PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE AND ENGAGEMENT FOR LGBTQ COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

Crystal R. Kiekel

May 2012
The Dissertation of Crystal Kiekel is approved:

Miguel Ceja, PhD, Higher Education & Organizational Change

Deborah Harrington, MA, English

Gregory Knotts, Ph.D.

California State University, Northridge
# Table of Contents

Signature Page  
Abstract  
Chapter I: Statement of the Problem  
Chapter II: Review of the Literature  
Chapter III: Methodology  
Chapter IV: Findings  
Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion  
References  
Appendix A: Student Interview Protocol  
Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol  
Appendix C: Student Consent to Participate  
Appendix D: Faculty/Staff Interview Protocol  
Appendix E: Faculty/Staff Consent to Participate  
Appendix F: Research Invitation  
Appendix G: List of AB 537 Task Force Recommendations  
Appendix H: List of Documents Collected for Analysis  
ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE AND ENGAGEMENT FOR LGBTQ COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Crystal R. Kiekel

Doctor of Education Degree

in Educational Leadership

This qualitative case study examines LGBTQ community college student perceptions and experiences with campus climate and student engagement. The purpose of this case study is to examine the extent to which community colleges are able to support and engage LGBTQ students in a way that will lead them to college success. Using phenomenological and ethnographic traditions, the researcher conducted 15 semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a document analysis at a single, large, urban community college to assess the strengths and needs of that institution. The researcher built a conceptual framework from student engagement and campus climate theories and analyzed data through the lens of that framework. The researcher found that the campus climate was relatively inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ students when compared to the surrounding community. However, students experienced a constant subtext of subtle forms of alienation, known as microaggressions, in several arenas of the college. The researcher identified factors that inhibited and supported further academic engagement for these participants. Based on that analysis, the researcher made recommendations to improve community college campus climate for LGBTQ students. Recommendations
include providing professional development for faculty, increasing campus dialogue, conducting further research, improving the campus climate for transgender students, and fostering leadership around LGBTQ student engagement and support. The researcher recommended three areas of further research, including a purely ethnographic approach to assessing college culture as it relates LGBTQ students, examining the process of institutional change toward greater inclusivity of diverse student groups, and examining the strengths and needs of hidden LGBTQ community college students.
Chapter I: Statement of the Problem

Introduction

The number of nontraditional students from diverse ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic classes, abilities, and sexual orientations who are entering into the United States college system is significantly increasing (Gohn & Albin, 2006). Studies have shown that students from underrepresented backgrounds are less likely to graduate than their traditional peers (Swail, 2003). Through the myriad of research done on student development and college impact, it has become clear that student perceptions of the campus climate have a significant impact on student engagement; student engagement, in turn, is the single greatest predictor of college persistence and success (Kuh, 2001, 2003). Different groups experience the complex construct of campus climate differently. Historically-disadvantaged groups, like people of color, women, and LGBTQ people, tend to express more negative views of campus climate than White people, men, and heterosexuals (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Worthington, 2008). Students of color who perceive campus climate as negative or hostile are at higher risk of attrition, and have a harder time with social adjustment on college campuses (Chatman, 2008; Guiffrida, Gouviea, Wall, and Seward, 2008; Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

Community colleges are dedicated to helping all students, irrespective of group affiliation or identity, to attain their personal and academic goals. Knowing what we do about the vital influence that campus climate and engagement has on student persistence and success, all community college leaders should be aware of how climate affects the very students whom they try to help succeed. By creating a culture of inclusivity and respect for all students, campus leaders can create an environment where students can
feel safe enough to take academic risks and engage in meaningful academic activities that lead to student success.

**Problem Statement**

While many colleges have created structures that begin to address the unique set of needs and strengths for many underrepresented groups, the voices and needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students remain largely unrecognized on community college campuses (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008; Renn, 2010). As the body of literature that examines the role of campus climate on LGBTQ student engagement, persistence, and success in higher education grows, it becomes increasingly clear that this group of students experiences marginalization and discrimination at higher rates than their heterosexual peers. In fact, there is evidence that LGBTQ students experience a more hostile campus climate than students from other unrepresented groups (Rankin, et al, 2010). This discrimination has measurable effects on their ability to thrive in higher education. Studies have consistently found that LGBTQ students (like other students from underrepresented groups) have more negative views of campus climate. These views correlate with (1) lower academic achievement, (2) poorer educational outcomes, (3) poorer social adjustment, and (4) less interpersonal skill development (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin, et al, 2010).

In the growing body of research that investigates LGBTQ student experiences and success, community college students make up a relatively small percentage of this examination. Given the community college’s mission to be an open access institution dedicated to diversity and student success, community college leaders should take an active role in fostering an educational environment that is supportive and engaging for
LGBTQ students. Community college leaders need to have a better understanding of how LGBTQ students interact with and experience campus climate in order to adopt improved practices that will engage these students to foster success. This increased understanding of this minority student group would benefit the students, the community college, the state, and ultimately the society where these students will continue to live, contribute financially, and participate in civil society.

**Historical Context of the Problem**

As conversations about LGBTQ people become an increasingly evident part of the U.S. social, psychological, and political landscape, LGBTQ students become an increasingly visible group in the U.S. education system. Controversies such as gay marriage and Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, as well as LGBTQ-related curriculum and gay rights are becoming common topics for discussions and assignments in community college classrooms across disciplines. High schools and universities have seen surges in programs, clubs, and services that attempt to create support networks for LGBTQ students (Messinger, 2009). Despite this trend, many community college administrators, faculty, and students remain unaware of the experiences and academic characteristics of these students; they therefore remain unaware of how to develop an environment that is conducive to their engagement and success.

There is a substantial body of literature to support the fact that LGBTQ students experience discrimination and marginalization that puts them at risk for academic failure. LGBTQ high school students have been found to be educationally at-risk in a myriad of measures. These students are at higher risks for depression, suicide, truancy, and homelessness than their heterosexual peers (D’Augelli, 2002; Espelage et al, 2008; Fisher
et al, 2008; Lock & Steiner, 1999; Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007). They are about half as likely to have plans to go to college (Fisher et al, 2008). They are more likely to disengage from the educational process and fail coursework, less socially integrated, and less likely to complete college-preparation courses than heterosexual students (Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007).

Many of the LGBTQ students who do make it to college often continue to feel marginalized in higher education. While most of the studies that focus on the experiences and characteristics of LGBTQ students in higher education have been conducted in recent years, the results have been consistent not only with each other but with studies that examine other underrepresented groups. From recent research, it is clear that LGBTQ students are more likely to experience discrimination on campus and less likely to see the campus as welcoming than their heterosexual peers (Rankin, et al, 2010). Despite these added academic risk factors, fewer than seven percent of institutions of higher education offer institutional support for LGBTQ students, and only four percent of institutions of higher learning have centers that address LGBTQ concerns (Rankin, et al, 2010).

Most colleges recognize that fostering diversity and equity on campuses is an important part of creating a healthy, effective learning environment, and community colleges take the lead in this democratizing mission. This value is inherent in the number of mission statements that make explicit commitments to fostering campus diversity (Rankin, et al, 2010). Given this commitment to diversity, equity, and student success, and given that LGBTQ students are faced with higher academic risk than their heterosexual peers, it makes sense that community college leaders would consider how
they can do more to meet the needs of this underrepresented and often academically at-risk group.

Community college leaders must address the needs of LGBTQ students, as is evident in the substantial body of literature that examines the importance of student engagement in academic success. Research shows that actively engaging college students early in their educational careers significantly increases their chances of college success (McClenney, 2007). Literature also substantiates that engagement is particularly important for educationally underrepresented populations in community colleges (Kuh, 2001). A body of literature also demonstrates that student engagement is higher on college campuses where students feel safe, supported, and accepted (Astin, 1996; Kuh, 2003, 2009). By learning more about how leaders can create an environment that is engaging and supportive of LGBTQ students, community college faculty, staff, and administrators may be able to significantly improve levels of college success for this underrepresented group.

Conceptual Framework

Applying current research and theory on student engagement, campus climate, and LGBTQ student characteristics and experiences, this case study explores the following question: To what extent do the current climate and practices in one community college engage and support LGBTQ student success? The study utilizes a conceptual framework drawn from two theories for understanding student success: student engagement (Kuh, 2001; Astin, 1999) and campus climate (Hurtado, 1992; Kuh, 2001). Student engagement refers to the extent to which students engage in educationally purposeful activities. There is strong evidence to suggest that greater engagement in these
educationally purposeful activities leads to greater educational persistence and success (Kuh, 2009; Astin, 1999). Campus climate theory demonstrates that an institution’s climate plays a significant role in helping students feel valued and comfortable in an institution, which increases college engagement and persistence; this theory also demonstrates that an institution’s commitment to diversity can have a significant impact on minority students’ perceptions of campus climate (Hurtado, 1992; Kuh, 2001).

This case study approach drew from phenomenological and ethnographic traditions to iterate the perceptions of LGBTQ students who attend a community college located in a large urban area in California. A qualitative approach is utilized in order to provide rich descriptions and analytical depth to the examination of student perceptions of campus climate and practices. This study will help (1) give voice to an underrepresented group, (2) examine the extent to which a community college meets the academic needs of these students, and (3) use these voices to help guide future practice.

Through individual interviews and a focus group, LGBTQ students described their perceptions of campus climate and their experiences with college practices and related activities. A special emphasis was placed on practices and behaviors that encourage students to engage in educationally purposeful activities. In order to more fully understand the campus climate and engagement practices, the data collected from interviews and the focus group were triangulated with a document analysis and interviews with campus employees. With this examination, I aim to help community college leaders better understand how LGBTQ students perceive the extent to which the community college supports their success, and to generate recommendations for
community college leaders who are interested in creating practices that support LGBTQ student success.

**Research Questions**

Examining the extent to which community colleges engage and support LGBTQ student success requires linking relevant research and theory, evidence of college culture and practices, and the voices of students regarding their perceptions and experiences. Despite the fact that LGBTQ students have been a part of the campus community since its inception, little is known about the ways in which these students perceive the campus’ ability to facilitate student success. Using a case study design, three research questions were explored:

1. How do self identified LGBTQ community college students describe their community college campus climate?
2. What are the experiences of self identified LGBTQ students who engage in college-related activities?
3. How do members of the campus community, including faculty, staff, and LGBTQ students, describe college practices, interactions, or experiences that support or inhibit LGBTQ student engagement?

**Overview of Methodology**

These questions were examined through a case study design informed by both phenomenological and ethnographic traditions (Merriam, 2009). In order to better understand how community colleges can create campus climate and practices that support LGBTQ student engagement, it is critical to examine the complex interplay between the perceptions and experiences of these students and the context in which these phenomena
are experienced. In order to explore these questions, it is essential to understand the norms of campus and LGBTQ student culture as well as how these students interact with their environment. According to Merriam (2009), a case study approach provides a framework for examining the interplay between the students’ perceptions and their environment. This tradition orientation allows college leaders to view the strengths and needs of campus climate and practices from the perspective of the students whom the college serves.

Primary data were collected through student interviews and a focus group. Ten LGBTQ students were interviewed and one focus group with an additional nine students was conducted at a large urban community college. Students were asked about: (1) their perceptions of the campus climate, (2) their experiences with academic and extracurricular activities, (3) the extent to which they felt supported or engaged by the college, and (4) the perceived effect that campus climate and practices had on their engagement. The conceptual framework derived from literature on student engagement and campus climate provided a lens through which these student perceptions and experiences were examined and interpreted. The resulting analysis helped determine the extent to which one community college effectively supports and engages LGBTQ students. It also helps determine what that campus could do to foster a more supportive campus climate and improved engagement practices for LGBTQ students.

These findings from interviews and the focus group were triangulated with a document analysis and employee interviews. Five faculty interviews were conducted with employees who have knowingly had direct contact with LGBTQ students. They were asked about their perceptions of the campus climate toward LGBTQ students, the support
and engagement practices in place that are available to LGBTQ students, and the effects of that climate and those practices on LGBTQ student engagement. Documents, including campus newspapers and newsletters, pertinent course curriculum, policies and rules, and health center and campus police procedures were examined, coded, and analyzed for themes that provide evidence of support and engagement practices.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study had a number of limitations and delimitations given the topic, organizational design, and participant pool. One delimitation of this study is that generalizability is limited given the study’s design. The phenomenological approach allows for a deep understanding of student perceptions through interviews and focus groups. However, this examination was limited the voices of 19 students in a single organization. This case study examined a particular setting with a unique set of demographic, socio-economic, and geographical characteristics. As a result, the ability to apply the conclusions drawn from this case study to a setting with dissimilar characteristics will be limited. However, this delimitation does not negate the potential value of this study. There has not yet been a qualitative study that examines LGBTQ community college student perceptions of climate and engagement practices. This approach was used to attempt to provide rich, detailed student descriptions of student experiences under a set of circumstances that are unique to community colleges. These rich and detailed descriptions will provide a valuable understanding of the extent to which community colleges support LGBTQ student engagement and success.

Secondly, the nature of the participants limits the number of sampling strategies available. There is no “LGBTQ” box that students check off when they apply for a
community college. Even if there were such a box, many LGBTQ students would choose not to disclose their politically and socially controversial sexual orientation or gender identities for fear of discrimination or reprisal. Therefore, it is not possible to randomly sample a large population of students. As a result, this study was limited by its reliance on self-selection. Since students volunteered to participate in this study, the qualities of the students who responded could potentially be correlated with their reactions and experiences. The participants who took part in this study were highly engaged, highly resilience members of a highly organized LGBTQ club. Because these students were so resilient, their experiences and needs may not be representative of the needs of the LGBTQ students who are not connected to a club, are not engaged in meetings and campus activities, or those who already dropped out of college.

Another limitation of the study is that participants were recruited using snowball and/or network participant selection strategies, in which participants are identified through other participants, informants, or social networks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Again, because the nature of the characteristics under examination, it is not possible to draw from a large sample of LGBTQ students to recruit as participants for this study. Instead, announcements were made in the school newspapers, at the LGBTQ student club meetings, and on the club’s social networking website, and participants and informants were asked to identify other potential participants. This snowball or chain recruitment strategy poses its own delimitation. Participants were limited to students who already have a sense of LGBTQ empowerment within the campus community. The study therefore may have excluded students who were not “out” on campus, or those who chose
not to identify themselves as LGBTQ to an outside researcher. The students who do not volunteer may well be the students for whom engagement and support is most critical.

However, despite these self-selection and sampling strategy limitations, the information gathered could nevertheless be extremely valuable. By interviewing students who are potentially more engaged and empowered than their less visible peers, this study provided an opportunity to examine both needs and strengths regarding campus climate and practices. Students who have successfully engaged in the college campus to some extent are likely to have some positive, successful experiences that will be of value when making recommendations for improvement.

**Significance of the Study**

There is a litany of work that describes the deleterious effects of the discrimination and alienation that underrepresented students face in educational institutions. There is a smaller but growing body of research that examines the effects of these stressors on LGBTQ students. The body of research that explores LGBTQ students focuses mainly on the K-12 system and, to a lesser extent, universities. However, there has been very little research done at the community college level. Community colleges are “democracy’s college;” they are open access institutions that offer opportunities to those who wish to improve their quality of life, irrespective of background, social group, or level of college preparation. As such, community colleges are in a unique position to provide opportunities for academic success and personal growth for this and other educationally underserved populations. By examining LGBTQ community college student perceptions of campus climate and engagement practices, this study may contribute to a growing understanding of how community colleges can adopt effective
practices that foster academic success for underrepresented students in general and for LGBTQ students in particular.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In chapter two, literature on relevant theory, on the historical political, psychological, and sociocultural context for campus climate, and on LGBTQ student experiences and characteristics are summarized. Chapter three describes the study’s design as well as methods used for data collection and analysis. Chapter four presents the results of this examination, and chapter five includes interpretation of the findings, recommendations for college practice and as suggestions for future research in this area.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This Review of the Literature is broken into several sections. There is a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework used in this study. There is a list of terms and definitions key to understanding the parts that follow. The political, historical, and psychological context from which the community college derives its campus climate will be described. The extant literature on campus climate and student success and engagement for LGBTQ high school and college students will be summarized. Finally, LGBTQ student strengths and legal protections as well as opportunities for changes in community college climate and practices is explored.

Where possible, studies are cited that look directly at sexual diversity in relation to institutions of higher education; however, the body of research that explores this setting is relatively small. There are many studies that explore issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in mental health; there is an existing albeit smaller body of work that deals with LGBTQ youth issues in high schools. The body of literature that examines LGBTQ students in higher education is smaller still. While the body of research examining LGBTQ students in higher education is growing, it is a field that is relatively new. Within that body of research, community colleges are still not the focus of these studies. To compensate for this limitation, every attempt will be made to draw connections between the existing literature and community college campuses. This study will contribute to this growing body of research by focusing on community colleges as a unique context.
Review of the Literature

Conceptual framework.

It is important to articulate a conceptual framework to understand a topic and interpret data so that an examination will generate sound conclusions and appropriate implications for practice. To understand LGBTQ community college experiences and perceptions, this study utilizes a conceptual framework derived from contemporary educational theory. The framework described in this review asserts that student persistence and success are strongly, directly, and positively linked to student engagement/involvement; it also asserts that, particularly for students who are members of underrepresented groups, academic and social engagement is directly affected by student perceptions of campus climate (see Figure 2.1). Therefore, to understand how community colleges can foster practices that support LGBTQ student success, campus leaders must understand how LGBTQ students experience campus climate and engage in college-related activities.

Figure 2.1 Summary of Theoretical Framework
Community college student success.

Community colleges are in many ways the ideal setting for examining needs, strengths, and student success opportunities for underrepresented groups. The democratizing mission of community colleges makes them the primary entry point for students belonging to traditionally underrepresented groups (Dowd, 2003). Community colleges are open-access institutions that offer low-cost, nonselective access to higher education. Students can attain an Associate’s degree, transfer to a four-year university, earn certificates, improve skills, or continue lifelong learning. Community colleges are referred to as the “people’s college” or “democracy’s college” (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Labaree, 1997). As such, they created opportunities for upward mobility and improved quality of life for over eight million students in 2011, which accounts for roughly half of all undergraduate students enrolled in the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010).

This open door policy also means that students often come academically underprepared for college level work. This results in low rates of success for many community college students. Nationally, over 40% of community college students enroll in at least one remedial course, and these estimates are thought to be conservative in many states (Adelman, 2004). While community colleges remain a beacon of hope for many students, the reality is that many community college students will not complete a degree or certificate or will not transfer to a four-year university. In 2010, a report by Moore and Shulock found that 70% of degree-seeking students had not completed a degree, certificate, or transfer requirements after six years, and that students from underrepresented groups succeeded at even lower rates (Moore & Shulock, 2010). Given
the increased number of students from underrepresented groups who are entering the community colleges, and given the low rates of success for these students, it is clearly in the best interest of community colleges to create organizational structures that support student success for underrepresented groups.

However, due to the multifarious missions and the diverse student educational objectives in community colleges, it is difficult to define and measure community college student success (Gutierrez & Dantes, 2009). While high schools and four year universities could feasibly measure student success through the single measure of graduation rates, community colleges must rely on multiple measures to determine institutional effectiveness. There is no single set of community college student success measures; however, commonly used measures for success include the completion of developmental coursework, success in credit-bearing courses, persistence from one semester to the next, or ultimately, completion of a degree, certificate, or transfer (Rothkopf, 2009). This complex manner of conceptualizing student success is unique to community colleges. It requires a nuanced approach to measuring the extent to which these institutions support students as they attempt to reach their various goals. This study contributes to a growing understanding of how community colleges can foster the various manifestations of student success by supporting students from underrepresented groups.

**Student engagement theory.**

While there are a myriad of factors that contribute to student success, one factor, student engagement, has surfaced repeatedly in the literature as key to predicting student persistence and success. Student engagement is the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute to academically desired outcomes.
(Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2001, 2009). It is defined as a set of behaviors and/or perceptions that have been empirically linked to good educational practice (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009). Student engagement is the single best predictor of learning and personal development in college (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009). Similar to engagement, student involvement refers to the behaviors that devote energy to the academic experience. Student involvement is more strongly associated with change than student or institution characteristics (Astin, 1996). While a cause and effect relationship between engagement/involvement and academic performance is difficult to establish, it is clear that those students who are more engaged-involved are more likely to persist and succeed.

