discussed in a previous chapter, the primary approaches to understanding and serving LGBT young people that have been explored in the research are based on (1) a risk-resiliency framework, or (2) an empowerment framework. The primary narratives that have been created by these two frameworks have shaped the service and research agendas for LGBTQ young people. On one hand, the risk-resiliency framework, which has been dominated by risk-focused research, has established a narrative of LGBTQ young people as victims of a hostile environment. There is no doubt that LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable to experiences of harassment, discrimination and exclusion based on their LGBTQ identities. Based on this narrative, these experiences lead to a number of risk factors that seriously affect health and well-being. While research is still limited in its understanding of resilience in LGBT youth and young adults, there is a

growing body of literature exploring unique protective factors for this population. This portion of the risk-resiliency framework posits a narrative that the risks can be overcome, or the trauma associated with harassment survived, if certain environmental factors and individual characteristics are present.

In comparison, the empowerment framework has established a narrative of agency, or assertions of power and control, for LGBT young people. Because the empowerment framework has been less explored with this population, particularly outside of school settings, the narrative established by it is less clear. What we know is that scholars such as Savin-Williams have positioned LGBT youth as no longer connecting with socially constructed labels, such as gay or lesbian, based on their sexual or gender diversity. By some, this has been attributed to societal shifts that have reduced stigma and created a "post-gay" era in which being LGBT is only one of many aspects of one's identity, but no longer one that attracts primary attention from others. This includes more visibility of LGBT adults and allies in media, such as Cyndi Lauper and her campaign to support LGBT youth, and the Dan Savage "It Gets Better" campaign launched initially through YouTube.

Others have attributed this shift to the empowerment of young people, who have taken control over their lives and asserted agency on their environments in ways that have shifted the kinds of environments they encounter. The Gay Straight Alliance movement is a good example of this. Young people across the country have worked with allies and adult supporters in their schools to establish safe spaces that are more supportive and affirming of LGBT students, thereby creating a cultural shift. Similarly, groups of young people across the country have responded to Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" campaign

with messages of agency, such as the "Make It Better Project", in which young people resist the notion that they must wait for a better environment and are working to improve their schools and communities now.

Merging of Service Approaches

The young people interviewed for this study experienced risk, resilience and empowerment in multiple and varying ways. Their paths to young adulthood as LGBTQ-identified people were not limited to either a risk journey or an empowered journey. Instead, they moved within and between these frameworks, often positioning themselves in both simultaneously. Based on their identities and experiences, I posit a service approach that merges the existing risk-resilience and empowerment approaches.

Blackburn (2007) suggests that research has established a false dichotomy between victim and agent for the lives of LGBT or queer-identified youth. She suggests that our understanding of LGBT young people should be contextualized in ways that allow us to understand their experiences as victims, resilient young people, and agents in a fluid manner. LGBTQ young people in this study reflected this conceptually in their descriptions of their identities. Many were working with and through their experiences as "victims", or with trauma, and were finding ways to incorporate those experiences into their identities. At times, their experiences of trauma created need, and at other times they were empowering. Sometimes this happened simultaneously, such as the young person who had experienced many years of childhood abuse. She expressed a need for constant attention to issues of safety, for herself, her partner, and others. At the same time, she defined herself as a survivor and talked about ways that her experiences could be used to help others who had experienced abuse.

What this lends itself to is a merging of the service approaches – risk-resilience and empowerment – in ways that allow young queer-identified people to be validated in the experiences of trauma they have endured, to be encouraged to find ways of coping with the impact of these experiences, and to identify realms of their lives where they have agency to create the kind of change that would be (a) most healing to them, and (b) would affect the lives of others. As reflected in the findings, the need for mutuality and reciprocity in service provision is important to upholding the dignity of LGBTQ young people, and making spaces for them to redefine their relationship with their environments through assertions of agency. Through both giving and receiving, healing can occur. Young people who can use their lives for a greater purpose experience transformation on multiple levels.

Applying a merged service approach in community-based settings. Service environments, whether that be agencies, clinics, or other settings, should take a holistic approach to meeting the needs of LGBTQ young people who are simultaneously experiencing risk, resilience and agency. At a primary level, as reflected in the findings, LGBTQ young people will need basic services including shelter, food, clothing, and health/mental health care. Directly addressing the impact of trauma, LGBT-specific and otherwise, is crucial to meeting the needs of this population. Risk associated with LGBT identity was experienced by the young people in the ways we see reflected in previous literature – violence/assault, homelessness as a direct result of family reactions, substance use, mental health challenges, and health-related risks such as accessing underground health care services or no healthcare at all. It is important to contextualize these experiences.