Involvement in the educational experience is not limited to academic activities such as studying and attending class. Although these behaviors are important in defining student involvement and predicting student persistence and success, engagement in extracurricular activities, such as sports, student clubs, and community activities, are also predictive of persistence and success (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). In fact, engagement with peer groups is one of the most influential factors in student persistence and success. Peer group interactions are particularly important for students who belong to underrepresented groups (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Students who feel stigmatized can create spaces among their peers that are safe from alienation or stigma. These underrepresented student groups often perceive campus climate as unwelcoming or hostile (Fisher et al, 2008; Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Sheet & Mohr, 2009). For these students, creating a sanctuary is vital for academic success (Grier-Reed, 2010; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).
In order to explore the extent to which community colleges have meaningful practices that support and engage LGBTQ students, a comprehensive examination of the opportunities for, experiences with, and perceptions of LGBTQ student engagement is needed. There are multiple possible forms of student engagement that are positively correlated with student persistence and success. Therefore, a framework is needed that will identify as many of these multiple forms of student engagement as possible.

For the purpose of this study, data were analyzed for evidence of student engagement in three settings: Classroom setting, campus social activities, and student support services setting. Given the importance of academic engagement on persistence and success, classroom engagement was chosen as one critical setting where meaningful LGBTQ student engagement may be found. Also, given the importance of peer group interactions, particularly for students from underrepresented groups, campus social activities is a second important setting where potentially significant engagement may be found. Finally, there are important opportunities for student engagement through student support services. Using this framework, data were gathered to provide evidence for (1) the extent to which the college provides opportunities for LGBTQ student engagement, (2) how LGBTQ students experience engagement, and (3) how their experiences support or inhibit further engagement.

**Campus climate theory.**

Student engagement theory emphasizes the role of a supportive, inclusive, and affirming environment in fostering student engagement (Astin, 1996; Kuh, 2003, 2009). Campus climate theory describes the essential role that the campus climate, culture, or
environment plays in allowing students to feel valued, thus empowering them to persist and succeed in college.

Students are significantly more likely to persist and succeed if they feel that they are valued, affirmed, and challenged by peers and faculty. The campus climate has a significant effect on the extent to which students feel as though they belong at a college (Astin, 1996; Kuh, 2001). Campus culture is defined by Kuh as:

The collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical setting, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an in institution of higher education and which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus (Kuh, 2001, p. 25).

This role is particularly important for students who belong to an underserved or underrepresented group; these students tend to have more negative views of campus climate, which is associated with lower retention and academic success rates (Chatman, 2008; Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Worthington, 2008). Although campus climate theorists traditionally focused on racial or ethnic groups in defining and measuring campus climate, researchers have since applied the model to LGBTQ students, and have found similar results. Like students who belong to racial or ethnic underrepresented groups, LGBTQ students tend to have a more negative perception of campus climate, which leads to lower levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010).

This study explored the extent to which one community college campus supports and engages LGBTQ students using Hurtado, et al’s model as a framework for how
campus climate develops. According to this model, campus climate is shaped by both external and internal factors. External factors include government policies, programs, and initiatives as well as sociohistorical forces that make up of society’s larger issues. This factors in turn influence how people view diversity on a college campus (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). This literature review will summarize the external context of LGBTQ people in U.S. society; that context is made up of laws, programs, initiatives, and the sociohistorical factors that contribute to a shared understanding of what it means to be LGBTQ in the Unites States. This examination will also summarize literature that demonstrates the psychological and academic effects of this context on LGBTQ people.

Internal factors that make up campus climate are described by four dimensions; (1) an institution’s historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of diverse groups, (2) the number of diverse groups represented on campus, (3) perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and (4) intergroup relations on campus (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). This literature review will provide evidence of the internal factors that contribute to campus climate for LGBTQ students. These factors include high school and college experiences, district policies, LGBTQ student experiences of harassment and microaggressions on campus, and campus support and engagement activities. This study includes student descriptions and perceptions of these factors (See Figure 2.2).

Campus climate theorists argue that increasing diversity on campus is an important element of improving climate for underrepresented groups. However, campus commitment and improved practices are not sufficient in and of themselves to improve
campus climate for underrepresented students (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Kuh, 2001). Often, simply increasing the numbers or visibility of underrepresented groups can lead to increased conflict and resistance on campus and among groups. To counter this conflict and resistance, it is important to foster interaction among groups and ongoing discussions about diversity to accompany this increased support and visibility of underrepresented students. Campuses can create long-term changes by engaging in practices such as: (1) Assessing their climate as it relates to underserved students often, (2) providing student support, organizations, and centers for students who belong to underrepresented groups, and (3) dedicating time and effort to establishing fair and just practices for all students (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

![Figure 2.2 Detail of Theoretical Framework](image-url)
While these theoretical models were not developed to describe the experiences of LGBTQ students per se, they provide a useful framework for understanding the LGBTQ community college experience. These theories help provide a context for understanding the historically low academic performance and engagement of LGBTQ students while providing a framework for understanding and improving LGBTQ student experiences in community colleges. This study utilizes models for assessing engagement and campus climate to gather evidence that is specific, relevant, and based in sound theory and research.

**LGBTQ students in context.**

In accordance with the campus climate paradigm, it is useful to examine the greater political, historical, and sociocultural context of LGBTQ people in the United States in order to understand the community college campus cultural norms and attitudes about LGBTQ students. Increasing attention has been paid to the role that sexual orientation plays in U.S. culture in the past two decades. Mounting research demonstrates that the discrimination LGBTQ people experience as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity has lasting, significant, negative effects on their psychological well-being (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). Evidence has also mounted that suggests the way in which society views variance in sexual orientation is changing. Laws, media representations, policy, and public opinion have shifted towards affording more acceptance and civil rights to LGBTQ people (Stotzer, 2009). According to campus climate theory, this social context would affect the cultural norms and practices on high school, community college, and university campuses. As society grapples with how to incorporate this increasingly visible group into mainstream culture, education also
experiences shifts in cultural norms, attitudes, policies, and practices as they relate to LGBTQ students.

**Key terms and distinctions.**

*Ally.*

Most social movement literature associates “allies” with those who are not a member of a stigmatized group, but are active in civil rights movements on behalf of that stigmatized group. However, LGBTQ rights movement defines an “ally” as anyone who demonstrates support to LGBTQ people, whether or not they are part of an official organization (Stotzer, 2008).

*Heterosexism.*

This term refers to structural sexual stigma or cultural ideology embedded in institutional practices. Legal examples of heterosexism include anti-sodomy laws and the Defense of Marriage Act. Consistently portraying LGBTQ people negatively in the media would be an example of heterosexism in the sociocultural arena. Pathologizing homosexuality mental health models and the proliferation of anti-LGBTQ religious teachings are also common examples of heterosexism (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2009).

*Inter-group differences.*

While the literature often refers to “sexual minorities” or “LGBTQ” as a single group, few studies examine lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women, transgender, and queer people as a single entity. Rather, most studies focus on subset of this group. This is because researchers recognize that lesbians, gay men, bisexual men and women, transgender and queer individuals, and questioning men and women have different sets of needs, strengths, risks and resilience variables. To reflect these intergroup differences,
this literature review refers to “LG” (lesbian and gay) groups in those studies that focus on gay men and lesbians only; it refers to “LGB” (lesbian, gay, and bisexual), “LGBTQ” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), “LGBQ” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer or questioning), and “LGBTQ” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) respectively, depending on the researchers’ topical area of study.

**Microaggressions.**

Also referred to as “death by a thousand tiny cuts,” microaggressions refer to non-physical, often nonverbal, automatic discrimination against members of underrepresented groups. Common forms of microaggressions include subtle insults or degrading implications made about people from underrepresented groups (Pierce, 1995; Rankin et al, 2010).

**Out.**

This term refers to the disclosure of one’s sexual orientation to family members, friends, and coworkers. It also refers to a process of self-realization and a coming to terms with identifying with a stigmatized group (Herek, 2003). This terms often stands in contrast to “closeted” LGBTQ people, who do not disclose their sexuality to either themselves or other groups. Often, “out” LGBTQ people do not disclose their orientation in certain situations if they perceive the situation to be unsafe, while they may disclose their orientation in groups that provide safer climates (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006).

**Sexual stigma.**

Also referred to as “homophobia,” “homonegativity,” or “sexual discrimination,” sexual stigma refers to “negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that
society collectively accords anyone associated with nonheterosexual behaviors, identity, relationships, or communities” (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2009).

**The legacy of sexual stigmatization.**

To understand the larger social context that contributes to campus climate as it relates to LGBTQ students, it is important to understand the legacy of LGBTQ discrimination and stigmatization in the United States. To describe the manifestations of LGBTQ stigma, Herek, Cogan, and Gillis (2009) distinguish between three different types of sexual stigma, or “homonegativity,” experienced by LGBTQ people.

The first level is the most visible and recognized. “Enacted Sexual Stigma” is the shunning, discrimination, violence, anti-gay epitaphs, and ostracism of LGBTQ individuals. This type of discrimination may manifest itself in the classroom in the form of gay jokes and commentary, personal remarks, or name-calling. The second, less visible form of homonegativity is known as “Felt Sexual Stigma,” or heterosexual or LGBTQ students using self-presentation strategies to avoid being labeled as “non-hetero.” Here, students may feel uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity in class for fear of social stigma, even when it may enrich a class discussion. It also refers to the multiple ways in which homonegativity manifests itself in passive ways, like students who disassociate themselves from openly gay classmates for fear of being seen as “gay by association.” This type of homonegativity is similar to what is described in the literature as “microaggressions.” This more subtle form of discrimination manifests itself in non-verbal, even preconscious ways, which, over time, contribute to a constant subtext of threat and stress for members of underrepresented groups (Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000; Pierce, 1995). The third and least visible form of homonegativity is “Internalized
Self Stigma,” or the acceptance of sexual stigma as part of one’s own value system. This is most visible in heterosexual students who internalize anti-LGBTQ sentiment, but also refers to “internalized homophobia.” Internalized homophobia refers to LGBTQ people who stigmatize their own sexual orientations or gender identities (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2009).

The effects of discrimination are well documented. One study examines the effects of anti-gay marriage legislation on LGB men and women across the country (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009). This quantitative study compared online survey responses of 587 lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women who lived within and outside of the nine states that passed “Marriage Protection Acts” in 2006. The study looked at measures of underrepresented stress (e.g. exposure to negative media messages, negative conversations, negative amendment-related affect, and increased activism) before and after the 2006 elections. This study found that LGB men and women who lived in states that passed anti-gay marriage laws reported significant, negative, immediate effects on their psychological health. These men and women demonstrated higher levels of negative affect, stress, and depression when compared to LGB men and women who lived in states that passed no such legislation (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009).

**LGBTQ student success and campus climate.**

Current research on campus climate for LGBTQ students indicate that, while campus climate is improving for LGBTQ students, perceptions and experiences of campus climate for LGBTQ students continues to be comparatively negative (Rankin, et al, 2010). One 2010 study demonstrated that, although the climate has improved since
2003, even students on campuses with LGBT support networks continue to experience an unsupportive campus climate. LGBT students were more likely to observe and experience harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual peers; they were less likely to feel comfortable or very comfortable with their campus environments; they were increasingly more likely to seriously consider dropping out of college than their heterosexual peers with each passing year (Rankin, et al, 2010). Students who affiliate with multiple underrepresented groups seem to have an even lower perception of campus climate. LGBQ students of color were less likely to feel comfortable or very comfortable than LGBQ White students, and LGBQ students of color were more likely to report having been targeted for harassment than their White LGBQ peers.

Few studies have examined a direct link between academic success and sexual orientation or gender identity, and many of the existing studies depend on convenience samples and are therefore not representative of the general population (Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007); however, a growing body of research links same-sex attraction and low scholastic achievement. Studies have found that LGBTQ students experience higher rates of depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse, prostitution, truancy, encounters with law enforcement, and running away from home (D’Augelli, 2002; Espelage et al, 2008; D’Augelli, 2002; Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007; Fisher et al, 2008). These students are five times as likely to skip school due to safety concerns and twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to have no plans for post-secondary education after high school (Fisher et al, 2008).

A 2007 study also demonstrates a direct relationship between same-sex orientation and a number of academic measures, from high school completion to college
preparation (Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007). Researchers found that heterosexism is part of the accepted campus climate in many high schools. This heteronormative culture is reinforced through formal institutions like prom and other school dances. The culture is also reinforced through the acceptance of microaggressions, or subtle comments and actions by students, faculty, and high school staff. As a result, LGBTQ students, like other students of historically stigmatized underrepresented groups, are likely to disengage from teachers, the school, and the educational process itself. Using data collected by the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement data sets, researchers examined whether same-sex attracted youth have compromised academic outcomes as they leave high school (Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007). The researchers examined the relationships between students who reported same-sex attraction and a number of variables, including GPA, course failure rate, number of college preparation courses taken, levels of social integration, and risk factors; these variables were then controlled for students’ other background characteristics. The findings suggested that same-sex attracted students left high school with lower grades. There were more likely to fail coursework and were less likely to complete college-preparation courses. They were also less socially integrated, largely owing to higher levels of emotional distress and substance abuse (Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007).

A 2006 study compared disclosed (also known as “out”) and undisclosed (sometimes referred to as “closeted”) students in terms of their campus experiences and perceptions of campus climate. They found that undisclosed students were more likely to feel the need to hide their sexual orientation from some students, faculty, and health care
providers because they felt that there was a possibility of unequal treatment. Disclosed students were more engaged in general, but perceived the campus climate more negatively. Disclosed students were more aware of LG topics, more involved in LG activities, and were more likely to be a part of a social network for LG students. These students were also less likely to conceal their sexual identity to faculty and other students. They were more likely to report acts of discrimination and violence on campus. Both groups equally reported receiving unfair treatment on campus, and both groups reported a similar number of attacks. Both groups also felt the need to hide their sexual orientation from students, faculty, or health care providers at some level (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006).

**Improvements in campus climate for LGBTQ students.**

There is substantial evidence to suggest that attitudes toward the rights and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals in the United States have shifted drastically in the past two decades. Federal initiatives, like Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Defense of Marriage, and Mathew Sheppard laws, have brought the debate over gay rights to the attention of the nation. The Office of Civil Rights of the US Department of Education now includes LGBTQ students on its list of groups protected from sexual harassment and sexually hostile environments (Fisher et al, 2008). The prevalence of television shows, like *Will and Grace, The L Word, Modern Family, The OC,* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,* demonstrates changing awareness, attitudes, and beliefs about LGBTQ people in society (Stotzer, 2008).

There is also research to support this shift in attitudes about LGBTQ people inside and outside of education. One study in 2008 demonstrates a gradual shift in attitudes
towards LGB individuals across the United States in the late 20th Century (Stotzer, 2008). In 2001, researchers found a decline in “morality-based dislike” of gay men and lesbians and more support for civil liberties for LGB people (Stotzer, 2008). A 2005 study that examined changing attitudes toward gay men and lesbians at a midsized Midwestern university resulted in similar conclusions (Smith & Gordon, 2005). Researchers administered the Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG) measure to 544 college students in 1996, and again in 2002. The survey found that attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians had become significantly more positive amongst college students (Smith & Gordon, 2003).

A 2008 study explored this phenomenon more deeply by identifying factors that contribute to positive feelings toward LGB individuals among straight college students (Stotzer, 2008). From a sample of 1,018 college students from a Midwestern university, 69 straight participants were interviewed who were considered to have “open and accepting attitudes” toward gay men, lesbians, and bisexual men and women based on their responses on the ATLG scale. Three common factors were identified that contribute to the formation of positive attitudes towards LGB people. The first factor is “early normalizing experiences,” including positive parental attitudes toward LGB individuals, exposure to television that portrayed LGB men and women in a positive light, and early exposure to LGB adults. The second factor was meeting LGB peers in high school or college. Those who were exposed to normalizing experiences in childhood had an easier time accepting their gay, lesbian, and bisexual peers’ sexual orientations. Third, most college students in the sample attributed their positive LGB feeling to experiences of empathy. That is, these individuals saw examples of discrimination and homonegativity
in their culture and rejected those behaviors and beliefs. Overall, the study suggested that personal exposure to LGB peers and adults seemed to make a significant difference in how straight college students viewed LGB individuals.

In addition to shifting attitudes, there have also been increasing legal protections for LGBTQ students in federal and California law. Federal and state laws prohibiting harassment and discrimination have extended to either apply to or explicitly protect LGBTQ students in public high schools and colleges. Sexual orientation discrimination or harassment is not directly prohibited under federal law; however, existing federal laws protecting students at federally-funded institutions from sexual harassment have been applied to protect LGBTQ students. Title IX of the 1976 Education Amendment Acts states that no one shall “on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity” if the institution receives or benefits from Federal financial aid (U.S.C, §1681). Although Title IX does not specifically prohibit sexual orientation harassment, harassment is prohibited if it is “sufficiently serious to limit or deny a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the school’s program,” irrespective of the sexual orientation of the victim or the aggressor (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Therefore, if an LGBTQ student experiences harassment of a sexual nature as a result of sexual orientation, and if that harassment limits or denies access to college, that harassment could be potentially actionable under federal law.

California’s Education Code is clearly and specifically prohibitive of discrimination and harassment that is based on sexual orientation at institutions that receive or benefit from state financial aid (California Education Code, §66270).
California Education Code includes in its definition of “Sexual harassment” any “verbal… conduct of a sexual nature” that has a significant negative impact on the student’s academic performance, or if the action creates an “intimidating, hostile, or offensive … educational environment” (California Education Code, §212.5).

In fact, institutions have been held liable for failing to act to protect LGBTQ students from sexual orientation harassment. In *Flores v. Morgan High School District* (2003), a group of high school students filed an action in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, claiming that their equal protection rights were violated when the school failed to respond to student-to-student anti-homosexual harassment (Flores v. Morgan Hill Unified, 2003). The court held that students could make claims against institutions under the Equal Protection Clause where the institutions failed to protect LGBTQ students and heterosexual students equally. In a similar case, *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (1996), the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals held that students could make gender and sexual orientation discrimination claims against their schools under the Equal Protection Clause. In that case, after a student and his parents in Wisconsin reported an act of physical violence, a school administrator told the student that he should expect such treatment because of his open sexual orientation. Changes like these in laws and applications of law demonstrate how federal and state policies have shifted to provide increased protection and support of LGBTQ students. They also provide potential opportunities for community colleges to create safer college campuses for LGBTQ students, and to foster dialog regarding these and other diversity issues that affect college students.

In California, there has been a significant increase in legislation around gender and sexual orientation since 1999. According to the Los Angeles County Human
Relations Commission, there were thirty-four pieces of hate crime legislation introduced into the California legislature between 1999 and 2007, and twenty-four pieces of legislation were enacted into law during that period (Los Angeles County Human Relations Committee, 2007). While these laws expand protection from and awareness of hate crimes for many traditionally underrepresented groups, two major laws have been passed that have expanded protection particularly for LGBTQ students in publically funded institutions. These pieces of legislation, AB 537 and AB 394, have resulted in laws that expand protections and create safer spaces for students in publically funded institutions.

*Assembly bill 537.*

In 1999, California became the fifth state in the United States to pass legislation to protect students from harassment based on their perceived sexual orientation or actual or perceived gender. Prior to 1999, California’s Education Code protected students from harassment and discrimination based on several protected characteristics, including race, religion, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, and gender (California Education Code, §200). However, like Federal law, it did not explicitly protect students based on sexual orientation or perceived gender. The passage of The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 extended these protections to all characteristics protected from Hate Crimes in the California Penal Code, including sexual orientation and perceived gender, where gender “includes a person's gender identity and gender related appearance and behavior whether or not stereotypically associated with the person's assigned sex at birth” (California Penal Code, §422.55c). With the passage of this legislation into law, California Education Code also prohibited instruction, district-
sponsored activities, (California Education Code, §51500), and adoption of textbooks or other instructional materials (California Education Code, §51501) that “promotes a discriminatory bias” or “reflects adversely” based on groups protected under that California Penal Code (California Education Code, §220).

**Assembly Bill 394.**

Despite the intentions of AB 537 to change school policy and create safer learning environments, in the ten years subsequent to the bill’s passage, reports of acts of violence against LGBTQ students continued to rise. Schools paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars in settlements in discrimination and harassment suits. Students continued to feel unsafe in schools, and faculty and students continued to be largely unaware of their schools’ nondiscrimination policies (A. 394, 2007). For this reason, the Safe Place to Learn Act was introduced and passed in 2008. This Act was meant to clarify and regulate how schools complied with The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. The key law was meant to “ensure that all local educational agencies continue to work to reduce discrimination, harassment, and violence,” “improve student safety,” and “improve…connections between pupils and supportive adults, schools, and communities” (A. 394, 2007). To this end, the law requires that the Department of Education monitor the extent to which schools (1) adopt an anti-discrimination and harassment policy; (2) post that policy in all schools and offices; (3) adopt a process for discrimination and harassment complaints; (4) publicize both the policy and the process for filing and following up on complaints; (5) maintain documentation of all complaints and their resolution; (6) maintain confidentiality and/or protection for those who make the
complaints; (7) identify a compliance officer responsible for assuring compliance with AB 537 (California Education Code, §234.1).

There exists a set of AB 537 compliance guidelines for school administrators who are interested in creating comprehensive, transformative change. A task force was created in 2001 to provide the State Superintendent of Public Instruction with guidance as to how to implement AB 537 to create safe learning environments for all children, including those who are perceived to be LGBTQ (Gill & Marshall, 2001; Knotts, 2009). Twelve recommendations were made around five themes: (1) student and staff development regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, and hate crimes, (2) research development in this area, (3) guidelines for accountability and enforcement of this law, (4) staff support to monitor compliance, and (5) recommendations for state policy (Gill & Marshall, 2001) (See Appendix G for a full list of recommendations). These recommendations create a framework for compliance with AB 537. By applying these recommendations, community college leaders can reduce the institution’s legal liability surrounding sexual orientation and gender-based harassment and discrimination.

Summary of current recommendations for changing campus climate.

There is ample literature that recommends courses of action for faculty, staff, students, and administrators who are interested in creating a more engaging, supportive campus climate for LGBTQ students on both high school and college campuses. Changes that can be made at the classroom, campus, and policy level are summarized.

High school and college faculty are in a unique position to foster dialogue about diversity and campus climate in classrooms. Faculty looking for ways to support LGBTQ students through curriculum could incorporate the history of sexual discrimination in
class lectures and underscore contributions of LGBTQ individuals to society (Fisher et al, 2008). Educators can also model sexually-tolerant behaviors inside and outside their classrooms. For example, faculty can adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward discrimination of any kind in their classrooms, including discrimination against race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Faculty could also address sexually-discriminatory jokes and remarks when they are made in their classroom. This zero-tolerance policy sends a message to students, junior faculty, and colleagues that discrimination at all levels is unacceptable in the campus culture (Fisher et al, 2008). Community college leaders could also adopt practices on campus, in classrooms, and during office hours to encourage LGBTQ students to join support networks. Faculty could also identify “safe spaces” where students can go to discuss LGBTQ issues with a trained, caring professional (Fisher et al, 2008).

There is evidence to suggest that these programs and support services have a statistically significant positive effect on LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students who were a member of support clubs in their high schools reported feeling safer, had fewer absences, reported less victimization, and were better able to manage the effects of violence and harassment (Fisher et al, 2008). A 2009 study suggested a powerful relationship between support networks and several levels of satisfaction in bisexual college students (Sheet & Mohr, 2009). Students who felt that they had both general and sexual-specific support reported higher levels of life satisfaction, lower levels of self-stigma, and lower levels of depression (Sheet & Mohr, 2009). Support networks that included allies (heterosexual students and faculty) were more effective at creating a positive campus climate than support networks without allies (Fisher et al, 2008; Sheets & Mohr, 2009).
Changes can be made at the policy level, as well. One 2009 study looked at colleges and universities that currently have policies that protect or serve LGBTQ students, either through benefits to same-sex partners or through protecting students, staff, and faculty from discrimination (Messinger, 2009). Researchers examined the factors that hindered or helped the development of these policies across twenty institutions. According to a series of semi-structured interviews, “formal, shared governance” approaches seemed to be the preferred method for institutionalizing change at public institutions. This method refers to working with administrators and faculty through shared governance procedures in order to create institutional change. The least successful approach to instituting change was the “adversarial approaches” to policy development. Those institutions that tried to force their institutions to protect their LGBTQ students through legal proceedings were least successful in creating changes in policies (Messinger, 2009).

There are several national programs that help schools and universities create educational environments that are conducive to LGBTQ student learning, such as the Allies Program, Safe Spaces, and Rainbow Educators. Organizations like PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) specialize in helping colleges and universities create more positive campus climates. While many barriers to adopting policies and education programs on campuses remain, there are also many tools available to campus leaders interested in improving campus climate and practices for supporting LGBTQ students.
Summary

The literature provides some clarity regarding the political, historical and sociocultural context, campus climate, and LGBTQ student engagement and success. Clearly, the effects of sexual orientation discrimination are significant and far-reaching both inside and outside of school. Anti-LGBTQ sentiment is not only accepted but institutionalized in many educational and legal settings. This affects LGBTQ students’ ability to feel safe, engaged, and accepted on high school and college campuses. It is also clear that, despite the deep-rooted institutionalized nature of this discrimination, attitudes are changing about LGBTQ individuals. College students tend to be more accepting of LGBTQ people in their lives, and are more likely to support LGBTQ rights than they were fifteen years ago. Laws and social media have shifted towards greater inclusion and protection of LGBTQ people. Educators and students who are motivated to change their campus climate have access to resources and research to support their efforts.

However, the literature does not provide a greater understanding of the experiences and characteristics of LGBTQ students at community colleges. There is scant attention paid to community colleges in the current literature, and no studies focused on community colleges as a unique educational setting for LGBTQ students. Based on the unique role of community colleges as open-access destination for students from diverse backgrounds, characteristics, and abilities, an exploration of the LGBTQ community college student experiences could potentially contribute significantly to a growing body of knowledge in this topical area.
Chapter III: Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine the extent to which community colleges are able to support and engage LGBTQ students in a way that will lead them to college success. To determine this, this study gathered data about LGBTQ student experiences and perceptions of campus climate and student engagement activities. Emergent themes were identified from data collected from interviews, focus groups, and a document analysis. An analysis of these themes was made based on the conceptual framework built from student engagement and campus climate theories. Based on this analysis, recommendations were made for improving the campus climate and student engagement practices so as to better engage and support LGBTQ community college students.

Research Questions

Applying the conceptual framework outlined in the Review of the Literature, a case study approach with phenomenological and ethnographic traditions was used to explore one campus’ ability to support LGBTQ community college student success through campus climate and student engagement practices. To gain a critical understanding of this topical area, three research questions were explored:

1. How do self identified LGBTQ community college students describe their community college campus climate?
2. What are the experiences of self identified LGBTQ students who engage in college-related activities?
3. How do members of the campus community, including faculty, staff, and LGBTQ students, describe college practices, interactions, or experiences that support or inhibit LGBTQ student engagement?

Chapter Three Organization

This chapter will begin with a description of the research setting and context. Organizational, employee, student, and LGBTQ student club member characteristics are described. The chapter includes a description of the research samples and data sources. The chapter includes a description of the data instruments used. Then procedures for data collection and analysis are described. The interview and focus group protocols are described. Finally, an analysis of the researcher’s roles and assumptions as they relate to this study is included.

Research Design and Tradition

Research design.

This study was conducted as a case study informed by phenomenological and ethnographic traditions. This can be categorized as a case study because it encompasses the four characteristics endemic to this design. It is a bounded system, it is particularistic, it is descriptive, and it is heuristic (Merriam, 2009). The research was bounded because data was collected from a single community college, from self-identified LGBTQ community students, within a six-month period of time. It is particularistic because it focuses on a clearly specified situation; this study focused on self-identified LGBTQ community college student perceptions of campus climate and student engagement activities at a community college. The study is descriptive because it contains literal, detailed descriptions of LGBTQ student experiences and perceptions from student
interviews, faculty interviews, a focus group, and a document analysis. Finally, it is heuristic because it attempts to enhance our understanding of the how LGBTQ students experience community college climate and college engagement activities.

Research tradition.

This examination explored this case by leveraging phenomenological and ethnographic traditions to gain a holistic understanding of LGBTQ student experiences and perceptions of campus climate and engagement. To gain this expertise, three areas, each representing a research question based on the conceptual framework, were investigated within this bounded system. First, an awareness of how LGBTQ students perceive the campus climate is essential. Second, it is necessary to acquire a rich understanding of student experiences with college-related activities (e.g. student engagement). Finally, it is important to gain insight into how the students react to their experiences with campus climate and college practices; more specifically, it is important to understand the effects of campus experiences and college practices on LGBTQ students’ ability to participate in academically meaningful activities.

To gather evidence for these three areas of examination, both ethnographic and phenomenological traditions are appropriate. The ethnographic tradition explores patterns of behavior and beliefs. There are several assumptions in ethnography. Ethnographers assume that (a) human behavior and culture is variable and locally specific; (b) culture reflects patterns of what should occur (ideal behavior), what does occur (actual behavior), and what might occur (prospective behavior); (c) one can discern patterns of social behavior through observation and inquiry; (d) one must understand what people do and why they do it before one can interpret social behavior; (e) interpretation of social
behavior is based on understandings and misunderstandings that occur between group members and the observers; (f) observers cannot offer an exhaustive explanation of a social group, but rather an explanation of the social behavior within the bounded system (Schram, 2006).

There are two orienting concepts in ethnography. First, the concept of “culture” in ethnography is not a structure itself that can be measured or examined. Rather, culture is an abstraction that researchers use to explain patterns of behavior to an outsider. The second orienting principle is “holism,” whereby researchers examine not only the parts of a system or culture, but the system as a whole as well. The system as a whole can be different than its parts, and so the whole needs to be taken into account as well as each component (Schram, 2006).

This tradition is appropriate for this study because it examined the behaviors of LGBTQ students as well as the culture of the campus. It is important to understand how these students behave and interact with their college environment in order to understand how campus climate and practices can be more supportive of LGBTQ student engagement. This tradition assisted in gathering evidence of LGBTQ student engagement behaviors as well as in gathering evidence of campus climate or culture as it relates to supporting or inhibiting LGBTQ student engagement.

The focus of the phenomenological tradition is on examining what experience means for the one who experiences it (Merriam, 2009). The orienting concept in phenomenology is epoché, that the researcher must suspend judgment of what is real and meaningful. According to Merriam (2009), the basic assumptions of phenomenology are (1) that human behavior is only understandable in the context of relationships to things,
people, events and situations; (2) the perceptions present us with evidence of the world, not as the world is thought to be but as it is lived; (3) that reality is not “out there” in an objective universe but tied to consciousness; (4) language is the central medium through which meaning is constructed and conveyed, (5) it is possible to understand and convey the central underlying meaning of a concept as experienced by a number of individuals. This tradition provided a framework for understanding how students ascribe meaning to their experiences and beliefs. This meaning will ultimately determine whether or not students remain engaged in college activities, as well as which activities they engage in.

While the student experiences and perceptions are critical to understanding this case study, in an attempt to understand the bounded case more holistically, other sources of data were leveraged as well. Specifically, the experiences and perceptions of faculty who have knowingly had contact with LGBTQ community college students were also explored utilizing similar traditions. Finally, documents that refer to pertinent campus and district policies, campus activities, and student or employee opinions were collected and analyzed using these traditions and the conceptual framework as a lens for analysis.

**Connection to purpose and questions.**

While the conceptual framework used in this study provides the foundation for understanding campus climate and engagement as critical elements to student success, the phenomenological and ethnographic traditions provide a structure for how to understand campus climate and student engagement through the eyes of the students under examination. This study utilized interviews, a focus group, and document analysis, instruments traditionally associated with case study, phenomenology, and ethnography, in order to discern themes across distinct types of data. The resulting rich, varied data were
analyzed using models for assessing campus climate and student engagement as a framework. The results attempted to present a valid, holistic understanding about the college’s strengths and barriers in terms of supporting and engaging LGBTQ students.

**Research Setting/Context**

**Site demographics.**

Birch College (pseudonym) is a community college located in a large urban area in California with over 20,000 students. Over 60% of the students are female, and 60% are under the age of 25. Seventy-five percent of the student population is Hispanic, 20% is Asian, and fewer than two percent are White, African American/Black, or “Other.” Just over one quarter of the students at Birch College are full time. There is no single or dominant educational goal that characterizes students at Birch College; like with most community colleges, students attend for many different reasons. About one third are studying vocational fields, one third hope to transfer, 20% are undecided, and under 10% are completing general education requirements.

There are nearly 2,000 employees at the college, including a combination of faculty (full time and part time), classified staff, unclassified staff, and academic managers and supervisors. About 45% percent of the employees are female and range widely in age. Just over one third of the college’s employees are Hispanic, one quarter are White, 15% are Asian, five percent are African American/Black, and about 20% are “Unknown.”

**LGBTQ student club.**

Birch College was selected for the site of this study because of its size and because it has an LGBTQ student organization with over 20 active members. There is no
demographic information available for the club members. The club does not have an official membership list. However, they have a strong social media presence with over 300 members at one site. It would be difficult to substantiate observations about the ethnic makeup of the club in the absence of demographic data; however, after attending a meeting, it was observed that the majority of the club members appear to be Latina/o, and this finding would be consistent with the ethnic makeup of the college. The mission of the club emphasizes the club’s commitment to creating a safe, positive, and tolerant campus that fosters student success and student empowerment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Questioning, and Queer, Intersex, and Straight Ally students.

**Site and participant selection.**

The site was identified using a purposeful sampling strategy. Since the purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which community colleges are able to support and engage LGBTQ student success, it would be appropriate to select a site for a case study that already has some LGBTQ student support practices in place. The rationale for selecting a college with support practices already in place is that one is more likely to find (1) existing strengths in terms of structures that support and engage LGBTQ students, and (2) students who feel safe and open enough to be willing to participate in a study about LGBTQ students. For this reason, an extreme/deviant case was selected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Extreme/deviant case is characterized by being highly unusual. This site is unusual in the region because it has a club with over twenty consistent, active members in it. This provided opportunities to interview active, engaged students as well as those students who may not be actively engaged in college practices.
Because the students on this campus are active and visible, they are likely to have encountered rich experiences that have both positively and negatively impacted their levels of engagement.

**Access and researcher roles.**

I gained access to this site through my multiple roles as an LGBTQ student club faculty advisor, community college professional, and graduate student. I gained access to the campus researcher through my role as a graduate student and through my role as the LGBTQ club faculty advisor at a different college. I explained that the intention of my study is to articulate the college’s strengths and needs in terms of its ability to support and engage LGBTQ student, and that ultimately I intended to generate recommendations for creating a more supportive campus climate and improving engagement practices for Birch College and other colleges.

**Sample and Data Sources**

The conceptual framework used for this study drove the types of data collected. This conceptual framework for understanding factors that contribute to student success emphasizes the need to assess campus climate and engagement behaviors. According to engagement and campus climate theories, this assessment is critical in order to determine the extent to which LGBTQ students are engaged and supported in a way that fosters academic success. In order to assess campus climate and LGBTQ student engagement, data were gathered regarding student behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions as well as data pertaining to college structures, culture, and activities. Data sources included input and perspectives from students and faculty as well as documented evidence of policies, activities, and norms that potentially impact LGBTQ student engagement.
The data collected included ten student interviews, a focus group with an additional nine students in attendance, and ten faculty interviews from those who knowingly have had direct contact with LGBTQ students. There were 24 participants altogether. This number of participants is large enough to provide a rich, varied data pool and small enough to manage within the timeframe allotted for this study. In addition to interviews and the focus group, critical codes and themes derived from an analysis of relevant campus documents were used to further triangulate the data collected from students.

Three sampling strategies were used to identify and recruit student participants. First, criterion strategy, or “cases that meet criteria,” was used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were LGBTQ students currently attending Birch College. Once thusly identified, snowball and network strategies were used to recruit and select additional participants. I was prepared to identify participants through other participants, informants, or gatekeepers if necessary (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schensul, LeCompte, Trotter, Cromley, & Singer, 1999). The first informants were the former club advisor and the institutional researcher, who introduced me to the current club advisor. The current club advisory then invited me to a club meeting, where I announced my intention to seek participants who meet the aforementioned criteria. Announcements were made where LGBTQ community college students are known to be found, at meetings, through social media sites, and through the campus newspaper. As participants were identified, I asked them to identify other participants.

These sampling strategies were chosen because there is no institutional database where sexual orientation information is kept, and therefore no random sample set from
which to draw. There is, however, a vast social network of meetings, friend groups, and links through social networking sites, that links these students. In the absence of a random sample set from which to draw, this social network was used to help identify participants.

In order to identify faculty participants, similar strategies were used. Participants must have met certain criteria; potential participants needed to have (1) knowingly had direct, meaningful contact with LGBTQ students, and (2) been directly involved with LGBTQ support and engagement activities. To identify these faculty and staff members, snowball and/or opportunistic sampling strategies were used. Participants or informants were asked to identify rich cases, or potential participants’ names came up over the course of the interviews or the focus group. Potential participants were contacted and asked to participate in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The documents that were analyzed were identified through similar strategies. First, the snowball strategy was used. Participants were asked to identify documents like fliers, newspaper articles, and/or polices that are relevant to their experiences. Second, the opportunistic strategy was used. Relevant documents were identified by speaking to participants, by perusing the campus and district website, and by walking around campus looking for fliers, signs, or other relevant information. Pictures were taken or samples were collected, as appropriate.

The community college students under examination in this study share critical history and characteristics. As members of the LGBTQ community, this population is part of a historically marginalized group. This group has recently experienced a surge in visibility due to the recent political debates and national discussions. This increase in
visibility of LGBTQ people has also been due to a higher awareness of discrimination, suicide, and violence associated with the LGBTQ community. Many participants shared ethnic history and characteristics as well as sexual orientation or gender identity characteristics. The college is 75% Latino, so, as expected, many of the participants in this study were both LGBTQ and Latina/o. Consequently, as expected, these students were often contending with a combination of factors associated with ethnic and LGBTQ identities.

Given the risk factors associated with this population, there are a number of potential ethical concerns that needed to be addressed when conducting these interviews and the focus group. First of all, participants’ identities were carefully protected. In any study, it is important to provide participants with a level of anonymity so that they will not experience any repercussions resulting from their responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this case study, however, anonymity is particularly crucial. LGBTQ students may not be out at their college or to certain instructors or students. Participants may stay undisclosed for fear of discrimination associated with their marginalized sexual orientations or gender identities (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). If participants could be identified based on the descriptions in this study, their anonymity would be compromised. This was addressed through an explicit confidentiality clause in the informed consent form that guarantees that students’ names and identifying characteristics will be excluded. Data was kept in a locked drawer or on a password protected computer in my home. Only my dissertation team and I had access to these data. Participants were also able to participate in “member checks,” whereby they were
able to review and edit the findings if they felt that their anonymity had been compromised in any way (Few & Stephans, 2006).

I also considered my ability as a researcher to tell the story that my participants intended to tell. I may differ from many of my potential participants on several characteristics, including age, ethnicity, sex, gender expression, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, educational status, etc. As a result of these differences, I may not achieve “insider status,” and/or I may inadvertently establish an otherwise imbalanced researcher/informant relationship, leading to potentially inaccurate or incomplete responses from my participants (Few & Stephens, 2003). I may also misinterpret accurate, complete responses as a result of my own cultural assumptions or personal biases. Since I must interpret the meaning of my participants’ responses through the lenses of my experiences, theoretical framework, and positionalities, the message sent and the message conveyed in this study may differ significantly.

In order to address these concerns, I was diligently self-reflexive over the course of this study. I was deliberate in the way that I dressed and spoke when I introduced myself to students and interview participants. Finally, I asked my fellow researchers to analyze excerpts from data that I had collected in order to ensure that we found similar themes and codes.