The young people in this study faced other forms of risk found in general populations as well – childhood abuse and neglect, foster care, teen parenthood, poverty, and family migration. From a social service perspective, these experiences of trauma and risk cannot easily be dissected from one another. For example, the risk of growing up in multiple placements through the foster care system and the rejection of one's adoptive mother upon coming out are intersected in ways too complex to pull apart from one another. Service providers need to be open to the full experience of risk and trauma as they assess the needs of LGBTQ young people, and to resist a need to assign risk to a specific aspect of a young person's identity.

Promoting resilience often requires a second tier of services and support that relies on peer engagement, adult mentorship, education/prevention, and access to the mediums that young people use to promote resilience (such as art, sports, etc.). Providers can encourage the enhancement of protective factors in the lives of LGBTQ youth that we know from the literature are beneficial to general populations of young people facing risk and trauma. However, an openness to what these protective factors may look like for LGBTQ young people is encouraged. For example, we know that the presence of adult role models is a key factor in promoting resilience for youth. Based on the findings of this study, service providers should work with LGBT clients to identify collectively who those adults should be. Does a young person need an LGBTQ-identified adult in their life? Or do they need an adult artist in their life? In either case, how can adult role models provide the kind of affirmation and support that LGBTQ young people need to thrive?

At a third level, services and programs that support agency or empowerment in LGBTQ young people is important to a service approach as I have proposed based on this

study's findings. Such services might include engagement in assessing the inclusiveness of an organization, program development and delivery, leadership and career development, and/or activism.

Most importantly, given the fluidity of these positions (as victim, resilient young person, agent), these levels or tiers of services and support should not be provided in a mutually exclusive fashion. A young person may simultaneously be dealing with homelessness or the impact of a physical assault, and be engaged in activism. There has also been evidence to suggest that forms of expression, such as dance and theater, may serve as both a form of resilience and an act of resistance against oppressive environmental forces (Grady, Marquez, & McLaren, 2012). We must not assume that these positions are linear or experienced in a progressive fashion. In fact, the production of identities among the young people that were in direct response to their experiences and environments lends to our understanding of the ways that identity can become a space for resilience. This kind of resilience can be encouraged, supported and nurtured in service settings during and after the healing process.

We also know that these services may or may not be provided in LGBT youth-specific settings. LGBTQ young people certainly can, and do, receive services from multiple sources. What is primary is that these service settings be safe, inclusive and affirming of the LGBTQ identities of the young people they serve. LGBT youth-serving organizations must identify the aspects of such a service approach that is within their capacity to provide, and then seek out linkages with other providers who are willing and able to engage in education and organizational assessment processes that will enhance their ability to appropriately and effectively serve LGBTQ young people. Similarly,

social workers and general service providers should seek ways to move their agencies and organizations forward in efforts to provide sensitive care that is tailored to the unique needs of LGBTQ youth and young adults. Providing services without further traumatizing LGBTQ young people via exclusion and harassment is crucial for agency-based providers to attend to. As the young people in this study articulated, we must strive for equal treatment, but be aware of and attentive to the differences in experience until equality is achieved.

The Multiplicity of Identity: An Intersectional Approach

The multiplicity of identity for LGBTQ young people must also be incorporated into any service approach intended to meet the needs of this population. When given space to self-define what aspects of identity have importance to shaping their sense of self, and the meaning associated with those identities, LGBTQ young people are able to articulate their needs and experiences in much more contextualized ways. Even for the young people in this study who expressed a resistance to being labeled within the socially constructed identity categories, their feelings about the categories often were in direct response to systemic constraints (such as racism) associated with those identities, or out of a desire to maintain fluidity in their identities. The use of tools, such as the identity map, that create spaces for young people to visualize their identities in parts and as a whole, may be of value in a therapeutic setting, as opposed to or as a complement to a traditional assessment tool.

An intersectional framework holds value for serving LGBTQ young people. Similar to the interconnected nature of trauma experiences discussed above, aspects of identity can rarely be cleanly disconnected from one another (Collins, 2000). The young

people in this study described ways that service settings can either increase or decrease the cohesion and conflict that exists between aspects of identity. For example, encouraging a young person to leave her faith community because of homophobic or transphobic remarks may in fact reduce the social support that young person receives racially or ethnically in that given setting. These kinds of decisions are personal, and young people should be given spaces to explore without judgment the benefits and consequences of their decisions. Similarly, as with the young person who experienced conflict between his identities as an athlete and as a gay male, service settings can help to build bridges that establish safe spaces for multiple identities to be affirmed simultaneously. So, in the case of that young person, programs in LGBT specific spaces that are sports-focused would reduce conflict and increase cohesion between aspects of his identity. Similarly, initiating educational programs in sports-focused settings that affirm LGBT-identified people would also build more safe spaces for young people with athletic identities outside of LGBT-specific settings.