**Instruments and Procedures**

The data collection instruments used in this study were interviews, focus groups, and document analyses, all developed and conducted according to ethnographic and phenomenological traditions. The ethnographic piece of the study focused on campus culture, patterns of behavior, and beliefs of LGBTQ community college students, while
the phenomenological approach allowed for a rich exploration of student and employee perceptions of reality and meaning in this system. These data were triangulated by an analysis of relevant documents, including web pages, policies, advertisements and articles. Together, these data attempted to provide a rich data pool from which a holistic picture could be derived of the extent to which Birch Community College provides support for LGBTQ students in their pursuit of college success.

**Interviews.**

The first instrument was an interview protocol used to conduct the semi-structured interviews with ten LGBTQ community college students (see Appendix A for full protocol). The questions in this protocol stem from the research questions of this study, which are based on ethnographic and phenomenological traditions and grounded in the conceptual framework. They explored campus culture, patterns of engagement behavior, and perceptions of experiences. For example, students were asked about how they perceive the campus climate, what college related activities they engage in, and the effects of those experiences on their ability to be engaged and successful in college. Based on the answers to those questions, other questions were asked to explore, clarify, and reflect on participants’ responses.

The second instrument was an interview protocol used to conduct five semi-structured interviews with community college faculty who had knowingly interacted in a meaningful way with LGBTQ students (see Appendix D for full interview protocol). These participants were asked similar questions about campus climate, engagement opportunities for LGBTQ students, LGBTQ student experiences on campus, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of campus practices. Again, based on the answers to
those questions, other questions were asked to explore, clarify, and reflect on participants’ responses.

The interview protocols began with an introduction, which included some background information about the research project, a summary of the informed consent agreement, and some general instructions about completing the interview. Participants were asked a number of demographic questions, including questions about their role in the college and their experiences with LGBTQ students. The next sections asked participants to share experiences and beliefs around campus climate, campus engagement opportunities, student engagement behaviors, and the effects of these experiences on further engagement and success. Each of the three research question had been assigned one or two interview questions, and then exploratory, clarification, and reflection questions were asked in order to gain richer, thicker descriptions from the participants.

**Focus group.**

The third instrument was a focus group protocol used to conduct the semi-structured group conversation with nine LGBTQ community college students (see Appendix B for full protocol). Again, questions were asked to explore, clarify, and reflect on participant respondents. The focus group protocol similarly began with some introductory or background information, clarifying the research purpose, confidentiality statement, informed consent, and contact information. Then students were asked to share their experiences and perceptions of campus culture, college engagement opportunities, student engagement behaviors, and the perceived effects of those experiences on student engagement and success.
Data collection.

A total of four data collection tools were used for this study. Two sets of interviews were conducted, one for students and one for faculty and staff. One focus group and a document analysis also conducted.

Student interviews/focus groups.

Once potential participants were identified through the various sampling methods, they were contacted by e-mail and by phone, as appropriate and necessary, to ask their permission to participate in the study, and, if they agreed, to set up a time to interview (see Appendix F for Research Invitation). Students were sent the informed consent in advance. Every attempt was made to schedule all interviews on the same day to minimize the number of days spent in the field. Participants were given the opportunity to choose a location for the interview if there was somewhere they felt comfortable, or when they had no preference, a neutral location was established in the institutional researcher’s conference room.

The protocol and the informed consent form were reviewed first. Once the informed consent was signed, the interview began (see Appendix C for Student Consent to Participate). Main questions were followed by follow up questions as appropriate. Since these were semi-structured interviews, questions were asked that were not in the protocol. Once all of the main questions and follow up questions were answered, the participants were thanked and reminded that they would be given the opportunity to look over the analysis and make changes.

Participants were recruited for the focus group in a similar fashion. Every attempt was made to conduct the focus groups on the same day that interviews were scheduled.
Participants were sent consent forms in advance. The first few minutes of the focus group were spent reviewing the protocol and consent. At the end of the focus group, participants were advised that the transcript would be available for them to review. Participants were reminded that they would be able to withdraw or make changes for thirty days after that time.

**Faculty/staff interviews.**

The faculty and staff interviews were conducted much like the student interviews. Potential participants were identified through the student interviews, the focus group, and the document analysis. Once identified through documents or by student participants, potential participants were contacted by phone or by e-mail, as appropriate, and invited to take part in the study. Interviews were scheduled in clusters to minimize the number of days spent in the field. Participants who agreed to take part in the study received the consent form in advance. They were reminded of their rights to review the transcripts or to exclude some or all of their comments from the analysis.

After the consent form was reviewed and signed, the interview began (see Appendix E for Faculty/Staff Consent form). Main questions and semi-structured questions were asked about campus climate, college opportunities for LGBTQ student engagement, student engagement behaviors, and the effects of these experiences on further engagement and success. Follow up questions were asked to expand, clarify, and explore participants’ responses.
Data Analysis

Interview and focus group data.

Themes and codes were initially derived from the models for assessing climate and engagement which were outlined in the conceptual framework. To explore the first research question, which asks about campus climate, the data were examined for evidence of internal and external factors that contribute to campus culture (see Figure 3.1). Transcripts and documents were analyzed to identify common themes in establishing the extent to which campus climate is safe and welcoming for underrepresented group. These themes include (1) socio, historical, or political references, (2) campus history of inclusion or exclusion of LGBTQ students, (3) number of diverse groups on campus, (4) attitudes/perceptions between/among groups and (5) quality of intergroup relations (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

Figure 3.1 Themes for Assessing Campus Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Factors:</th>
<th>External Factors:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of inclusion/exclusion</td>
<td>Sociohistorical Context: historical, psychological, social legacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of groups on campus</td>
<td>Political Context: Government programs, policies, initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes/perceptions between/among groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergroup relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Perception of) Campus Climate
The second question, which explores LGBTQ student engagement, was analyzed using the conceptual framework, as well (see Figure 3.2). The data were analyzed to identify engagement themes in classroom, social, and student services settings. Codes were developed that assessed the extent to which these engagement activities were typically associated with college persistence (Astin, 1999).

![Figure 3.2 Themes for Assessing Student Engagement](image)

The third question, which relates to student perception of the effects of these activities on engagement, focused more on the connections students make and/or the meaning students ascribe to campus climate and college practices. To answer this question, data were analyzed seeking themes that asserted (1) connections between campus climate and student’s feelings of being welcome, safe, and valued (Kuh, 2001) and (2) the effects of past experiences on inhibiting or supporting future engagement (Kuh, 2001).
Once the data were prepared, I moved carefully through the first transcription using Atlas TI, a commonly used computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) system. This software assisted in the process of searching for words and phrases and categorizing those words and phrases into codes. It also holds chunks of text and information. It helps organize codes, compares categories, and makes matrices. This software does not create themes or assist in the interpretation process. Rather, it helps organize raw data.

After the initial codes were identified, the data were more closely examined to expand on initial codes, develop new codes, and eliminate initial codes that I thought I would have found but did not. I read through the data a second time to further clarify, collapse, or expand codes. Then, using the codes and networks identified in the first interview, I applied codes and networks to my second and subsequent interviews and the focus group. I also identified additional codes in those transcriptions and reread interviews to look for codes found in subsequent interviews or the focus group.

Once codes were identified, collapsed, and clarified, I connected them into networks and families. Reoccurring codes and families were identified across data sources. From these codes and code families, themes were created. These themes consisted of networks of codes derived from all of the data sets. Conclusions were drawn about what themes were found across the data sources. I made note of themes that I either expected to find or did not find, or themes that I did not come across in my review of the literature, but that I found in my data.
**Document data.**

I began by collecting data from the field. I looked for references to gender, sex, or sexual orientation-specific bylaws, policies, and procedures in documents that affect the college. I looked at diversity statements, compliance and grievance procedures, values statements, and codes of conduct (See Appendix H for a full list of documents referenced). I looked at the college website focusing on the college mission, student organizations pages, and campus activities and events. Then, I walked around the campus and look for graffiti, fliers, or other references to diversity, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. I identified documents through the interviews and the focus group. As participants referred to events, incidents, or procedures, I identified corresponding documents. They were then uploaded into Atlas TI and added into the data set.

Working directly with the hard copies of the data, I read each document carefully the first time through, identifying initial codes as well as the codes I derived from my interviews and the focus group data sets. Upon second reading of the documents, I expanded, clarified, and collapsed these codes, paying careful attention to codes that were anomalous to this data set.

Using a similar process of networking and thematizing, I looked for codes and families that I saw across documents. I noted codes and families that I found across documents, interviews, and the focus group. I used these themes found across the data to finalize themes and networks. From these themes and networks, I began to make sense of these data through interpretive analysis. It was the themes and code families that I found across documents, interviews, and the focus group that I focused on in my analysis section.
Timeline.

I began collecting data in November of 2011. I conducted interviews, document analyses, and the focus group between November 2011 and February 2012. I analyzed data for codes, families, and themes in February 2012. At that time, I began my interpretations with an emphasis on bringing the participants’ voices back to the themes I had identified.

Researcher Roles

I had multiple roles as I conducted this study. I saw my key roles as researcher, doctoral student, and educational professional. As a principal investigator, I also played the roles of advocate, potential reformer, and writer.

Biases.

I make several assumptions about the nature of education and the nature of my target population that could have potentially affected my work. Based on my literature review and experiences as a student success professional and faculty advisor for LGBTQ students, I believe that: (a) students are more likely to succeed in college if they are engaged and supported effectively early in their college careers, (b) developing a positive campus climate for underrepresented groups is a best practice for fostering student success for all students, (c) LGBTQ people are an underserved underrepresented group at risk for lower college success rates, (d) the campuses are not fully supportive of LGBTQ students, and therefore there are ample opportunities for improvement.

Effects on the case.

These biases may have affected my case and participant reactivity in several ways. My interviewees may well have picked up on the fact that I was there as a
researcher but also as an advocate and potential reformer. In fact, I hoped that my participants perceived this bias on some level. If participants saw me as their advocate, I hoped they would see me as nontthreatening. If they saw me as a nonjudgmental, I hoped would feel as though they could be open and honest. However, I also hoped to minimize their impulses to say the “right” thing or to say something that would sound “good.”

I utilized several strategies to counter this potential effect. First of all, I made a conscious effort to stay detached from my reactions to the responses of my participants. I needed to ensure that I was not leading the responses with my own positive or negative emotional reactions (e.g. shock, support, head shaking, nodding, etc.). I minimized contact with the participants before and after the interview to avoid the impulse of socializing excessively with the participant while they participated in the study. This strategy helped me avoid unnecessary effects on the participants in my multiple roles, and particularly in my role as potential reformer and friend. Second, I framed my questions carefully and had my peers examine my questions to ensure that did not lead participants to give the “right answers.” I eliminated value-laden words that might have indicated that I was looking for a positive or negative response. Students may have perceived their environment in a positive, negative, or mixed way, and I did not want to lead them in a particular direction with my questions. By avoiding value-laden language in my prompts, I hoped to limit respondents’ potential impulse to give me the story that they believed I wanted to hear.

Effects on the researcher.

My respondents’ answers may have affected the way in which I interpreted my data, as well. Since I went into this study with a strong set of values, it was quite possible
that I might have been more likely to pick up on themes that affirm my current belief system; by the same token, I may have been more likely to miss themes that are not congruent with my values and assumptions. In order to counter this, I did a few things. First of all, I triangulated my data. I analyzed not only student interviews, but also faculty and staff interviews and a document analysis. Another strategy I used was peer review, whereby I asked my colleagues to analyze excerpts from my data. I offered to analyze a colleague’s data in exchange. Since my peers and I gleaned similar themes from the data, I felt more confident that it was student perception and not my bias that is expressed through this study.

Summary

This study explores a community college campus through the eyes of LGBTQ participants. Using a phenomenological and ethnographic case study, I explored the perceptions and experiences of this underserved, often invisible group. I used faculty testimony and documentation to create context for student feedback. I was sure to undergo steps to increase the trustworthiness of the data. I gave participants opportunities to do member checks, asked colleagues to code sections of the data, and remained cautious and mindful of how I interacted with my participants. Using this methodology, I attempted to draw trustworthy conclusions from robust and rich data sources. From these data, I attempted to generate useful recommendations for how community college leaders can improve their practice and foster student success.
Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

This study examined student engagement and perceptions of campus climate. Engagement and climate are two factors strongly associated with persistence and student success. By utilizing a case study design informed by phenomenological and ethnographic traditions, this study proposed to give voice to a group of students who traditionally remain underrepresented on college campuses. By listening to student voices and interpreting those voices through the conceptual framework, I attempted to provide college leaders with valuable input regarding how college practices can be changed to create more inclusive environments that are conducive to student engagement and success.

In order to answer the research questions, data were coded using concepts from the literature review and themes that emerged. Those codes were then split, combined, or altered to create families and themes. Those themes were applied to the three questions below.

Question 1 – How do self-identified LGBTQ community college students describe their community college campus climate?

Question 2 - What are the experiences of self-identified LGBTQ students who engage in college-related activities?

Question 3 - How do members of the campus community, including faculty, staff, and LGBTQ students, describe college practices, interactions, or experiences that support or inhibit LGBTQ student engagement?
Findings

“That's the overall feeling on campus; it's not aggressive homophobia, aggressive transphobia- even as far as misogyny, not aggressive in-your-face- It's that really subtle form of it. And that's the most difficult form to combat.”

Participants perceived the campus climate as inclusive of LGBTQ students on the whole; however, as indicated by the quote above, participants also felt that the campus community was subtly alienating of their LGBTQ identities. On the one hand, the climate has several inclusive structures. The campus has an LGBTQ club that provides a strong social support network, faculty who act as mentors and allies, and access to non-stigmatizing resources that help participants work through the challenges that create barriers to student engagement and academic success. At the same time, students and faculty consistently reported a subtle subtext of stigmatization that informed the way they perceived and experienced the environment. The campus climate appeared to have been characterized by a complex balance between overall safety and subtle forms of alienation, between stigmatization and resilience. This finding is consistent with those of Rankin, et al (2010). They found that campus climate is improving for LGBTQ students, but that students still experience stigma associated with their sexual orientations or gender identities. In organizing the themes that emerged from the data around the three research questions, the student perception that emerged was one in which participants felt relatively respected by peers, faculty, and student services professionals. However, at the same time, they felt consistently reminded of their otherness by the ever presence of microaggressions in classrooms and social settings.
Data sources.

Student participants.

I conducted ten, 60 minute student interviews. All of the participants were between the ages of 19 and 22. Most identified as Latina/o, Chicana, or Hispanic, but a few identified as White or a mix of White/European and either Pilipino or Hispanic. Five of the participants identified as male, three identified as female, and one identified as gender-queer. Two participants identified as lesbians, one as pansexual, one as straight/questioning, one as bi-sexual, and five identified as gay. Majors ranged from sociology, linguistics, science, psychology, art/fashion, and business, with one student undecided. Most planned on transferring to a four-year university, and a few expressed a desire to go to graduate school. I also conducted one, 90-minute focus group with nine participants. These students were not asked to identify their demographic information; however, many students positively identified their sexual orientations or gender identities over the course of the focus group. Based on those positive identifications, I knew there was at least one lesbian, at least one gay man, at least one bisexual, at least one pansexual, and one student who identified as either transsexual or gay when forced, but personally consider themselves to fall in neither category.

Students were asked general questions about campus climate and diversity. They were also asked to share stories in which they felt included or excluded in various settings on campus. When those stories were told, they were asked to follow up by reflecting on the effect that those experiences had on their engagement or success in college. Participants were encouraged to interpret the questions broadly and to take stories and examples in any direction they felt best reflected their experiences.
Faculty participants.

Each student was asked to identify employees that were connected to LGBTQ students in some way. The students recommended over thirteen faculty members. Some colleges employees recommended additional participants. I e-mailed all recommended faculty and staff members. Nine faculty responded to express interest. Out of those, six were scheduled for face-to-face or over the phone interviews. Of those, five successfully completed an interview. Although the faculty were not asked to disclose their sexual orientation, some faculty members identified themselves as LGBTQ over the course of the interview, while other faculty members identified themselves as heterosexual. These faculty contributed essential feedback both about direct student experiences in the classroom as well as insight into the development of curriculum, programs, and policies that make reference to LGBTQ students and thus shape the campus climate through deliberate, systemic action. Due to the small number of faculty participants, it was necessary to remove as many qualifying characteristics as possible from this report. Therefore, no profile of the faculty members is included here, and no comments are attributed to any single participant.

Documents.

Before the interviews, I spent time physically on the campus. I walked around, looked at the facilities, sought student resources, and examined posted materials on walls, in pamphlets, and in any other place I could find them. After each interview or the focus group, I sought documents that made reference to participant experiences. A wide range of references emerged from this inquiry, including references to courses, counseling services, workshops, clubs and organizations, and academic programs. I collected
information available on the web, like crime statistics, schedules of classes, campus wide correspondence, an accreditation self-study, meeting minutes, etc. (See Appendix H for a full list of documents analyzed).

**Conceptual framework.**

Using Atlas TI, codes and themes were organized into networks that addressed each of the elements of the conceptual framework described in the Review of the Literature. That framework was made up of campus climate theory and student engagement theory. Together, the framework for this dissertation suggests that the campus climate informs the extent to which students are engaged in meaningful learning activities; this is particularly important for underrepresented students, who often view the campus climate as more hostile and less welcoming than other students (Hurtado, 1992; Kuh, 2001). That engagement, in turn, leads to greater persistence and student success (Kuh, 2009; Astin, 1999). This framework suggests that, by better understanding campus climate and student engagement, colleges can make improvements to both that will lead to improved college engagement and success.

**Question 1 – How do self-identified LGBTQ community college students describe their community college campus climate?**

In order to create an understanding of LGBTQ student perceptions of campus climate, participants were asked to describe the campus climate as well as their personal experiences on campus. The answers and stories that students told, along with supporting documentation, were analyzed and arranged in a way that describes the external and internal factors of campus climate outlined in the Review of the Literature (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Overall, participants perceived the campus
climate as relatively inclusive of LGBTQ students; that inclusivity was relative to the experiences the students had had in their homes, in their high schools, and in their communities.

**External Factors**

According to campus climate theory, campus climate is informed by its socio-historical and the political contexts (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). As demonstrated in the Review of the Literature, the context for these students is characterized by a long history of discrimination and marginalization, current shifts in policy and public opinion, and a highly contentious political and social climate around the issue of LGBTQ rights. The phenomenological inquiry conducted for this study adds to that understanding of these external factors by describing the how these LGBTQ students experience and perceive that context.

Whenever participants made references to life outside of Birch College, those responses were coded and combined to create themes of responses. From those themes, four major categories of external factors emerged. In describing their campus climate and experiences, respondents often made references to their (1) family life, (2) high school experiences, (3) experiences in the surrounding community, and (4) experiences with policy and civic engagement.

**Family.**

Many students talked about life at home and/or with their families. Since most of the student respondents came from Latina/o homes, students’ stories of adolescence and family life included references to ethnicity, religion, generation gaps, and adolescent
identity. One faculty respondent summarized these multiple layers of identity in a story she told about a questioning student who had come to her for guidance about her family:

She [was] talking to me about being Mexican-American, how hard it is in her culture to talk to the older generation like her parents- and it just really hit home how many layers there are to our students’ diversity. We’ve got the issues that most of them are fairly young, then we’ve got ethnic identity issues and acculturation issues and LGBTQ issues and gender-all issues and it just was one of those situations where there were so many layers and factors at play.

It appeared as though these rich ethnic, generational, religious, and sexual identities often informed one another to create unique cultural and individual experiences.

The majority of the family stories were about stigma and rejection connected to respondents’ sexual orientations or gender identities; some participants shared stories that involved physical, emotional, or psychological abuse. As outlined in the Review of the Literature, this type of overt homo-negativity is characterized by Herek, Cogan, and Gillis (2009) as “enacted sexual stigma.” This is defined as the shunning, discrimination, violence, anti-gay epitaphs, and ostracism of LGBTQ individuals. In the family setting, participants told stories of having been disregarded, shunned, kicked out, physically threatened, and physically or emotionally abused by family members in association with their sexual orientations or gender identities. Often, respondents made direct connections between these experiences and their perceptions of college climate or their level of engagement in college activities.

For example, Joanne [pseudonym] shared that, when her mother found out that she was sleeping with a girl, she told her in no uncertain terms that she was not allowed
to express her sexual orientation at home. Joanne’s mother, who already had a history of abusive behavior, began to use Joanne’s sexual orientation as a focal point of extreme emotional abuse. Joanne shared one story in which her mother encouraged her to commit suicide:

At one point, freshman year, because of the way that she treated me, because I was going into high school and all the aspects around that and being LGBTQ and just feeling like the world’s against you and all lonely, my mother wanted me to kill myself. She told me to kill myself and I was going to do it.

After high school, Joanne entered into a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with a man, moved to California, and began attending Birch College. Now that she is separated from her abusive mother and violent domestic partner, the college provides her with an opportunity to meet people “like [her]” and to take advantage of the programs and services, like counseling and domestic violence prevention, that she needs.

Ricardo, a psychology major, explained that he is not permitted to express his gay identity in his home, either. Since his family does not accept his sexual orientation identity, he finds refuge at the college. He describes his academic life as his real life and his home life as “purgatory.” As a result, he believes that “School is my life and home is my prison. Because, in my household, I have to be this person, this labeled-straight person.” In response to his family’s enacted stigma, Ricardo involves himself in as many student services and academic support services as he can. Both for Ricardo and for Joanne, it appears as though the college provides a safe space where they can escape the stigmatization and abuse they experience from their family and home lives.
Not all of the stories related to family and home life were about stigmatization and abuse. Both Joanne and Ricardo also spoke of family members who were either LGBTQ themselves or were allies who accept them along with their sexual orientation identities. Other students talked about nieces and mothers who were either “okay with” or openly supportive of their sexual orientations or gender identities. In some cases, as in the stories of Joanne and Ricardo, these supportive individuals were perceived as essential sources of stability, protection, and self-esteem. Joanne described her step-father, who provided some protection from the abusive enacted stigma that she experienced from her mother:

For my coming-out story, my mom would always abuse me and control me and beat me. My step dad would always have to interfere when it got too bad or too rough or something. He’s always there for me and he’s proud of me and he loves me… my step-dad was very happy with me and who I am and he doesn’t care.

Similarly, Ricardo described how his brother and his aunt provide protection and support from the stigma he feels from his family,

The only person I really talk to in my family is my brother and my aunt. My aunt’s lesbian and my brother works with gay people at his company, so he’s okay with it, too. They’re like, “If there’s any type of problem, any type of situation, let me know.”

For these students, it seems as though these allies and supporters were essential sources of support, love, and acceptance associated with their identities as LGBTQ people. This dynamic implies that positive role models make a critical difference in the lives of these
participants, and that this difference may be particularly important to those participants who experience alienation and abuse in association with their LGBTQ identities.

**High school.**

Most of the student participants had stories of high school, some inclusive and affirming and some exclusive and disaffirming of students’ sexual orientations or gender identities. Several students came out for the first time in high school, and shared stories about whether or not they were accepted by their peers. Some spoke of LGBTQ clubs at their high schools. When LGBTQ clubs were included in students’ stories, they were described as positive sources of support and acceptance. Susan, a Pilipino and White lesbian, student talked about the importance of such a club in her high school experience:

It opens the door for kids to be like, “Okay, I’m questioning my sexuality, where do I go? Who do I talk to?” Or, they’re looking for a safe-haven, they’re getting bullied, like, “Who am I going to talk to?” Different things, you know, that’s how I saw the importance of a GSA [gays/straight alliance] in a high school; because I had nowhere to go when I came out. I came out at that school…that was my safe-haven, and how many other kids are going to be looking for a safe-haven, too? Because, you know how tough high school, middle school, and elementary is, and those kids need somewhere to go.

Many participants reported that they “came out” in high school. These stories provided a glimpse into a critical stage for participants as they developed their personal identities. Many of these experiences were described in positive terms; participants talked about how “coming out” in adolescence had powerful, positive effects on their self-esteem. Student allies, LGBTQ clubs, LGBTQ and ally faculty, and supportive
counselors were all named as sources of support and resilience during this period of their lives.

For example, Ricardo described how, before high school, he was quiet and reserved with few friends. As a result of his family’s enacted stigmatization of the LGBTQ community, he had been afraid to participate in class for fear of someone finding out that he was gay. However, when he “came out” to his high school, he was surprised to learn that his peers reacted with neither exclusion nor stigma. In fact, many did not have much of a reaction at all: “It was like, ‘Oh yeah, I’m gay, yeah,’ and everybody was like, ‘Okay, yeah. So, what were you saying?’” After he “came out,” he described how the campus climate became more accepting of gay sexual orientation. After experiencing that acceptance, he learned to become much more active and engaged in school and social activities. Now, Ricardo involves himself in as many social, academic, and student services as he can. He describes himself as a “social, outgoing person” who participates on campus as often as possible because he feels that “You have the help; you might as well go for it.”

However, there were also many high school stories shared that included varying degrees of enacted stigma. Participants reported having been shunned and laughed at by peers. They endured the casual use of the term, “fag,” cyber-bullying, face-to-face bullying, and discrimination from administrators and faculty. One student shared a story about how her teacher kicked her girlfriend out of class after telling her that she needed to go to church to address her sexual orientation. Another student said that, at her school, two girls were suspended for kissing. Marco’s story typifies many that participants told about the types of casual enacted stigma they endured regularly in high school. Marco, a
bisexual man, attributes the teasing he endured to a campus culture that normalized homonegativity among adolescent males:

[Guys] would just say stupid stuff sometimes, like “fag.” I remember once, I was sitting in class, in the back, and there were four students around me and I was just observing them. One of them was making fun of me, and then it was like a chain reaction … This guy…would make fun of me because other people were making fun of me because he felt so insecure, and he wanted to fit in. So, he felt like going with the crowd would be okay.

Participants reported more subtle forms of homonegativity, as well. Examples of “felt sexual stigma,” characterized by those who use self-presentation strategies to avoid being labeled as LGBTQ, also emerged from the data (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2009). This stigma presents itself in a variety of ways; for instance, LGBTQ people may feel uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientations or gender identities because they would prefer to avoid stigmatization; another example would be people (either LGBTQ or hetero) disassociating themselves from “out” LGBTQ people for fear of being labeled as such themselves. A few stories emerged in which participants experienced this type of stigma. Some participants felt that students and faculty members avoided them as a result of their sexual orientation. Susan talked about how this “felt stigma” prevented her from engaging in sports in high school. When she tried to join the basketball team, she felt shunned by the other team members:

My whole high school knew that I was the only lesbian on campus, … so it just felt like I was a threat … they get into that idea like, “Oh, she’s a lesbian, I’m a
woman, she’s gonna to hit on me;”… “She’s gonna make moves;” “She’s gonna brainwash me into liking her.” They wouldn’t talk to me.

Susan explained that this type of felt stigma was a common experience for her:

Because for some reason, whenever someone would talk to me in high school, other people would automatically assume that I was with them or talking to them on a relationship-level… being the only lesbian on campus in high school, I would say it was the hardest thing, ever, really.

Sometimes, this adolescent homonegativity was turned inward. “Internalized self-stigma” is a form of sexual stigma that becomes part of one’s personal system of values (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2009). This stigma is experienced by both hetero and LGBTQ individuals. In the focus group, for example, one student shared that when she was a teenager, she felt unable to accept herself:

Even if other people accepted me, I didn't accept myself… My pre-teen years, about 14 and 15- those were my hardest years because I felt as if I came out, nobody would like me, people would disown me, people wouldn't want to be my friend anymore.

Ricardo’s self-stigma manifested itself in the form of deliberate self-harm; he shared that he was a “cutter” in high school. He reported that he used to cut into himself because he was “torn about what [his] confusion was.” Alex, a sociology major, shared that he used to bully other students in school because he struggled to accept his own sexual orientation. Later, when Alex came to accept his sexual orientation identity, he became devoutly dedicated to helping other both LGBTQ and hetero people learn more about the LGBTQ community so that other people will not suffer in the same way he did.
Based on these findings, it seems as though these adolescent experiences of “coming out” in high school had a profound impact on participants’ formation of identity, beliefs, and behaviors. There appears to be a link between the experiences around sexual identity in high school and the perception of campus climate and level of engagement at Birch College. Many participants described these high school experiences as sources of resilience and inspiration that they bring to bear when they walk onto the community college campus.

Community.

Stories and perceptions about life in the surrounding community often emerged over the course of student interviews and in the focus group. From all the stories participants told, three major themes around community emerged. First of all, student participants often talked about their experiences, both affirming and disaffirming, with their respective Christian and Catholic communities. Second, several students shared their experiences about feeling stigmatized in their respective neighborhoods. Finally, even when they were not feeling stigmatized, there were several examples of how participants remained hyper vigilant in their community in order to avoid homonegative experiences, or even to avoid situations in which their physical safety might be at risk. These experiences often appeared to be linked either directly or indirectly to college resilience and engagement.

The neighborhood is predominantly Latina/o and Catholic. A few students in the focus group shared that, despite the community’s reputation, there are, in fact, a number of LGBTQ community members living in the area:
A lot of people around and outside of the area assume that it's completely bad, everyone's in the closet, you can't see anyone who's gay over there, but I do see people there and...I know a ton of trans women who live around me, and I know several trans men who come around the area.

Despite the community’s reputation for being stigmatizing toward LGBTQ people, many participants felt safe enough in their neighborhoods to walk with their partners down the street without fear of violent reprisal. Others felt accepted enough to be “out” and still participate in church, family, and community activities. There were references to friends, churches, and communities in the area that affirmed and accepted them along with their sexual orientations.

Several participants came from Catholic or Christian homes and communities. For these students, the church and/or their community’s religious identity play an important role in how they experience their community and campus climate. For example, Chris, a Chicana who identifies as a gender-queer pansexual, grew up in a Christian home where the pastor was accepting of Chris’s identity. Susan, in contrast, grew up Catholic, but turned away from the church after her religious community failed to support her when she “came out.” A focus group participant exemplified how the tension between these religious communities and these LGBTQ communities can lead to confrontation. When the topic of homosexuality came up in her Bible study group, she found herself in an open confrontation with the man leading the group over whether or not homosexuality was a sin. This tension sometimes spilled over onto the college campus, as well. In the focus group, two music majors talked about how they feel less comfortable taking night classes than daytime classes because at night, more members of the local church come to
take choir classes; these students perceived the presence of local church members as a threat to their ability to feel safe and respected on campus. Based on these findings, it appears as though religious identity plays a vital role in determining how participants engage with their surroundings. It also appears as though, while some experiences around the community’s religious identity were positive, most were stigmatizing and even occasionally openly confrontational.

Outside of the religious context, many students endured enacted stigma in their neighborhoods in the forms of open disapproval and, occasionally, sexual orientation harassment. Participants told stories of being stared at by passers-by, being whispered about as they walk down the street, getting yelled at by passing cars, and even being aggressively confronted on the street. Again, these experiences appeared to have had a direct effect on college resilience and engagement. Because of the disaffirming experiences they have had in their communities, many participants see the campus as a safe haven from overt acts of enacted stigma. One focus group participant shared, “In the streets, you feel maybe like something might happen or somebody would harm you. But on campus…I guess it's a safety home.” Another focus group participant described how she was able to turn the homonegative stigma she experienced in her neighborhood into motivation to engage more fully in her studies. She shared that her mother’s friends regularly gossip about her, referring to her as “lesbiana.” Her coping mechanism is to work even harder to achieve academic success:

Because I'm gay and they're Catholic, they're old-school Mexican parents, their [kids are] on a pedestal and I'm below them and I'm inferior. And it just gives me motivation… So, every time I tell my mom that I've won an award or I've been
selected to read this, this, and this, she gets to gossip about it…it's fun to play with them, their gossiping, their pedestals and chop them down little by little.

When students are not experiencing homonegative stigma on the streets or in their communities, they are taking precautions in order to keep themselves safe. One student shared that she avoids the local fitness center locker room for fear that someone might think that she is looking at other women while they change. Luis, a Latino gay man who is studying fashion design, said that, for the most part, he feels safe to be “out” in his community; however, even he takes precautions. He shared that once, when he was walking down the street with two female friends, they noticed that some men were staring at him in a threatening way. He was obliged to walk in between his two friends in order to avoid any potential for conflict. A focus group participant pointed out that, although she feels relatively accepted by the campus community, she worries that homonegative community members could walk onto the campus at any time. Susan summarized this constant state of hyper vigilance with the following statement, “Wherever you go, it’s always there, so that’s why I fear, my major fear of just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Participants experienced an array of both affirming and disaffirming experiences in their community related to their LGBTQ identities; however, the majority of notable stories were about communities that offered more stigma and alienation than support and acceptance. Again, those experiences are brought to bear when students enroll at the local community college. It appeared as though even these disaffirming experiences were often linked to college resilience and engagement. As a direct result of their homonegative
experiences in the community, students appeared to rely on the college all the more to provide a physically safe, socially inclusive, and academically affirming environment.

**Political and civic engagement.**

Participants also made several references to their involvement in LGBTQ-related political and civic activities in and around their communities. These responses provide phenomenological evidence for how these students experience the larger sociopolitical context that ultimately informs the climate of the campus. This sociopolitical context is characterized by greater visibility of the LGBTQ community as well as increasing politicization of LGTBQ rights and identities. National debates about gay marriage, Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and teaching LGBTQ-related topics in schools appeared to have had both a direct and indirect impact on participants’ level of social and political engagement. The increase in size and number of LGBTQ groups and empowerment campaigns, like the Human Rights Campaign, gay pride celebrations, and various LGBTQ awareness campaigns, seem to have provided participants with opportunities to become socially and politically involved with local and national LGBTQ communities. Perhaps as a direct result, many participants saw themselves as educators and advocates for the LGBTQ community. Five of the ten students interviewed and at least three students in the focus group used the term “educators” to describe how they saw their LGBTQ role. These students reported that they actively sought opportunities to engage in dialogue and answer questions that people have about their sexual orientations and gender identities. As Chris put it, “I’ve got to speak out my mind or no one’s going to listen.”
Some participants engaged directly in political and civic activities. Joanne, who is in the military, joined the Human Rights Campaign when she was in high school. Through her affiliation with that organization, she wrote letters to help repeal the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell law. She feels a personal sense of pride and responsibility for the success of that campaign. Alex, who bullied LGBTQ students in high school, now enjoys volunteering in the community in order to provide support to LGBTQ community members. Students and faculty members also cited several examples of students either participating in or wanting to participate in other forms of civic and political engagement, as well. Activities cited include AIDS Walk, Day of Silence, National Coming Out Day, LGBTQ History Month, Gay Week (a local event in a nearby community), Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and Transgender Awareness Month. When asked what his motivation was for engaging in these types of activities, Luis said that he just wanted “to feel a little bit more freedom and more secure in the community.”

Again, it appears as though there is a link between the sociopolitical context and participants’ level of college engagement and resilience. These students respond to a lively, contentious national presence by becoming more engaged in LGBTQ-related campaigns and topics, both on and off campus. That engagement seems to provide essential motivation and sense of purpose for students who are struggling to make their world safer and more secure.

Participants’ identities and perceptions of the world had been clearly informed by experiences at home, in high school, in the community, and in the larger sociopolitical context. These unique identities and perceptions are brought to bear on their community college experience. Often, students were able to link their experiences with stigma in
these external spheres to their educational resilience and campus engagement.

Participants seemed to perceive that the campus climate was safer than their other systems of influence. At the same time, it appeared as though many also felt compelled to stay politically and civically active. They appeared to do this in order to feel even safer, more valued, and more included in the world.

**Internal Factors**

According to Hurtado, et al (1998), in addition to these external dimensions, there are also four internal dimensions that help to shape campus climate. Those dimensions include (1) how diverse a campus is, (2) how included or excluded groups feel, (3) what the perceptions and attitudes are among groups on campus, and (4) how the groups relate to one another on campus. In order to examine the campus climate at this particular site for these LGBTQ students, themes and networks were created for each of these dimensions. The document analysis was particularly helpful in describing these internal factors. Documents, such as the college’s strategic plan, crime reports dating back to 2002, weekly bulletins dating back to 2008, and meeting minutes, provided triangulated data that helped create a larger context for participants’ perceptions and experiences. The combined analysis of faculty interviews, student interviews, the student focus group, and the relevant documents are discussed here in three sections, including (1) campus diversity, (2) respondents’ perceptions of LGBTQ inclusion or exclusion, and (3) intergroup interactions and perceptions. Taken together, these internal factors contribute to a campus climate with two faces: The college is on the one hand relatively inclusive of LGBTQ students, but at the same time, it is also characterized by a constant subtext of subtle alienation.
Diversity.

According to a college overview, Birch College is a large community college located in a highly populated urban area. The majority of the students attending this college are students of color. Nearly 80% of the student body identifies as Latina/o or Hispanic, and over 15% of the students identify as Asian. The remaining students are Black/African American, Caucasian, or Other. The top three primary languages are English, Spanish, and Chinese. Women make up nearly 60% of the institution, and over 60% of the students are under the age of 25. There is no formal count of LGBTQ at the college. However, the club’s primary social networking site has 357 friends, and there were over 20 students attending the meeting that I attended. There is also no official indication of the religious breakdown of the student body; however, based on reports from student and faculty interviews, many students at the college appear to have a strong affiliation with the Christian or Catholic faith. One faculty added that she also saw Buddhist and Muslim students on campus, but agreed that there were not as many students of that faith as there are students of the former two faiths.

Documents were collected and analyzed to help create a picture of the extent to which the college is diverse and how group identity manifests itself in the curriculum of the college. Schedules of classes from fall 2011, winter 2012, and spring 2012 were examined and coded for references to LGBTQ identity, gender/sex identity, religious identity, and ethnic identity from the two largest ethnic groups, Latino and Asian students. Next, further documents were collected to enrich this understanding of how the curriculum reflects these group identities. Course descriptions from the college catalog
were coded, and equity data from the strategic plan was collected that reflects the extent to which certain groups are represented in some of these disciplines.

Many classes and images emerged from an analysis of the schedules of classes and the college catalog to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the college. The majority of the images in the schedules of classes were of students of color, mostly images of Latina/o students along with some images of Asian, White, and Black/African American students. As seen in Table 4.1, the course offerings themselves also reflect representation from these larger student groups. There were multiple curricular references in the schedules of classes to Latina/o and Asian cultures and identities, as well as topics relevant to gender, sex, and sexuality.

The college offers courses that focus on Chicano identity in several departments. For example, the college offers Mexican or Chicano emphases in courses in Sociology, Music, History, Chicano Studies, and English (See Table 4.1). The college offers multiple sections of Chicano Studies classes on the weekends, in winter, spring, and fall. According to the college’s strategic plan, Latino/Hispanic students are overrepresented in Chicano Studies and Spanish courses.

Though less prevalent, there was also a strong Asian cultural identity apparent in the schedule of classes. There were three Asian American Studies courses listed in the catalog, and multiple offerings of Chinese language classes. Chinese and Asian American Studies courses were offered in both of the primary terms and in winter. Chinese language classes were also offered at off campus sites. According to the college’s strategic plan, Asian/Pacific Islander students are overrepresented in Japanese, Chinese, and Asian American studies.
Women were the topical focus of courses in several disciplines, including Sociology, Health, English, and History (See Table 4.1). A women’s health course was offered in both the primary terms and in winter. The other classes in which women were the topical focus were only offered during the primary terms. Women were not overrepresented in any of these disciplines, and course-level data was not available to determine whether or not women were overrepresented in these specific courses. There were no courses offered in which men were the topical focus (e.g. men’s health).

Two classes are offered in which sexuality is the topical focus. One is Human Sexuality and is offered through the sociology department. This course has several offerings in each of the primary terms, but no offering online, in winter, or at off-campus sites. Sexual orientation and gender identity were not included in the language of the catalog description of this course. The other course that offers sexuality as the topical focus is offered through the psychology department. This course concentrates on the psychological aspects of human sexuality. This course does include both sexual orientation and gender identity in the catalog course description. The language used in the course description reflects that the course explores romantic couples, sexual anatomy, gender identity, sexual orientation, love and attraction, and a range of medical and psychological aspects of sexuality. No LGBTQ, queer, or gender studies courses were referenced. Since LGBTQ student identity is not tracked through the registration information systems, it cannot be determined through the current campus data whether or not LGBTQ students are overrepresented in these courses. However, many of the participants made references to one of these two courses in their interviews, indicating that LGBTQ students may be drawn to these courses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: Courses Referencing Group Identities, by Discipline*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicano Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian American Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modern Languages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This table does not include all group identities referenced in the curriculum. It reflects references only to groups under examination in this study.