Given the multiple oppressive forces faced by young people living at the intersections of many marginalized identity groups, it is clear that "to work effectively with queer youth in urban communities, one has to embrace the complexities of their multiple identities and develop the capacity to understand the intersections among them" (Blackburn & McCready, 2009, p. 228). Based on the findings of this study, primary tools for doing so include; (1) the creation of spaces for young people to self-define, (2) employing a lens of both risk and empowerment/strength with regard to intersecting identities, and (3) involve queer-identified young people in shaping and evaluating the kinds of services and programs that are inclusive. The latter means that service providers

should consider ways to engage young people in understanding the systems with which agencies must interact and respond for funding, etc. This may mean an open dialogue about capturing demographics, for example, for a funder who uses traditional identity categories, while at the same time honoring that young people may be resistant to or constantly shifting those categories. Such dialogues are based on an assumption, as with participatory action research, that young people have the ability to understand and analyze the systems that impact their lives.

Through such processes, service providers should ask questions such as: how do we negotiate with young people, who are very aware of what identity is, to help them understand the value of identity categories to service provision instead of taking away their agency and assuming they do not care or it will not matter? How can we help practitioners to understand the ways in which identity can be oppressive and the ways in which it can be liberatory? How do we support the maximization of the latter and the minimization of the former? Questions such as these challenge our binary notions of identity that are often unconsciously replicated in service settings. These include binaries such as; provider-recipient, youth-adult, knower-learner. Through awareness, practices and patterns can be established in service delivery that support intersectionality and the whole young person.

Informing Research Approaches

This study was designed using a critical theory framework, and a participatory action research method that was aligned with key principles of critical theory. In what follows, I revisit the primary principles of critical theory that guided this study and reflect on their value as a research approach with and for LGBTQ-identified youth and young

adults. I also reflect on the value that PAR has as a research method that seeks to uphold the principles of critical theory.

Critical Theory as a Guide for Research on/with LGBTQ Young People

There were five primary principles associated with critical theory, broadly defined, that undergirded this study – attention to power, honoring subjectivity, understanding context, going beyond binaries, and engaging in praxis. As I reflect back on the relevance of these principles to the current study's findings, I see the value that these principles hold for research on/with LGBTQ young people in the future.

Attention to power. First, as has been argued in the research literature, the lived experiences of LGBTQ young people are directly impacted by the social systems with which they interact. These systems assert power, often in oppressive ways, on LGBTQ-identified youth. These systems have also impacted the ways in which people in the lives of LGBTQ young people respond to them through the establishment of stigma and practices that devalue and demoralize queer-identified people generally. From an intersectional perspective, as has been discussed, many LGBTQ young people face oppressive systemic power, such as racism and classism, based on other aspects of their identities as well. This further complicates their experiences. Developing an understanding of LGBTQ young people through a lens that is attentive to power will offer a depth of knowledge necessary to effectively serve, and advocate for/with, this population.

On the other hand, a theoretical framework such as critical theory that calls for attention to power allows researchers to explore the ways in which LGBTQ young people use and access power in their own lives. Attention to power in the lives of young people

helps researchers to identify ways that queer-identified young people are resisting the oppressive systems, as well as finding ways to create change both from within and outside of those systems. Such insights assist with the identification of protective factors, support the consciousness raising process among LGBTQ young people, and begin to bridge the disconnect between research and service settings.

In community-based agencies where staff members have already employed the power of the arts as modes of resistance and leadership among young queer-identified people, programs are being implemented and spaces are being created for young people to use these mechanisms for personal, group and community healing/change. For example, About Face Youth Theatre is an organization that uses the dramaturgical process with LGBTQ young people to support the telling and retelling of their stories in ways that are individually helpful for the youth. These stories are used to build a collective story that is then performed through theater to engage others in dialogue (Halverson, 2010). Researchers can use these spaces and programs as sites where service approaches and interventions using this principle of power assertion can be developed and tested.

Honoring subjectivity. The theoretical principle of honoring subjectivity became an incredibly valuable aspect of this study and its findings. Not only does each young person have his/her/their own unique story, how that story is interpreted and assigned meaning is a subjective process. This was evident in the identity maps that came out of the first phase of this study. Despite having an interview guide, and giving each young person similar instructions, each identity map was a subjective representation of the lives of the interviewees. The way in which it was interpreted and accomplished speaks to the

subjectivity of experience among LGBTQ young people. The process of interpreting one's story and assigning it meaning guides how a young person is going to assess his/her experiences and perceive her/his future. These perspectives of the self are key to providing both therapeutic and empowerment-based services. From a critical theory perspective, honoring subjectivity involves self-definition. For researchers, this calls for more qualitative approaches to understanding the lives of an incredibly diverse population.