Students were asked to describe how “diverse” the college is. If participants asked what “diversity” means, I asked them to define it for themselves, and then to talk about how diverse the campus is based on their definition. While some participants described
the campus as diverse, most felt that the presence of only two ethnic groups made the campus ethnically homogeneous. Many of the students agreed that the campus is made up of two ethnic groups: Asian and Latino. Luis mused, “There are Asians, Latinos, and a few Black people and that's pretty much it.” Jacob, a Latino and gay young man, classified the ethnic breakdown more specifically, “There are two minorities: Latin – predominantly Mexican because central Americans are more [in the community] – and Chinese. That's all there is.”

Participants also described diversity in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. Faculty and student participants agreed that there is variation of sexual orientation and gender identity, but that the diversity is somewhat hidden. One focus group participant said, “I think in terms of orientation – sexuality – it's a little more diverse but not as much as we'd like to see. And I guess that goes hand-in-hand with people not being 'out' and their comfort level.” Two faculty members agreed that there is more sexual diversity than meets the eye, made up of both disclosed and undisclosed LGBTQ faculty and students. One faculty participant said that there were many more “out” faculty and students on campus today than there were when he started eight years ago. He said that, when he holds his summer classes of forty students, typically three to five percent of his students are disclosed members of the LGBTQ community. Another faculty participant shared that, although there are not many “out” students on campus, many LGBTQ students who are not comfortable revealing their sexual orientation publically will “out” themselves to her privately in essays, papers, or during office hours.
Students and faculty respondents were asked to describe the overall campus climate in broad terms of its attitudes toward LGBTQ students. Then, diversity policies, weekly faculty and staff bulletins, meeting minutes, and other literature was identified and coded to create an overall sense of the extent to which LGBTQ students were included in the campus culture. Several references were found to efforts that the campus community makes to create an atmosphere of inclusion for all student groups. These references included: (1) nondiscrimination policies listed in several places, (2) multiple references to the value that the institution places on diversity and civic engagement, (3) evidence that the campus community maintains a relatively physically safe environment, and (4) distinct plans to promote equity in student success.

The students and faculty, however, had a more tempered perspective about how inclusive the campus is toward LGBTQ students. Overall, the campus was described as one that was respectful of different cultures, identities, and lifestyles, and that respect usually extended to LGBTQ students. However, the students and faculty also described a campus climate that is characterized by multiple microaggressions. Microaggressions are described as “Death by a thousand tiny cuts,” and refer to the subtle, non-verbal, or even preconscious daily actions that marginalize members of underrepresented groups (Pierce, 1995; Rankin, et al, 2010). As a single event, these acts may go unnoticed or may be forgotten. However, over time, the persistence of these microaggressions contributes to a constant subtext of threat and stress for members of minority groups (Pierce, 1995; Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000).
Judging by the documentation alone, the college appears to be one that is inclusive of all groups, including LGBTQ students. The nondiscrimination policies, which are applied to both hiring policies and policies providing protection from other kinds of discrimination and harassment on campus, have language that is inclusive of sexual orientation. This language comes directly from the California Education Code, which includes sexual orientation on the list of groups legally protected from harassment and discrimination in educational institutions receiving state financial aid (California Education Code, §66270). This policy is applied to all colleges in the state. This boiler plate language reads, “The Chancellor’s Office and the California community colleges, in compliance with federal and state laws, do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, medical condition, sexual orientation, domestic partnership or any other legally protected basis.”

This statement can be found in several places in college documents, including in the college application, the student club charter membership rules, the fee waiver application, the academic calendar, the faculty handbook, the schedules of classes, and the college catalog. The campus has a designated compliance officer to ensure that the college practices are aligned with federal and state codes. If students or employees feel as though they have been the victim of prohibited discrimination or harassment, the college catalog includes step-by-step information on how to take action. That information is complete with steps to take to address the behavior as well as contact information on how to contact the compliance officer in order to file a complaint.
Variations and applications of this policy show up in other documents, as well. The professional development guide encourages faculty and staff to meet their professional development obligation by attending activities that explore “Student, faculty, and staff diversity (e.g. sexual harassment workshops, affirmative action conference, cultural diversity seminars, and multicultural activities).” The catalog also includes language that specifies that all programs and activities will be conducted in a manner that is “Free of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, creed, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexual orientation, age, handicap or veteran status.” It should be noted that, although “sexual orientation” is now included in the state’s nondiscrimination and anti-harassment laws, and therefore in the college’s nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies, there is no mention of gender identity that I could find in any of these statements of policy or values.

There were also references to inclusivity and cultural awareness in the college’s statement of “core competencies.” These competencies make up the institutional learning outcomes; they describe the competencies that students should have mastered once they have completed a college program of study. According to this statement, college completers should have gained among their list of skills competency in the areas of “Cultural and Global Awareness.” Areas of cultural and global awareness include respect for “individual racial, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation differences, and those with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities” as well as “tolerance toward individuals from different religions, cultures and traditions, and those who express differing political views.” These core competencies were adopted in early 2007, and are widely distributed throughout official college documents.
One way to measure group inclusivity is to count how many times groups are referenced (or “included”) in regular correspondences to faculty and staff. To examine this, all of the college’s weekly faculty and staff bulletins from 2008 to 2011 were collected and analyzed in Atlas TI to detect references to student groups, as seen in Table 4.2. Over that period of time, LGBTQ language was referenced twice in 2008 – once when announcing AIDS Walk and the second time in reference to domestic violence awareness month. Next, an analysis was made of how many times other demographic groups were referenced in the bulletin. Black/African American groups were referenced zero times. Asian/Chinese group references emerged six times in connection to events, scholarships, faculty promotions, and one student club. References to Chicano/Latina/o/Hispanic groups occurred 30 times in connection with requests for campus leadership positions, announcements of promotions, events, scholarships, and requests from the library for recommendations for what books to purchase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total occurrences</th>
<th>LGBTQ</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Religio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLBT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chican</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant voices.

With a few notable exceptions, participants described the overall campus attitude toward LGBTQ students as inclusive. Student participants felt accepted by many of their peers of all sexual orientations, and often had very positive things to say about their
interactions with college faculty and employees. A number of respondents pointed out that the climate at this college was more inclusive than the climates of other colleges where they have worked or studied. Marco described how he found the campus climate at Birch College to be more “down to Earth,” or more comfortable than another urban college that he had attended. Chris compared Birch College with other campus colleges similarly:

For the most part, in the broad sense, it’s more accepting. Let’s say when I was going to another college … they seem more closed-off. I feel more diversity here… There might be the bad apples that will come out and say stuff to you, but for the most part, people are accepting your life…It’s just who you are, and it’s just a minor thing.

Many other students described that they felt as though their sexual orientations were, for the most part, not a basis for exclusion from campus activities, classroom discussions, or student services. They felt safe to walk around campus and be “out” in many contexts at the college. One faculty member described the overall attitude toward LGBTQ students as “quite positive.” In her classes, when LGBTQ topics come up, she finds that the students are aware of these topics and support the rights and LGBTQ students. For example, she finds that the vast majority of her students this semester support gay marriage, and were willing to express their support openly in assignments and discussions.

Several faculty participants shared that this climate was not always so inclusive. According to the reports of several faculty participants, there has been a shift in campus climate over the past five years. One faculty participant shared that it was five years ago
that several “out” and “loud” LGBTQ faculty were hired, which played a vital role in the shifting culture. Another faculty participant described an early club that involved a three to four faculty members and a few LGBTQ students. He said that there some students who were “out and open and assertive about their identity,” but that most students remained “terrified that somebody would find out about them.”

However, according to another faculty member, over time, the LGBTQ community began to gain more visibility. The current club was formed, a handful of LGBTQ faculty leaders emerged, and conversations about including LGBTQ topics in the curriculum and in the campus community began to crop up in academic senate and curriculum committees. A few faculty participants mentioned that some administrators were also openly inclusive of LGBTQ groups. That support, in one faculty’s view, is a critical factor in determining how inclusive the overall campus is. One faculty member shared that the administrators are “really supportive of the idea” of raising awareness about LGBTQ issues. Another faculty member was asked to elaborate on what that administrative support looked like. He shared that, when people in power are supportive, “Things happen.” He went on to explain that, in community colleges, initiatives can easily fail because of lack of communication, bureaucratic processes, and lack of college-wide consensus. However:

When you have high-ranking leadership support, things happen fast. The timelines are very short. Things are successful because everyone is on board. Things get communicated; I think that's also the most important thing….it's a campus-wide thing. Everyone knows; everyone gets a flier… that support is very important.
What resulted, according to several faculty participants, was a clear shift in campus climate. One faculty member shared that, although the campus is still not totally safe for LGBTQ students, there has been a clear cultural shift since these changes began to take place:

I see more students that are free than when I started here eight years ago. It was very difficult to see people from the LGBTQ community here, other than the faculty, but now it's easy to identify the students. I don't think they're actually afraid – and I want to be careful because I don't want to generalize – I know there are a lot of students that are afraid, I know there's a lot of students that have been kicked out of their houses because the community that we work with is very Hispanic, very Asian, which typically are influenced by other things. But I think that they are more brave now.

This finding is consistent with those of Messinger (2009). He found that LGBTQ rights advocates who worked with shared governance procedures were able to make colleges campuses more inclusive for LGBTQ students. The advocates who worked within the system were more effective in creating change than those advocates who took on a more adversarial approach.

What seems to have emerged from this analysis is a picture of a campus community that has undergone a shift toward greater inclusivity of LGBTQ groups. Based on the faculty participants’ comments, a presence of Latino groups and Asian groups has been present for some years now, but that the emergence of an LGBTQ presence on campus is relatively new. It may be the case that this campus climate shift has resulted from a combination of shifts in external factors, like the increasing visibility
of the LGBTQ community in political and social spheres, and internal factors, like the deliberate steps that the campus community has taken to include nondiscrimination policies, a focus on diversity, and conversations about LGBTQ students, into the campus climate. Although the campus community has been able to affect a significant shift in campus climate, according to the participants in this case study, students are still subject to normalized stigmatization from external and internal spheres.

*Microaggressions.*

The faculty and students agree that the overall campus climate is relatively inclusive of LGBTQ groups, and particularly so when compared with the climate of the surrounding community. However, beneath this general sense of inclusivity, there was also a general consensus that students also must interact with an environment in which microaggressions occur regularly in a wide range of settings and forms. In fact, microaggressions emerged so many times in the data that they were later sub-classified by both the type of microaggression (verbal, nonverbal, etc.) and the type of microaggressor (i.e., faculty, peer, community member, etc.). At the end of this process, seven types of microaggressions were identified. These types of microaggressions are summarized in Table 4.3. They consist of: Stigmatizing Humor, Nonverbal Alienation, Dismissive Behavior, Stigmatizing Language, Assuming Sexual Attraction, Avoidance Behavior, and Stereotyping Behavior. While these categories do not cover the breadth of all possible microaggressions, they do encapsulate the majority of experiences reported by these participants. The types of microaggressions are defined in Table 4.3, and will be used to categorize microaggression this chapter.
The most frequently-reported microaggression fell into the category of
“Stigmatizing Humor.” This type of microaggression is characterized by humor about the
LGBTQ community that results in the marginalization of an LGBTQ student. This may
include LGBTQ jokes that are meant to be funny without being deliberately offensive.
This may also include jokes that are designed to stigmatize. It can also include snickering
or laughing at LGBTQ students because of how they present themselves or when they say
something in class that “outs” them. While this type of microaggression occurred most
often among peers, several examples of faculty members making these jokes also
surfaced. For instance, during the focus group, one young woman complained that her
instructor regularly makes gay jokes in class, but because they were meant to be “silly,”
she felt powerless to confront the behavior:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Gay jokes, snickering, laughing</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal</td>
<td>Stares, glances, whispers, and facial expressions of shock, anxiety, or fear</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype</td>
<td>Repeatedly being referred to by the wrong sex; advice on how to present more hetero; assumptions about what LGBTQ people are like</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>&quot;Tranny,&quot; &quot;fag,&quot; &quot;it,&quot; &quot;hermaphrodite;&quot; also refers to faculty who teach inaccurate/offensive facts about the LGBTQ community.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>Comments and behaviors that demonstrate the belief that LGBTQ students are attracted to all people of the same sex</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Avoid talking to, encouraging, or touching LGBTQ students</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissive</td>
<td>Disregarding or shutting down LGBTQ identity or perspectives; also, faculty failing to intervene when microaggressions occur</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What's so difficult with him is that it's not like he's aggressive – they're just little jokes, but he's constantly joking. He's a huge dork; he'll make jokes and be silly, so when he does that, there's this feeling like I don't want to be a killjoy by saying, “Don't make those jokes.”

This example demonstrates not only how hurtful these jokes can be, but how disempowering they can render a student. Since this student’s instructor was making jokes “just to be silly,” she felt as though it would be inappropriate to address that stigmatizing behavior.

*Nonverbal alienation.*

These are nonverbal actions that leave LGBTQ students feeling alienated. These actions may or may not have been deliberate, but they nonetheless resulted in participants feeling stigmatized. Participants described students who would “gawk” at them, appear to be whispering about them, and look at them with expressions they described as fear, shock, or anxiety. The examples ranged from the thinly-veiled stare or whisper to the barely perceivable glance. Chris demonstrated just how subtle and non-deliberate these actions can be:

I went to the girl’s restroom, and on my way out – I always get this a lot – people have to look back and look at the sign to see if they’re in the right restroom or not… and it kind of makes you feel uncomfortable.

As Chris indicates, it is not a single occurrence that creates a climate of alienation, but the fact that Chris witnesses this nonverbal behavior “a lot” that makes the difference.
**Stereotyping behavior**

The third most commonly-reported microaggression characterizes incidents whereby heteronormative stereotypes are used to describe LGBTQ students. In some examples, peers and faculty members would make assumptions about the participants’ orientations or identities based on heteronormative stereotypes. For example, one student described an instructor who repeatedly addressed her as a male, even though she had corrected the instructor on several occasions. In another example, a pansexual student in the focus group had this to say about peers who assumed that she was a lesbian by how she presented herself:

I talk like a guy so they figured I'm a lesbian. And I'm like, “I'm not,” and there's nothing wrong with that, but they'd say it almost like a compliment. Like, "Oh, I thought you were gay! But you're not, so that's cool!" Something is wrong and I don't think they quite realize that.

In this example, the participant felt affronted on two levels. First, she felt marginalized because her peers used a lesbian stereotype to make assumptions about her sexual orientation. Second, she noted that the students inadvertently implied that the fact that she was not a lesbian was a positive attribute. In this example, as in many other examples of microaggressions, no malicious or homonegative sentiments were intended by those who effectively stigmatized the participant. Again, this is a common characteristic of these forms of stigmatization, and that fact makes it all the more difficult to confront the behavior.
*Language stigma.*

This microaggression type is simply characterized by the use of offensive language in a non-confrontational setting. This excludes language that is used to commit acts of legally prohibited discrimination; rather, this form of language is often subtle, usually legal, and unintentional, making it sometimes difficult to pinpoint or address. Some of the examples in this category included deliberate use of offensive language, but again, in a non-confrontational setting. For example, participants were offended when they heard casual use of terms like “fag” and “tranny” on campus. Participants thought these terms were stigmatizing even though the slurs were not directed at them. However, many stories were about instructors who used offensive language about LGBTQ people in unintentional ways. For example, one instructor used the term “it” to describe a transgender athlete. In another example, an instructor used the term “hermaphrodite” in a lecture that was meant to be inclusive of LGBTQ topics.

*Assuming sexual attraction.*

This microaggression occurs when members of the heterosexual community assume that members of the LGBTQ community are attracted to them by default. Several LGBTQ participants shared stories in which hetero peers would automatically assume that they were attracted to them simply based on their sexual orientations. For example, in the focus group, some young lesbians complained that hetero peers often automatically assume that the young lesbians were sexually attracted to them simply because they were same-sex oriented. One woman hid her orientation for as long as possible from her learning cohort because she knew that her peers would retrospectively analyze her every move once they found out she was a member of the LGBTQ community:
You will go back…and you'll analyze everything, and any time I stared at you for
more than a second, you'll be like, "She was checking me out," or "She was doing
this," or "Do you think she was looking at me when I came out of the restroom?"

Another woman in the focus group reported that she exercises extra caution during her
dance classes because she worries that her female hetero peers would be anxious about
dancing with a lesbian:

It's difficult because the women that are dancing or choosing partners, a lot of
time they won't want to dance with another woman; especially a lesbian. So I
kind of wait, like I'll just take whoever's left, like if there's an odd number, you're
forced to dance with me. But other than that, I'll leave myself out of the equation;
only for their comfort level…to kind of keep their anxiety at bay.

This story exemplifies many stories in which fear of this microaggression led participants
to avoid places on campus where it may occur, including gym showers, locker rooms,
and dance floors.

Avoidance behavior.

Avoidance summarizes the experiences that students described in which hetero
peers and faculty members avoided association with LGBTQ students if their sexual
orientation or gender identity was clear. Similar to some forms of “felt sexual stigma,”
this may include examples of people avoiding altogether a student who presents as
LGBTQ. This may include faculty members not touching or not providing the same
amount of feedback to openly LGBTQ students as to hetero-presenting students. In one
example, Joanne describes how some of her peers stopped touching her or even speaking
to her once they found out she was a lesbian. Some participants have chosen to not come “out” at all in some situations in order avoid this kind of treatment.

*Dismissive behavior.*

These are behaviors that shut down, disregard, or ignore LGBTQ students’ perspectives, identities, or voices. This category includes stories of peers who dismiss a participant’s orientation as fake or imagined. For example, several focus group participants agreed that many people tell them that they will “grow out of” their sexual orientations or gender identities. In another example, when a pansexual student disclosed her orientation to hetero peers, she said that, “They wouldn't take me seriously. They were like, ‘You just call yourself that to feel special.’” This category also includes stories about faculty members who chose to ignore microaggressions that occurred in the classroom. One faculty participant emphasized the negative effect it has on LGBTQ students when faculty fail to intervene with gay jokes and stereotypes they witness in class. While the faculty members may not notice or think it is important to speak up when they hear jokes or negative epitaphs in class, according to this faculty participant, LGBTQ students certainly take notice. The message that students hear is that their orientations, identities, and perspectives are invalid or unimportant.

It is important to note that the microaggressions reported, like the microaggressions referenced in the literature review, were often not deliberate or meant to offend. Many microaggressions are committed by people who may not consider themselves subject to homonegative beliefs or behaviors. One faculty member pointed out that, although the faculty overall have “good intentions” toward LGBTQ students, they often lack a critical understanding about the community. As a result, “They may say
or do things sometimes that are offensive, but that wasn’t the intent; but that’s how the student perceives it.” Again, it is because these stigmatizing behaviors are sometimes subtle, unintentional, and carried out by well-intentioned, caring professionals or peers, they are much more difficult to identify and address in a productive way.

**Interactions and perceptions among groups.**

In order to get a sense of how diverse groups interacted or did not interact on campus, participants were asked to share a story or situation in which the campus’ diversity or lack of diversity stood out for them. Then, the most recent college catalog was collected and coded for curricular or policy evidence of intergroup relations. In addition, the campus sheriff office logs from 2002 to 2011 were collected and coded to identify the kinds of incidents that are typically reported to the campus sheriff. It appeared that the campus made successful strides to create a safe environment in which student groups can interact freely. Where there were stories of intergroup strife reported by student respondents, it tended to be between LGBTQ students and hetero students or between LGBTQ students and Christian or Catholic students.