The theoretical principle of honoring subjectivity also calls researchers to employ reflexivity. As someone who perceives herself to be self-aware, I became very attuned to just how easily my assumptions and worldview can become dominant. In the interviews and the resulting analysis, I saw the simultaneity of how identity categories can be constraining and liberating. I saw the lives of the young people through my lens of privilege, and reflected on my interactions with them in ways that allowed me insight into how they must experience interactions with social workers and other service providers. This process of reflexivity has strengthened me as a researcher, and has entrenched my belief in the need to shift expertise to those who live the experiences that we seek to understand as researchers. This connects subjectivity back to the principle of power as well.

Understanding context. Because the lives of LGBTQ young people are intersectional, understanding the context of their experiences is an important theoretical principle to employ in research on/with this population. While socially constructed identities broadly have similar meanings, the local context shapes the ways in which social constructions are manifested through policies, practices, and social interactions.

For example, in this study the lives of undocumented young people in Phoenix, Arizona, during 2012/2013 shaped the meaning of that identity. As one young person who participated in the study stated, his identity as an undocumented person did not come to the forefront of his experience until he became directly affected by state legislation and federal practices limiting his access to employment and higher education. For a queer-identified young person in another context, the experience may have been very different. Similarly, what it means to be an African American, queer-identified young person in Mississippi (where one of the interviewees was raised) may be very different from the experience of the same young person in Arizona.

As researchers seek to move the literature forward through the development and testing of interventions aimed at this population, a contextualized understanding of risk and empowerment will be important to effectiveness. It would be difficult to develop an intervention that would not require some adaptation, minimally, based on the local context within which it is being employed. And perhaps because the lives of queer-identified young people are so diverse both within and between local contexts, attempts to develop interventions to meet their needs will require a different approach than those employed with other populations. Community-based agencies that serve LGBTQ youth specifically should be engaged in this process as they have already developed grassroots insight and wisdom on the contextualized (and shifting) needs of the youth/young adults they serve.

Beyond binaries. Theoretically, the principle of thinking beyond binaries applies to research with LGBTQ young people in multiple ways. As with honoring subjectivity and supporting self-definition, researchers must understand the differing perspectives of

LGBTQ young people as they relate to existing identity categories. Researchers need to employ methods that raise up, rather than silence or invisibilize, the ways in which queer-identified young people use and play with identity categories. Researchers can use their work as advocates and mouthpieces of the gender and sexuality theorists that exist in the identities and lives of many queer young people. This can be accomplished by questioning in our own work the ways that we reinforce binary understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity, and create spaces for expressions of a spectrum of identities within both.

Researchers also can use their work to employ methods that support resistance of the notions that LGBTQ young people exist in binaries such as: functional/dysfunctional, healthy/unhealthy, victims/agents. As has been discussed, there is a fluidity within and between these dichotomized positions. Using a critical theory framework creates opportunities to further challenge these binaries, and to lift up the complexity of stories and experiences that exist within them. One example of this is the use of the phrase "resilient resistance" posited by Yosso (2000), that explores the intersection between conforming and transforming in the resistant actions of young people. Further exploration of these intersections, as well as the spaces that have been occupied completely outside of binaries, can be understood more deeply through research that is approached from a critical theory framework.

Engaging in praxis. There is nothing that is more aligned with the values of social work than applying the lessons we have learned from research and practice in an effort to challenge injustice, and promote social change. This does not mean, however, that research studies must add an action or praxis component at the end of their work.

Praxis requires intentionality from the point of conceptualization and design. Praxis requires reflexivity and shifts in power. Praxis requires that researchers be both connected to the community and guided by the privileged knowledge that the community has on its own issues. Praxis also requires that researchers intentionally build in the time and resources necessary to engage in action with the same amount of zeal with which they engage in the research process itself. Praxis does not mean that the burden for action is placed firmly on the shoulders of the communities that already face resource deprivation. Praxis is a collective process that involves collaboratively assessing the most effective methods and sources of dissemination of the research in order to promote change.

Using PAR to Conduct Research with LGBTQ Young People

The use of PAR with LGBTQ young people offers both value and challenge. Certainly, the process has taught me that (a) PAR is about change – individually, collectively, and in the community, and (b) it is a method that forces researchers to challenge their notions of relevance and representation. Below, I will discuss the aspects of the process that created a space that was conducive to change. Then I will address the primary challenges to using PAR, as I see them.

Spaces for change. As one of the researchers stated during the final reflection in week sixteen, "Each of us has been changed in some sort of way because of this group." The change that I witnessed, and that was reflected upon by the team in its final weeks, relied on an investment from everyone involved and a willingness to learn. As was reflected in the final section of the PAR findings chapter, the young people who engaged in the PAR portion of this study came into the process with expectations that they would

learn and grow as people. They also had an expectation that they would be a part of creating some kind of change in their community. While this looked very different for each team member, the will was there. There is no doubt in my mind that it was will that got the team through its difficult times. And it was their relationships, their ability to inspire one another, and their ability to envision what the project could become that kept them engaged. These are all things that the group brought into the process.

Because each team member came into the team in a different place as compared to one another, each researcher left in a different place. As with any form of social action, measuring the change is a challenge. But the factors that were identified through analysis of the process are good starting points for considering how individual and collective change might occur with PAR as a service and research approach. Similarly, measuring the impact of PAR on the broader community or intended target for change should be considered and built into the process. Having the researchers consider what impact they hope to see and how it will be assessed before action is taken would be another layer of the process.

PAR-associated risks and vulnerability. PAR also requires that risks be taken. On the part of the traditional researcher, the uncertainty of what the study will bring or where the research will go can be both unnerving and exciting. In a concrete way, the uncertainty creates barriers to accessing funding and planning out one's research agenda. In a less tangible way, there is a vulnerability that comes with being a PAR scholar. For me, realizing and acknowledging that a study driven by my own knowledge and interests would have further reinforced the silencing and invisibilizing of the young people engaged in this study was a powerful process. In contrast, the realization that through

PAR our research team developed a study that is relevant to the young people's lives, and accountable to the community is also powerful. Instead of pretending that we are not vulnerable or reinforcing expectations that research scholars must be all-knowing experts, PAR creates space for vulnerability to be a strength. It allows for a shift in expertise that is crucial to developing a deep understanding of LGBTQ young people.

PAR also allows researchers to model that vulnerability and subjectivity are aspects of research that create spaces for critique and dialogue between research subjects and traditional knowledge producers. For example, while the young people involved in this PAR study were critical of traditional research's (mis)representation of their stories and lives, they also learned that research is conducted by humans. The humanity of the process is the reality. How that is made apparent is what is most important. For example, soon after the research team launched their online survey, we received feedback from someone in the community that we had left heterosexual or straight off of the response options for sexual orientation. The research team was accused of invisibilizing pieces of the LGBTQ community. In reflection, the team questioned how they could have missed that before sending it out. What they did was own their mistake. They fixed it on the survey, reached out to the person who had brought it to the team's awareness, and laughed at themselves for being human. The team also created a list of limitations to their study that openly acknowledged their humanity.

PAR creates opportunities to sit in these spaces without judgment, and to see the flaws that exist in research that is not available to engagement and dialogue. When we, as researchers, can openly discuss our limits, acknowledge the humanity of research, and

push one another to collectively do better, then we will be better equipped to honor those we seek to understand. PAR offers tools to make this happen.

Emotional vulnerability was raised by the research team as well. In reflection, one team member shared that more preparation for the emotional work that the process might require should be shared with participants in the beginning. Adding this to the consent process is recommended consideration based on this team's process.

Ethical considerations. Other areas of risk for the researcher include ethical considerations. When power is shifted and expertise is put in the hands of young people, then the relationship between "adult" and "young person" also shifts. The safety that accompanies a disconnect between researcher and research subjects is suddenly challenged. The establishment of relationships that have intentional boundaries is important for researchers using PAR to think through ahead of time, and to regularly reflect on with mentors and advisors. Questioning our own boundaries and their purpose as being ethical versus assertions of power and control is an important process that should not be done alone. For example, during the storytelling process that the researchers engaged in, I was uncertain whether my story should be shared. After much reflection, I decided that not sharing my story was a more powerful statement than sharing it. The issue was less about whether I shared and more about what I shared. How we use ourselves in relation to our co-researchers, and the relationships we establish are under constant negotiation. Developing a structure of support for reflexivity is highly recommended for researchers engaging in PAR.