**Documents.**

The college offers multiple disciplines that focus on a diverse range of ethnic and racial student groups, including Chicano studies, Asian studies, and African American studies. In addition, a sociology class is offered that focuses on race and ethnic relations. The curriculum for that course, according to the college catalog, includes topics such as an examination of major cultures, races, and ethnicities, factors that influence their identity, and law and policy around these groups. This class is offered relatively often, considering the relative small size of the sociology department. According to the
Schedules of classes, five sections of this course were offered in fall 2011 out of 34 total sections offered in the sociology department, making up nearly 15% of the total department offerings. In spring 2012, four sections were offered out of 37 total sociology courses offered, making up nearly 11% of the department’s offerings that semester. Based on these data, it appears as though this course is offered fairly often, indicating that this topic is of some curricular importance to the department or to the college.

Another potential source of information about how groups interact on campus is the sheriff’s office. The campus sheriff can play a key role in creating a campus climate that fosters communication and physical safety between students and student groups. A physically safe environment is a necessary prerequisite for students to engage in social and college activities. If there is evidence of intergroup conflict on campus, the sheriff’s office may be likely where that evidence can be found. To examine the role of the sheriff on campus, language from the sheriff’s website was collected and coded. Also, any references to the sheriff that emerged in any of the interviews or the focus group were noted, coded, and added to the analysis.

Through this analysis, only two direct connections between the sheriff’s office and the LGBTQ community emerged. The two connections were inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and there were no reports from any participants of harassment, discrimination, or exclusion from the campus sheriff based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The first of the two connections was found on the sheriff’s website, where LGBTQ language is included on the statement of the sheriff’s core values. Here, the sheriff’s office affirms its commitment to respecting all people and standing up
against “bigotry,” including “homophobia” as well as “racism,” “sexism,” and “anti-Semitism.”

The second connection between the LGBTQ community and the sheriff’s office emerged in a story that a faculty participant shared. About five years ago, this participant was forced to call the sheriff to intervene in a class debate that had grown out of control. During a discussion about gay marriage, a student, who the instructor described as “very religious” and having potentially been a former gang member, had grown overly agitated and argumentative. He was opposed to gay marriage based on his religious beliefs. He grew angry and belligerent when he perceived that he was not being heard, and began to say what the participant described as “some very negative things.” The participant was well aware that there was a lesbian couple in the class who was not “out” during the time of this incident. The instructor tried “get him to quiet down,” but ultimately had to call the sheriff to escort the student out of class. The sheriff’s office intervened again a few days later when the student returned to class with the intent to audio record the instructor without her knowledge. This time, they escorted the student to the sheriff’s office and facilitated the student’s transfer out of her class. Again, it appears as though the sheriff’s office is cooperative and actively engaged in maintaining a physically safe campus environment for all students, including LGBTQ students.

Next, the campus sheriff’s incident reports over the past nine years were examined and coded to determine what kinds of incidents and crimes occur on campus. Sheriff reports were coded and collapsed into 20 categories, spanning from violent crimes (e.g. rape, assault, and forcible fondling) to noncriminal incidents (e.g. student, employee, or visitor “incidents” and suspicious circumstances) (See Appendix I for a full
list of codes). Distinct patterns emerged from the available data that revealed the types of reports that were commonly made (See Figure 4.1). The most frequently reported incident was theft. Between grand theft auto and other reports of theft, this crime makes up nearly 57% of the incidents reported through this data source. The second most common report was for unspecified “incidents,” most often involving a student, but also occasionally involving employees or visitors. These “incidents” may or may not have been rooted in intergroup conflict, like the “incident” that the faculty member shared about a conflict arising from the tension between religious and LGBTQ groups. Since no additional information about these “incidents” was available in these documents, it is difficult to draw conclusions about their nature of origin. However, it is reasonable to surmise that these “incidents” did not rise to the level of illegal activity, since illegal activities were reported separately based on their respective categories. The third most frequently reported incident was graffiti/vandalism. Reports of this kind made up 13.4% of the incidents reported. The majority of the incidents reported on campus, then, were nonviolent in nature, indicating that the campus may not be safe from theft or vandalism, but it is relatively safe from acts of physical violence.

In order to compare these data to other similar educational institutions, on-campus national crime statistics for public two-year colleges were collected and coded. As per the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (1998), all private and public campuses must publish seven categories of crime statistics to the Department of Education each year. These categories include homicide, sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson. That information is then made available publically. While far less detailed than daily incident
logs, these data provide a framework to compare campus to national data. Three years of data, from 2008 to 2010, were compiled for reported crimes at Birch College and for the nation as a whole. The two sets of data were compared to see how safe Birch College is compared to a national standard.

Figure 4.1: Birch College Sheriff’s Office Crime Reports: Compiled Data for 2002 - 2011

When compared to national data, Birch College appears to have slightly lower rates of violent crimes and slightly higher rates of theft-related crime (See Figure 4.2). In the nation overall, nonviolent crimes make up 86% of the reported incidents, compared to Birch College’s 93%. In the nation overall, 13% of crimes were violent in nature, compared to seven percent of Birch College’s crimes. Based on these data, it appears as though Birch College is physically safer when compared to the rates of all U.S. 2-year
public institutions. It also appears as though the nonviolent crime rates, particularly those related to theft, are slightly higher than overall data for similar institutions.

**Figure 4.2 Comparison of Birch College and US Public 2-year College Crime Statistics**

![Crime Statistics Chart]

*Participant voices.*

In terms of overall group interaction, results were mixed. Some participants saw that groups interacted harmoniously. Others worried that ethnic, religious, or cultural tension may lead to trouble for LGBTQ students. Several participants described interactions among groups in positive terms. For example, Joanne reported that, although students sometimes stuck to themselves in social arenas, they interacted fluidly in classrooms:

> A lot of the Asians will be in their own little cliques. The African Americans or the Hispanics, they'll all be in their little cliques, sometimes. I guess it is noticeable here and there. But as far as classes go, I still do see a lot of people intermingling with each other, despite race or ethnicity, gender or orientation. It's getting there, more and more.
One student indicated that, despite the ethnic and religious diversity, the college was a fairly safe environment for LGBTQ students: “There's a reputation for [Birch] being filled with minorities, and the reputation of so many people being Catholic actually scares people from coming out, even though it's like, actually it won't be that bad – but there's that fear because of the reputation; I think the reputation is worse than the reality of being here.”

Ricardo agreed that people from diverse groups interacted comfortably, with no strong group affiliation. He said that the students who attended the college were more focused on education and individual characteristics rather than on group identity:

Everybody’s just human. Students are just trying to get their education. Sure, there’s different races, different sexual orientation, but honestly no one really looks into that. Everybody’s like, “Hey, what’s your name?” And they get to know the person. There’s no, “Oh, what’s your sexual orientation or what’s your race?” …It’s comfortable. You don’t feel disrespected in any way about yourself. So, it’s all common ground; everybody’s a student.

These sentiments reflected the overall observations students had about the campus climate; many students saw the campus as a safe space to learn and interact with other people safely and freely.

In terms of ethnicity, the students seemed to be very aware of the existence of ethnic groups on campus; however, they seldom made references to interactions among these different ethnic groups. For example, Luis described how he perceives a lack of ethnic diversity on campus. When asked to describe a situation in which this lack of diversity stood out for him, he reported that there were not many cultures to learn from:
I think they mainly focus on the Hispanic and Latino community. I mean, you have the art department there and it's pretty much all about the Chicanos and everything. So I think they focus it too much on that, they don't really explore cultures.

When asked the same question, another student said that he missed having Black friends. At his last college, he said, he had a lot of friends who were Black women, and that he missed that mix of cultures that he once enjoyed.

Some participants worried that the presence of such culturally disparate groups on campus may lead to conflict with or stigmatization of LGBTQ students. For example, Susan worried that the cultural diversity on campus may pose a threat to her as a member of the LGBTQ community. She expressed fear of stigma or acts of discrimination on campus:

Sometimes I feel afraid to express myself here on campus because of the cultures some people may have, or some hatred. Everywhere we go, there’s going to be somebody that doesn’t like you for who you are. So, sometimes I feel like that, you know? My partner does come here, to the same school, and … I’m okay being affectionate, but she’s not okay because she’s here at night and she doesn’t know who’s watching. She doesn’t know if they’re going to follow her or something, so we have to play it safe. And I wish we didn’t have to play it so safe, you know? I wish we could be the heterosexual couple that’s like, expressing their feelings, too. So I guess you could say I’m excluded from… the climate of the campus. I’m not allowed to express my feelings toward somebody because I feel unsafe – and how come I’m the only one that feels that way?
Even though the campus may maintain a physically safe environment, if students do not feel safe, then they will perceive the climate as unsafe and hostile. For Susan, it is the perception that affects college engagement, not necessarily the number of incidents of violence on campus.

One faculty member shared Susan’s trepidation. She perceived that the ethnic makeup of the college fostered a climate in which LGBTQ students are likely to experience stigma that will lead them to hide their sexual orientations and gender identities. She said that:

The Latino population, and the Asian population, too, these are two communities that don’t deal well with difference in sexual identities. We don’t talk about it in our communities and so, understandably, many of them are closeted in our community, except with their friends. They’re not even sure if all of their professors will accept them, so they’re fairly closeted on campus.

Although some participants perceived that there was a potential for conflict between ethnic and LGBTQ groups, only one example of a microaggression emerged from the data that was explicitly tied to ethnic identity. Joanne, a White and Hispanic linguistics major, is studying Mandarin, and has thus enrolled in several Chinese language classes. She spoke of what it was like for her to come “out” to her Chinese friends. She shared that some women were accepting of her sexual orientation or even excited and interested in having “a gay friend.” However, other women would avoid her after learning about her orientation: “Some of them would just cringe away or they won't talk to you ever again. They'll exclude you from everything they do. I don't like being in that situation.” When she tries to speak in Mandarin about topics like sexual orientation,
she says some of her peers will grow nervous, as indicated by their body language or by their verbal reactions, “I'd be trying, like, to hug them just to see how they react. Some will say ‘Oh my God, no...’ In Chinese and they will squeal.” It was this tension that led Joanne ultimately to seek LGBTQ friends. She ultimately decided to attend an LGBTQ group therapy sessions and LGBTQ club meetings in order to meet people “like her.”

Although there was little evidence of enacted tension between ethnic groups and LGBTQ students, there was plenty of evidence of enacted tension between some religious groups and LGBTQ students. There was a strong Christian and/or Catholic identity prevalent on campus. Those religious group affiliations were often associated with microaggressions, acts of discrimination, and openly hostile campus confrontations. Four interviewees and a number of focus group participants shared stories about confrontations and tensions with Bible Club members. Some of the students were themselves religious, so they were facing opposition from members of their own faiths. In one story, Marco shared that he was having a conversation with someone from a campus Bible study. They were sharing their experiences of “feeling the Holy Spirit” when Marco disclosed his sexual orientation. Immediately, the conversation turned hostile:

He’s like, “What? How can you still be gay, even though you’ve felt it?” And I’m like, “Yeah, I am.” He was like, “You’re confused,” he was like, “You’re going to go to hell.” And I’m like, “Oh, okay, I’m sorry, you must live in a glass house. You must be perfect,” and we just started getting into it and we went at it.

This story was typical of several other stories I heard of proselytizing students telling LGBTQ students to “repent [their] sins,” that “God hates homosexuality,” and even one
experience where a student spotted a peer with a “God hates fags” sign taped to his back during an LGBTQ Club event. These confrontations ended without violent incident, but they are nonetheless a constant source of irritation and frustration for the participants.

Even in the absence of enacted religious and ethnic tension, the fear of tension between group identities was enough to keep many students from participating fully in the college’s activities. One student in the focus group shared that most people don’t know his sexual orientation because there are so many people who “preach a lot” on campus. When describing the overall campus climate, one focus group participant had this to say:

I think the diversity of the campus comes into play when it comes to people coming out, because one of my friends who attended here but then transferred, he wanted to come out but he felt that because the majority of the ethnic background of this campus are Hispanic/Latinos, majority raised Catholic is a given, he was kind of afraid that he wouldn't be as accepted in his classes.

When the external and internal factors contributing to campus climate are taken together, what emerges is a picture of campus climate with two seemingly ambivalent sets of norms. On the one hand, social and political shifts have led to greater visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ people, and this community college has embraced that shift even more than other educational institutions. There appears to be faculty, administrative, and student leadership as well as a campus infrastructure that supports the inclusion of LGBTQ students on campus. The students clearly perceive that culture of inclusion.

On the other hand, under the surface, students are aware of both real and potential acts of stigmatization. These perceptions of potential or enacted stigma stem from both
specific ethnic and religious group tensions and also from an overall perception of a culture of subtle exclusion. While the campus is free from acts of physical violence and prohibited acts of discrimination, enacted microaggressions and perceived threats of stigmatization are still pervasive in the campus climate. The complex, seemingly dual nature of the campus climate has a direct effect on academic resilience and student engagement. The next two research questions focus on an exploration of how that complex climate affects student perceptions of experiences as well as their behaviors around college engagement.

**Question 2 - What are the experiences of self-identified LGBTQ students who engage in college-related activities?**

According to campus climate theorists, an inclusive, diverse campus climate lays the groundwork for students to engage meaningfully in college-related activities (Hurtado, 1992; Kuh, 2001). Simply put, if students feel safe, included, and respected on their college campus, they are more likely to engage in their educational environment. This engagement, in turn, leads to greater educational persistence, positive change, and academic success (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2009). This examination describes the extent to which students engaged meaningfully in those college-related activities. In order to answer the second research question, student and faculty participants were asked to describe situations in which LGBTQ students felt included and/or excluded in three key settings of engagement: (1) student services, (2) social or student activities, and (3) classroom climates (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen & Allen, 1998). After conducting interviews and the focus group, documents were identified and examined to contribute to an understanding of the contexts and experiences that the participants described. Taken
together, student participants appeared to demonstrate a high levels of campus engagement. This was true despite the fact that their experiences with college-related activities were mixed; some experiences were affirming and other experiences were alienating or ineffective. Ultimately, the participants were able to find ways to engage positively and meaningfully in all three settings. However, the classroom climate and the LGBTQ club seemed to have the biggest impact on whether or not participants felt safe and included at the college.

**Student services.**

When student participants were asked about their experiences with student services, at first many answered that they did not engage in these activities or that their experiences were not relevant to their LGBTQ identity. Three interview participants identified themselves as isolated from activities outside the LGBTQ club and the classroom. One student could not drive; another student described herself as a “home body” who did not spend time on campus outside of class. A third student said that he was a private person and preferred not to get involved: “I really kind of close myself, I keep my emotions to myself and everything.” However, when asked if they utilized specific student services, like counseling, workshops, the health center, the housing center, etc., many students were able to describe situations in which they had engaged with student services professionals both within the context of their sexual orientation as well as for general services and advice.

Of all the student services activities, participants thought about or engaged in emotional and behavioral counseling most often. Some students sought out emotional and behavioral counselors to help them cope with a range of barriers that they faced. Four
participants reported situations in which they sought counseling or group therapy. All four identified themselves as LGBTQ during their sessions. None felt stigmatized by these counselors in any way. Three found counseling and group therapy to be helpful. One reported that counseling sessions were inadequate to meet his needs. Three others wanted to go to counseling, but felt uncomfortable about seeking services. Of the three who were uncomfortable seeking services, two were concerned about being stigmatized by the counselors; the other had seen a counselor in the past, but the counselor had given her advice that was not culturally appropriate for her. As a result, she was reluctant to go back and try it again.

The reasons for seeing a counselor were varied. One student sought out counseling to help her cope after her grandmother refused to accept her sexual orientation. Another student sought counseling services because she was having difficulty at home with her parents accepting her sexual orientation. Chris wanted to see a counselor to help explore whether or not Chris was transgender, but has not because Chris fears that the counselor would stigmatize Chris’ gender identity:

I wanted to get counseling to see if I might be transgender or not, but I’m also scared of getting looked at like, “What are you doing here? You were born this way and that’s how you stay,” or, “How do you expect for this to happen?” Because I have never met the counselor and I don’t know if she would be, you know, willing… to help me out …I find that kind of intimidating because here I am, meeting a new person and letting her know what few people might know. After conducting these interviews, I walked around campus and perused the website looking for documentation that would enrich my understanding of the
participants’ experiences. I found information on a health center that provides HIV testing and basic preventative health care needs to students free of cost. It also provides the free emotional and behavioral counseling that participants referenced. These services were available for students who needed support with stress management, depression, anxiety, relationship issues, eating disorders, domestic violence, self-esteem, suicide prevention, or crisis management. The center also provides free support groups and referrals to community resources when needed. The health center website includes no language that is explicitly inclusive of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Of all the stories I heard about counseling, two stood out among the rest. Marco had a very positive experience with his counselor. He made an appointment with a counselor to seek guidance about his first serious relationship. He found the encounter to be very helpful and not in any way stigmatizing. He also felt more comfortable talking to a counselor at this college than he had felt at a previous college that he had attended. He attributed the difference to the climate of the campus:

She was telling me, “You know, it’s okay, you’re going to be who you are, accept it. You’ve got to learn how to love yourself.”… And I was like, “How long is that going to last? How long am I going to be so self-insecure?” She was like, “Honestly? It could last a lifetime, it all depends on you.” And I was like, that’s not what I wanted to hear, you know? But, I have to take advantage of that and I’ve always wanted to take advantage of it in other places, but I think at [Birch College] - I don’t know what it was, but I felt more comfortable, here. More at home, here, than over there at [the other college.]”
Jacob, however, did not find the counseling services to be helpful for his needs. Jacob sought counseling services after he was the victim of rape. He did not hesitate to seek campus services, and he did not feel stigmatized by the counselor. However, the counseling experience was nonetheless inadequate. The college was only able to offer infrequent visits to a general practitioner; this was insufficient to cope with the aftermath of this violent crime:

I needed therapy… to come to some sort of conclusion and closure with what happened. … They had a big, huge waiting list, and I went about twice, and it just wasn't working for me because there's such a big gap in between the therapy sessions… I felt it was so urgent, but I don't have the money to pay, so I thought, “Oh, great, I can go here,” but still, in the end it wasn't helpful because I have so many things to say and to have to wait 3 weeks to say it.

Bound financially, he had hoped the college would be able to provide him with the services he needed to cope with the crisis. However, the general support available to him was too limited. He said that the therapist that he saw did not provide him with the advice or resources that he needed. He ultimately reported that he had worked through the trauma on his own.

Jacob was the second participant to share a story about having been the victim of violence. Both Jacob and Joanne had been victimized, and both had sought resources from the college to recover from their trauma. In full recognition that experiences with personal violence can have a deep impact on student engagement and success, I searched the physical campus and the website for services available to those who are or have been victims of violent crimes. On a walk through the campus’ student union center, I found
two pamphlets with hotlines and information for victims of domestic violence available in both English and Spanish.

On the web, there is a comprehensive page dedicated to personal violence prevention, complete with crisis intervention hotlines and campus activities. For example, during Domestic Violence Awareness month in 2011, the college offered: (1) two film screenings, (2) three fundraiser and/or charity events for women’s shelters, (3) one candlelight vigil, and (4) five workshops ranging from self-defense to reporting abuse. The website connects students and employees to various resources that cater to diverse ethnic and sexual orientation identities. Relationship violence is clearly defined using language that is explicitly inclusive of the LGBTQ community; the website reminds readers that “Relationship violence can also occur between same-gender partners.” The resource list contained four rape and battering hotlines, including one with Spanish speakers and one that provided services in “Asian languages.” The information for four domestic shelters was included on the page, including one shelter that provides services to Chicanas and one that provides services to Jewish women. There were also two stalking hotlines, one of which connected LGBTQ victims of partner abuse to the local LGBTQ community support center. Finally, there were four phone numbers that victims could call on campus, including the sheriff’s office and the campus’ own violence prevention line.

Joanne, a lifelong victim of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, shared stories of her engagement with the program. She had been the victim of rape and molestation; after a life of physical abuse by her mother, she entered into an abusive relationship with a man, with whom she moved to the area around Birch College. When she was asked
about what campus activities she had been involved with, she answered that she was unable to attend most campus events because she did not know the area, she did not drive, and because her boyfriend had limited the activities she was allowed to engage in.

As a result, the only activities she was able to attend were those on campus. Fortunately for Joanne, there were several activities on campus available to her. She engaged not only with the LGBTQ student club, but also with LGBTQ group therapy sessions and several activities offered during domestic violence awareness month. Joanne described her participation in domestic violence awareness activities in positive terms; she reported that she felt safe to talk about her relationships and her sexual orientation during these activities.