Termination/transition. Similar to the importance of reflexivity around relationships and boundaries with co-researchers, scholars using PAR should attend to

issues related to ending the project and termination of relationships. Again, because the disconnect between research subject and researcher does not exist in PAR, the ending can be emotionally challenging for all those involved. Openly engaging in a dialogue about this process and attending to issues of sustainability of the team (if they so desire) should begin at the beginning. This process is still happening for me. Some of the researchers left the team at the end of the sixteen weeks, and made a clean break from the work. Others left the work, but sought to maintain the relationships they had established with me and their co-researchers. Others want to stay involved but face barriers to ongoing participation, particularly without the resources available to offer stipends or pay for an interpreter. And others remain engaged in the work and have expressed a desire to continue to present and prepare to publish their research with me. The multiplicity of these relationships raises whole new sets of questions about ethics and obligations. PAR raises complex questions about ownership, responsibility and access that must be addressed with support by scholars involved.

Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008) use the term "youthtopia" to describe the potential of spaces created through the PAR process for youth as "…spaces to hope, heal, repair and transform their personal pain as well as larger social inequalities" (p. 114). What I caution scholars against is the glamorization of PAR. While the transformative power of this method is real, it requires attention and thought to be given to many areas not considered by scholars in traditional research settings. Opening up this dialogue among PAR scholars, and particularly social work scholars using PAR, can support the development of factors to attend to and skill sets to develop that allow for the

enhancement of the potential that PAR holds as a research and service approach with young people in general, and LGBTQ young people more specifically.

Future Research

This study makes several significant contributions to the literature on LGBTQ young people. First, it gives voice to the ways in which LGBTQ young people experience and talk about their identities in a way that honors self-definition and intersectionality. It is in the stories that we can gain deep understandings of the ways in which identities are shaped, and how young people are using their identities to shape their environments. This bidirectional process supports the development of services and interventions that reduce risk, promote resilience and encourage use of agency. In addition, this study offers key factors associated with a participatory action research methodology that have value as service and research approaches. Finally, the study was conducted through a social work and critical theory lens. Social work helps us to go beyond theorizing to application, and fits well with the values and principles of critical theory that support the simultaneous promotion of individual well-being and social justice.

There are several key areas that the findings of this study point to as areas in need of further research and exploration. First, the factors that have been identified through this study as having a protective nature in support of resilience among LGBTQ young people need to be further explored in future research. The presence of both peer and adult role models or mentors was raised by the young people as occurring for them in multiple settings. The existing literature on mentorship specifically for LGBTQ young people is incredibly scarce, despite the fact that it has been identified as protective in previous

studies. An understanding of this and other protective factors that can be incorporated into programs and services aimed at serving this population is called for through research.

Similarly, as has been previously discussed, if we are to approach programming with an assumption that resistance and empowerment promote resilience – that assertions of agency can be both therapeutic and protective – then further research needs to explore what aspects of this process can be replicated through programs and services. Such factors could be identified as promising practices for serving LGBTQ young people, and tested for their effectiveness. This study identified key aspects of PAR that supported growth and change in the young people involved. These factors may serve as building blocks for future studies.

Second, while it has not been explored in detail through this study, it is important to acknowledge the gap in research directly addressing emerging adults and young adults who identify as LGBTQ. This is particularly the case for LGBTQ young people for whom specific organizations and programs have been developed across the country to serve them up to age 21 or 24 in some cases (as with one n ten). It is clear from this study that young queer-identified people ages 18 to 24 still require support, but what is less clear is how this support might differ from that of LGBTQ young people under the age of 18. As queer young people age into adulthood, what needs do they have to support this transition? And are there unique characteristics of those young adults who seek LGBTQ-specific services during? These questions require further exploration through research.

Finally, a number of service approaches and frameworks have been posited in the literature for serving LGBTQ youth. Based on this study's findings, I have proposed an approach that integrates the risk-resilience framework and the empowerment framework.

Such a framework must be further developed, honed and tested through research. The need for tested service approaches and interventions aimed at meeting the needs of LGBTQ young people is critical. Along these lines, while this study was inclusive of young people from a variety of identities under the LGBTQ acronym, additional research is called for to further understand the unique issues (beyond those raised here) that are experienced by subpopulations.

Conclusion

This study has been such an opportunity for me to grow – as a person, as a researcher and as a social worker. The chance to apply a critical methodology that is aligned with my personal and professional values has helped me to see the ways that I can, as a scholar, bridge the worlds of social change/social justice and research. The relevance that the research has to the everyday lived experiences of LGBTQ young people gives me hope that this study, and others after it, can inform the development of services and supports that honor the whole person, and engage young people as agents of social change. For they are the ones who will make it happen.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION LETTER-INTERVIEWS

Exploring Intersections of Identity and Service Provision among LGBT Youth and Young Adults: A Qualitative Study

May 2012

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Liz Segal in the School of Social Work at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to better understand how LGBT youth and young adults think about their identities, and experience services and programs. I hope to find out if and how identity impacts the kinds of services that you think would best meet your needs.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve participating in a 1 to 2 hour interview. The interview will ask you a set of questions about your identity and service experiences to learn about how service providers can best serve LGBT youth and young adults. It will also involve a mapping activity on paper that we will do together to understand the different pieces of your identity and what they mean to you. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, for example, it will not affect your participation with ***one n ten*** or other services you receive. You must be 18 to 24 to participate in the study.

Benefits of participating in this study include that you will be helping service providers better understand how to serve LGBT youth and young adults. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be confidential. Interview recordings and transcripts, as well as identity maps created in the interview, will be kept in a secure, locked location on the ASU downtown campus. When interview recordings are transcribed, names and identifying information will be removed. If you decide to give us permission to contact you for a follow-up study, your name and contact information will be kept separate from your interview responses. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do <u>not</u> want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. The audio-recordings will be kept in a secure, password-protected file location on an ASU computer server. Only the researcher team will have access to them. After one year, they will be erased.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at.. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Exploring Intersections of Identity and Service Provision Among LGBT Youth & Young Adults:
A Qualitative Study
Structured Interview Guide

1. One of the things that is most important to me in my research is your identity – groups you feel you belong to, terms that you use to refer to yourself, parts of you that are influenced by these groups – so I'd like to start there. And if you are willing, I'd like for us to map out your identity groups together on this piece of paper. Maybe we can start with the pieces of your identity that are important to you. You can use a circle or other symbol to represent them here. As you draw them on the paper, I also want you to think about how the pieces of your identity relate to one another.
    a. What are the terms you use to identify each of the groups you have on this identity map? The terms you use to refer to yourself as a member of each of these groups?
    b. How would you say you came to see yourself as a member of each of these identity groups?
    c. What do each of these pieces of your identity mean to you? How would you say that they make up who you are?
    d. Talk more about the overall map and how the pieces of your identity relate to one another. In what ways do they support & complement each other – where do they fit together well? And in what ways are they in conflict with one another? Where do they not fit together well?

e. How do you negotiate the places where your pieces of identity don't fit together well? How do you deal with that? How does it affect you? How do you respond?

f. How would you say society responds to you as this person who is made up of all of these pieces of identity?

g. What impact does this have on you?

h. How do you respond or deal with these responses?

2. I want to shift a bit into talking about the things (supports, resources, services) that are out there that have been helpful to you in negotiating the world and its responses to you.

   a. What would you say is most helpful for you as a young LGBT-identified (use youth's own identity language/terms here) person? What makes you feel good about being who you are?

   b. Have you ever used any kind of services – LGBT specific or otherwise – since you began identifying as an LGBT person? Talk about this (interviewer will solicit narrative from interviewee – multiple experiences may be shared based on experience of interviewee).

      i. What was the service for?

      ii. How did you go about finding the service or becoming connected to the service?

      iii. What was your experience like with the service and the service providers – from first point of contact? What did you find most helpful? Least helpful?

3. Are there any experiences that you have had where you needed a service but couldn't find or get it? Talk about this.
4. Using your experience as a guide, if you went seeking a service today, what would you want that experience to look like? What could the service providers and services do that would best support you as an LGBT-identified young person?
    a. What would the relationship/s look like with the service providers?
    b. What would the interactions be like?
    c. What else would be important to you?
    d. How does this relate back to your identities that we discussed in the beginning of the interview, if at all?
5. Is there anything else that you think would be important for me to know or that you want to include before we finish?
6. Do you have any questions for me?
7. Could I contact you again about this study? By responding "yes", you are not agreeing to participate further, but just to be open to considering future opportunities for participation.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW DEBRIEFING SHEET

Exploring Intersections of Identity and Service Provision among LGBT Youth & Young Adults: A Qualitative Study
Debriefing Sheet

Thank you for your participation in this study.

While we do not expect there to be any risks to participating, and we will not be asking you about your personal experiences, we recognize that seeking and receiving services may or may not be related to painful or traumatic experiences. We know that these kinds of experiences have strong emotions that come as a result. If the interview raises these emotions for you, the resources below can be contacted directly to support you and provide services to help you to deal with the impact of your experiences and the related emotions.

RESOURCES:

The Trevor Lifeline – Crisis and suicide hotline that is available, toll free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Specifically created for LGBT young people.

866-488-7386

EMPACT – suicide prevention center

480-784-1500 suicide/crisis hotline for Maricopa county

866-205-5229 toll free crisis hotline for Arizona

APPENDIX D

INFORMATION LETTER – PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TEAM

LGBT Young Adults: A Participatory Action Research Study

August 2012

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Elizabeth Segal in the School of Social Work, College of Public Programs at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study on participatory action research. Participatory action research is a kind of research that puts people who would usually be studied in the role of researcher. This study will look at the challenges and successes of using participatory action research with LGBT young adults. I am interested in what the process will look like as we do research together.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve participating with a group of 10 to 15 LGBT young adult participants in a series of weekly meetings for approximately 4 months. The meetings will last between 2 and 4 hours, depending on what we are working on. The meetings will be audio-recorded, and your consent to be audio-recorded is required for participation.

During the meetings, the group will work together to develop a research study, carry it out, and decide how to use what is found through the research. I will be in the role of facilitator and co-researcher. That means that I will help keep things moving in our meetings, and add in my opinion as needed.

Another part of the study involves writing in a journal. During our meetings, I will ask you to stop and write about your ideas or views. These journals, with your permission, will be a part of the study. Finally, you will be given the option to participate with the group in a private Facebook page, or to communicate with the co-investigators in some other way to get information about the group's project. You have the right not to answer any question or participate in any portion of the study, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, for example it will not affect any services or support you might be receiving from one n ten or other service organizations. You must be between the ages of 18 and 24 to participate.

Potential benefits of participation include the development of research knowledge and skills through the process of the study, as well as the possibility of developing leadership skills in working as a part of a team and organizing a project. In addition, the results of the study may support the strengthening of programs and services aimed at supporting LGBT young people. Finally, participants in this study will be compensated for their time at each group meeting in the form of cash and in an amount equivalent to $10/hour. While there are no foreseeable risks to your participation, the topics addressed by the

group may at times be uncomfortable. The co-investigators on this study will provide referrals to local resources if the discomfort causes distress for you.

Your responses and participation in the group meetings will be kept confidential by the research team members. While complete confidentiality cannot be maintained because of the group nature of the study, the co-investigators will protect your confidentiality by saving the audio-recordings to a password protected computer file, and removing all identifying information at the time of transcription. Your personal journal will have a code that is selected by you, so that your responses will not be connected to you. Finally, any online communication that you choose to engage in through the group's facebook page will be de-identified prior to its use in the study. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used unless you voluntarily decide to participate in presentations or other forms of dissemination as a co-presenter/co-author.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at... If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to participate to in the study.

_____ _____
Signature Date

By signing below, you are agreeing to be audio-recorded.

_____ _____
Signature Date

_____I give the researchers permission to use my online comments.
Initial

____I give the researchers permission to identify me by name.
Initial

___I give the researchers permission to use my journal entries.
Initial

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TEAM – RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

Elite Leaders Defying the Odds (ELDO) - "Exploring ICB" Research Study Design

Research Audience – Who we hope will listen to our findings:

- LGBTQ leaders
- LGBTQ community
- LGBTQ groups & organizations
- Undocumented queers
- Deaf and hard of hearing
- LGBTQ youth of color
- Non-profits that serve the LGBTQ community
- LGBTQ youth serving organizations
- Parents of LGBTQ-identified people

Research Questions:

RQ1: How does intra-community bigotry affect the LGBTQ community in Phoenix?
RQ2: How can LGBTQ people develop knowledge and create change around intra-community bigotry? What can parents and community leaders do?
RQ3: If intra-community bigotry were lessened, what affect would that have on the future of the LGBTQ community?

Sample:

- LGBTQ-identified people
- Ages 18 and older
- Phoenix metropolitan area – will try to get people from different areas
- Diverse ethnic backgrounds
- Deaf people and others with disabilities
- Undocumented people

Research Methods:

- Survey – online
- Focus groups
    - Collect information from the group
    - Observations of the focus groups

APPENDIX F

RESEARCH TEAM NORMS

The following norms were established during the team's first meeting, and were revisited and added to as needed throughout the project. They were posted visibly at every team meeting.

- Respect others' opinions. Do not degrade them/it.
- No judgment – watch side comments and non-verbals.
- Confidentiality – keep personal experiences in the group.
- Check your privilege at the door – we are equals here.
- Speak up if you are offended. Talk through it and move on.
- Share the work load. Try all things.
- Come in fresh and ready to work.
- Don't take your personal feelings out on others.
- One person talk at a time.
- Share your opinions. They are important.
- Stay focused on the task.
- Don't take negativity out of the room.
- This is a different space and separate from one n ten.

APPENDIX G

ELDO RESEARCH TOPIC – VISUAL REPRESENTATION

This was drawn on a piece of flip chart paper during the second weekly meeting as the team identified its area of focus for the research.

I don't know what it is with queers and umbrellas, but it's just like our thing.

- Participant response during team meeting, August 27, 2012