For Joanne, these experiences with group therapy, violence prevention activities, and the LGBTQ club provided her with much-needed support to acclimate to a new life in a new area. Joanne went on to talk about how she would attend more campus activities if they were available to her:

I think if there were more LGBTQ activities I would attend them, because I want to meet more people like myself, which I haven't met that many until I came to these groups. Before then, I was just like, “Where are the people like me?”

The participants’ needs for student services seem to have been at least partially met by the services offered by the college. It appears as though the students who engaged in these student services did not feel stigmatized as a result of their sexual identities and gender identities, and several students reported that they found the services to be helpful. However, other students did not find the services to be adequate to meet their needs. Jacob found that general counseling was not adequate to provide him with the crisis
intervention services he needed, while Chris and other students reported that, while they had a need for the services, they were too intimidated by the unfamiliar service providers to seek them out on their own.

**Student/social activities.**

When participants were asked about their experiences in a college social setting and/or in student activities, they talked about involvement in multiple social arenas, including the LGBTQ club, other clubs, campus settings, employment settings (as student workers), and sports teams. The most frequent occurrences of social interaction emerged around (1) sports, (2) other clubs, and (3) the LGBTQ club. When it came to sports or other clubs, participants had a range of experiences, some inclusive and some stigmatizing. However, experiences with the LGBTQ club were resoundingly positive. It appeared as though, at least in this one area, participants were able to create a safe sanctuary from microaggressions and stigma (Greir-Reed, 2010). In seeking documentation to enrich this emerging understanding of student participant engagement, two sources of documentation were particularly helpful: websites on sports teams and campus clubs information such as charters and mission statements.

According to the physical education webpage, there is a large range of sports available for students. Women’s sports include badminton, soccer, softball, volleyball, and cross country. Men’s sports include baseball, cross country, basketball, football, soccer, track and field, and wrestling. Participants talked about their experiences in men’s track and field, women’s soccer, and men’s basketball. Some of these experiences were inclusive and others were not. When asked about an experience in which she felt included on campus, one student immediately answered, “My basketball team.” Another student
described about how accepted he felt by his track team, and even that he had met his boyfriend on the team. However, another student described an experience in which she tried to join the soccer team, but perceived nonverbal microaggressions from the other girls: “Some of them would actually look at me and I would have to go dress in the bathrooms, or I wouldn’t go to the locker rooms.” When I asked her to describe how they looked at her, she said: “It would be kind of like spite.” It appears as though many participants enjoyed engaging in sports. Some students had positive experiences in this area. Others, however, experienced that same undercurrent of stigma that characterizes other arenas of the college, as well.

Based on the documentation, Birch College also seemed to offer many opportunities to engage in student clubs. The student union website listed fifty-one opportunities for students to participate on campus through clubs. Many of the clubs reflected the groups on campus, including the LGBTQ Club, a club for Asian students, a Christian club, a feminist club, and four clubs that focused on Latina/o-related topics. Despite the large number of clubs on campus, participants made few references to participation in student organizations outside of the LGBTQ club. I collected three stories about other clubs on campus, some positive and some negative. Alex shared that he had had very positive experiences with the campus’ American Sign Language club; in fact, the two clubs had even collaborated on an activity. However, when Jacob tried to get involved with the campus’ sociology club, one of the members was rude to him. He described a situation in which the president of the club was indifferent and cold to him when he asked questions about how the club worked:
He wasn't even giving me any eye contact when he was speaking to me, he was very monotone, and I didn't feel a level of mutual respect as a group member, as part of the club…I didn't feel accepted and from that moment I just felt kind of like, if they don't want me here why am I going to waste my time here, let me just go to [LGBTQ Club] where I'm accepted and they want me.

Jacob perceived that the president’s behavior was an avoidance microaggression prompted by his open presentation. As a result of this perceived avoidance microaggression, he never went back to the club, and has avoided activities sponsored by that club ever since that day.

The second story that I heard about a non-LGBTQ club was told by Chris about the Christian club. Having grown up in a Christian home, Chris had some interest in attending a few Bible Club meetings. Some students were friendly, but Chris also perceived nonverbal microaggressions from other students. Chris shared that, when Chris walked into the room, the club participants “would just stare.” When I asked what kind of stare it was, Chris said, “Just like kind of, ‘Oh, what you are doing here?’ Or, ‘You don’t have anything to do here.’” Despite this microaggression, Chris’ religious faith is not shaken. Chris said, “Even though I might not be this way, it’s still a pleasure to read the bible.”

The one arena of social interaction that appeared to be free from stigma of any kind was the LGBTQ club. For the vast majority of the respondents, the LGBTQ Club represented an extremely affirming, positive experience for both themselves and, as they saw it, for all LGBTQ students. It was in that safe space from which participants were able to derive the support they needed to stay engaged in the rest of the campus. For some
students who identified themselves as introverted or a “home body,” the club was the only source of social interaction outside of the classroom in which they engaged. Other students said that the club was the first club they had joined, while others described it as the only place where they felt included on campus.

Several students described the club as a friendly, inclusive place where students can make new friends. In fact, some students felt that this LGBTQ club was more inclusive and affirming than other LGBTQ student clubs they had attended at other educational institutions. Susan said that, while other clubs have felt “cliquish,” this club fostered open interaction among the club participants. For this reason, she “felt more welcome than I’ve ever felt, in a really long time.” Susan described the club as a place where everyone is welcome: “They’re like, ‘Okay, you’re gay- come join us.’ It doesn’t matter who you are, what ethnicity you are. They just accept everybody.” For other students, the LGBTQ Club offered access to a range of learning experiences, including: an opportunity to learn more about (1) their own community, (2) about how they can get more involved in that community, and (3) about how they can raise awareness on campus and in the community about LGBTQ topics. One student shared a story that exemplified how much there was to learn from participation in the club:

It was amazing. I met so many different kinds of people and I didn’t even know what a transgender was, before. It was that bad. And, I didn’t even know what a bisexual was, or what’s the difference between gay and lesbian. So, it was interesting, not just to make friends there that would understand what I’m going through, but it also helped me grow a bit.

122
This finding is consistent with those of Grier-Reed (2010). According to her, safe spaces or “counterspaces” like these are essential survival mechanisms for students who experience microaggressions on campus. Grier-Reed wrote about racial counterspaces as a response to racial microaggressions. However, it appears as though a similar phenomenon applies to these LGBTQ students, as well. Like the students about whom Grier-Reed wrote, participants appear to have created a “sanctuary” in which to support one another (p. 182). In this space, participants work together to make collective sense out of their common experiences and identities.

The club also appears to provide a critical peer network of support that is crucial in an environment in which microaggressions are part of the cultural norm. Participants said that the club provided them with the emotional and social resources they needed to thrive in college. Joanne shared that participation in the club, “Gives me a better coping structure and coping atmosphere, I can talk to people who are like myself.” Similarly, a focus group participant shared that, once she joined the LGBTQ Club, the connections she made have resulted in improved academic engagement: “I've noticed after going to [the LGBTQ club] and after feeling more comfortable, I did a lot better at [Birch] because … I looked forward to coming to classes, whereas before it was kind of like, I didn't really have that many friends.” Chris shared a similar experience about improved engagement and success:

The first year I came in I was like, really bad….My first year, I was terrible at it, then my second year, once I started joining clubs, I started getting more involved in stuff. Especially in [the LGBTQ Club]…I made quite a few friends there and my grades so far have been going up.
There were a few participants who found the club to be inadequate. One student felt as though the club was not politically active enough. Two students reported that they felt as though there were not enough LGBTQ-related clubs and activities on campus. One student shared that it would be much better if there were services for students who could not make it to the club, either because of time constraints or because they did not feel comfortable “outing” themselves:

We have one club… and that’s it, but we don’t hear of other clubs out there and other services out there for the LGBTQ, and I guess we depend on the club to keep us informed of what events are going on out there. But, what if you can’t make it to that? What if you’re busy during that time? Then what? Or, if you want to see it in private… Or, what if you could get a newsletter or even meet up with one-on-one counseling, or just a little focus group.

Luis would like to see more resources for LGBTQ students, as well. He compared the community college campus to university campuses, where there are LGBTQ fraternity houses and centers. On these campuses with more extended services, Luis felt “relieved,” “like you can actually just be a person, walking around and not caring.” Joanne, who describes herself as a person who does not generally engage in college social activities, said that, if there were more LGBTQ activities on campus, she would attend them.

It appears that the students walk a tightrope in social settings between feeling included and alienated. While the tension between the religious groups and the LGBTQ groups on campus remain fairly consistently negative, other settings, like other clubs and sports, may or may not allow the participants to feel included and valued. The one constant factor seems to be the positive support that the LGBTQ club provides. This
network of education, support, and information that seems to be a beacon of hope and inclusivity for these students who have every reason to be uncertain about whether they will be stigmatized or accepted in other settings.

**Classroom experiences.**

Virtually every participant in the study had a story ready when asked about a situation in which they felt included or excluded in a classroom setting. From math and music to sociology and psychology, every student had an experience that connected their LGBTQ identity to a classroom situation. The most common classes in which content, assignments, and discussions were pertinent to participants’ orientations and identities included psychology, political science, philosophy, athletics/PE, health, and arts (choir, dance). Many of the experiences were affirming; students talked about how much they enjoyed connecting LGBTQ identity to class discussions and assignments, and many of the stories were shared about faculty who were supportive and engaging toward “out” students. These positive experiences often led directly to increased student engagement and success. In contrast, many stories included acts of microaggression, and those often left students feeling alienated, angry, disillusioned, or disengaged.

Participants seemed to deeply appreciate those instructors who were accepting and inclusive of their LGBTQ identities. For example, Susan shared that she appreciates that her instructors accept her and seem to care about her: “They don’t judge me for what I’m wearing or what I’m doing. They pay no attention. If something happens and I’m in trouble…it probably seems like they will step in and say something.” When one focus group participant “came out” to one of her long-term instructors, she was delighted by her positive response: “She was extremely accepting, to a point where I was like, okay, I
did not expect you to be this friendly about it... I loved her reaction.” Another student shared how, when he came out to one of his instructors, the instructor provided him with additional support and guidance in the class. Some participants described situations in which instructors’ affirming messages toward LGBTQ students set a tone in their classrooms that made them want to participate more. Marco typified the sentiments of several participants when he said that, “When you feel accepted by the instructor, you feel like you want to participate more. Because they’re like, they’re meeting you halfway, you should meet them halfway, you know? They have your back.” Students consistently expressed appreciation and praise for those instructors who went “the extra mile” for them as LGBTQ students.

Several students described stories about class discussions in which LGBTQ topics emerged. Sometimes they chose to participate and sometimes chose not to participate in these discussions. Luis was one student who chose not to participate in a discussion in a psychology class about whether or not sexual orientation was ascribed or learned. When asked why he chose not to participate in the discussion, he answered that he often puts up barriers between himself and the instructor because he feels like his instructors are going to judge him, even if he has no reason to think they would. He explained that “It’s all just in my mindset, I put those barriers there; I see a bunch of students, they get along well with the instructors, but I really don't.”

Other students were not hesitant to get involved with classroom discussions and assignments that dealt with LGBTQ issues. These students reported that they particularly enjoyed classes that encouraged them to make connections between their sexual orientation and the course assignments and discussions. Some students actively sought
classes with certain faculty members because they knew the instructor was LGBTQ, or because they knew the instructor incorporated LGBTQ topics into lectures, discussions, and assignments.

These participants described the value of allowing students to connect their LGBTQ identities with class assignments. For example, Alex regularly connects his sexual orientation with his classroom discussions and assignments. In one story, he demonstrated how these connections can help LGBTQ students bring their own expertise to bear on their assignments; at the same time, these opportunities can foster a larger dialogue that can raise awareness about the LGBTQ population:

I was in my Psychology class, during my presentation, I was talking about gender identity disorder and they were more interested in me, as a homosexual male. They were asking me questions about my life and my opinions, and I could tell that it wasn’t hostile, but they wanted to know.

Interestingly, one of the faculty participants was the same instructor who facilitated Alex’s class that day, and she also shared a story about the presentation. She agreed that the class was respectful and curious if uneducated on LGBTQ topics (one student asked if “gay” meant that he thinks he is a woman). She noted how the dialogue that followed Alex’s presentation provided a rare learning opportunity for the entire class: “Nobody snickered or started making jokes like we might have seen 10 years ago… people were just very curious and asked questions respectfully as much as they could.” Based on this and other experiences that students shared, it appears as though extending the opportunity for LGBTQ participants to make these connections can have a positive effect on the LGBTQ students as well as on all of the students in the class.
Most of the classroom experiences that were shared were affirming and inclusive of LGBTQ students, but there were also many examples of students and instructors who stigmatized LGBTQ participants through multiple forms of microaggressions. In fact, there were almost as many examples of faculty microaggressions as there were of faculty support. Susan shared her experience with humor microaggression in the classroom, a story that sounded like several others that were shared. When she was in a health class, her instructor tried to cover a topic that was relevant to the LGBTQ community, but did not take the lesson seriously. Instead, the instructor made inaccurate statements and jokes about the experiences of LGBTQ people: “He was just talking about the gay men and laughing about it, and suicides, and laughing about that…he was just making all these jokes and saying all these…stereotypical things that people say about gay people or gay men.” Similarly, Ricardo shared that, in a math class, a faculty member attempted to shame a male student who was staring out the window by accusing him of being a member of the LGBTQ community. He asked the student if he was “looking at girls or…boys.” He then went on to call the student a girl and teased that he must be looking at boys out the window. On another occasion, the same instructor teased another inattentive student by telling him that he should “move to San Francisco” because he was “curvy.”

One faculty participant pointed out that these faculty microaggressions are often not intentional. Rather, they sometimes come from generally approachable, well-intentioned faculty who do not know enough about the community to understand when they are stigmatizing students: “I think some faculty are just in general more approachable; but, I also think they’re more approachable to heterosexual students, not necessarily GLBTQ individuals. And again, I think it’s because they’re well-intentioned,
but they just don’t know enough.” She attributes part of this lack of understanding to faculty’s own experiences and backgrounds. To exemplify this, she shared that she was not raised with an awareness of the LGBTQ community, either: “I grew up in a Mexican family and people never really talked about sexual identity or sexual orientation.” It was not until she found out that a beloved family member was gay that she took the initiative to educate herself about the community. Now, she uses this experience to inform her deliberate practice to be as inclusive as possible for all students in her class. Because she felt like she did not support her family member explicitly enough, she now takes strides to make it clear that her classroom is a safe space for all students.

Participants also shared stories about microaggressions that were committed by other students. Jacob shared such an experience that occurred in a sociology class that focused on human sexuality. Students had been asked to write down a sexual fantasy that they had. Those written fantasies were then shared anonymously with the whole class; however, the sex of the person who wrote the fantasy was included on the assignment. Therefore, when Jacob’s fantasy (which was about another man) was “anonymously” shared, he felt as though everyone knew that he had written it. He described the nonverbal and humor microaggressions that followed:

Everybody looked at me, and…some straight guys in the back took the initiative to… use my incidents against each other, like, you know, as a joke. Like, “We all know it was you who wants to be in Europe with a man.” So, I kind of felt excluded.

Like many participants who experience microaggressions like these in the classroom, Jacob chose to not respond. Rather, he said that he just “laughed it off.”
Students were asked about their responses to the various experiences they shared. What emerged was a wide variance of feelings and reactions to microaggressions in the classroom. Some students reported that they did not let these incidents bother them. Some said that they did not care what the teachers thought about them or that the behaviors were not a big deal. Some students chose to focus on their academics and ignore or try to forget the stigmatization. Other students told stories of how they disengaged from a class because they felt sexually stigmatized. Several students and faculty members shared stories about students who had dropped classes after experiencing one or more microaggressions.

Some students had strong emotional reactions to these kinds of faculty behaviors. Students used such terms as “pissed off,” “scared,” “horrified,” “panic mode” “freaking out,” “knife in my stomach,” and other visceral terms to describe their reaction to microaggressions in the classroom. Some would confront the microaggressor openly, either calmly or otherwise. When Susan was asked about her reaction to her health teacher, she said, “It pissed me off. I got mad at him…it wasn’t right to say those kinds of things. So, I stepped up and I took the right action.” In this case, the “right action” was to confront the instructor about his inappropriate language. Similarly, when Ricardo was asked about his reaction to the humor microaggressions that he witnessed in his math class, he described the feeling as being similar to “a knife to my stomach, or to my heart.” After both incidents, he chose to confront the instructor calmly but firmly about his comments. The instructor did not admit wrong doing, but he stopped making gay jokes in class.
Some stories of microaggressions ended up providing affirming and inclusive learning opportunities for the instructor, the LGBTQ student, or the entire class. One experience demonstrated how a verbal microaggression can be turned into a learning opportunity. A focus group participant shared that one of her anthropology instructors once used the term, “hermaphrodite” in a lecture to describe transgender people. Based on the context, it was clear to the participant that the instructor felt that the term was being used appropriately and respectfully; however, the participant, who had learned about the history and implications of the term, knew that the word is considered by the trans community to be stigmatizing and wholly inappropriate. After class, the participant approached the instructor and told her that the word is offensive to the LGBTQ community. In response, the instructor went home and researched the term. She came back to class the next day and openly apologized to the entire class for using the term. She shared the history and context of the word with the class, and provided resources to students who wanted to learn more about the trans community.

In one example, an instructor demonstrated how microaggressions can be turned into learning experiences by instructors who are willing and able to confront them as they happen in class. One faculty participant makes it a point to correct students who use stigmatizing language in class and to address gay jokes as they are told. She shared how much the LGBTQ students appreciate her interventions. Sometimes, this support allows students to feel comfortable enough to “come out” to her privately during her office hours:

Often the student will come out to me… during office hours and say something such as, “Well, I really appreciated it the other day when you were talking about x
and somebody made a comment that was offensive to me, and you corrected the person, and you made certain that it stopped.” So, I appreciate that because not all instructors do that; I’ve been in some classes where instructors have kind of laughed and even made a comment themselves, and I appreciated you didn’t do that.”

The participants’ experiences with college related activities reflected the overall ambivalence towards LGBTQ student inclusion that seems to characterize the campus climate. On the one hand, participants were able to find many resources and activities on campus that were helpful, engaging, and supportive in the student services, social, and classroom settings. However, at the same time, there remains much room for improvement. Students experienced alienation and stigmatization regularly in both classroom and social settings. Also, some important college related activities that students found to be helpful and supportive, like emotional counseling and the LGBTQ club, seemed at times to be inadequate to meet the needs of students who faced multiple internal and external barriers to student success.

One major difference between the overall campus climate and these specific college related activities is that the campus community has much more control over the kinds of activities and services that it can offer for students. While community college leaders can do little to change the external factors that contribute to campus climate, those same leaders have the power to create activities and services that help LGBTQ students stay meaningfully engaged in college.
Question 3 - How do members of the campus community, including faculty, staff, and LGBTQ students, describe college practices, interactions, or experiences that support or inhibit LGBTQ student engagement?

Student participants were asked to reflect on the effect that their perceptions and/or experiences had on their decisions and abilities to engage in future college activities. Faculty participants were asked to reflect on how the various experiences that they shared affected their students. Again, the results indicated that participants walk a thin line between engagement and inclusion, and disengagement and alienation. Effects of stigma tended to be have mixed results. There were stories of students who engaged more as a result of experiencing stigma, there were stories of students who disengaged as a response to stigma, and yet other students who reported that the disaffirming experiences had no effect on their education whatsoever. However, while experiences with stigma were inconsistent, experiences with inclusion uniformly resulted in increased engagement.

Effects of stigma.

When asked, two faculty participants agreed that it is difficult to tell if stigmatizing experiences will encourage or inhibit future college engagement. One faculty member said he has seen many students who are comfortable with their own sexual orientation or gender identity, but are stigmatized, sometimes severely so, in the home. With these students, he says, he has “seen it go in both ways:”

I've seen students that are like, “You know what? I'm going to show them that I'm better than this.” They really thrive. Motivation. – Those are the students that
everyone wants. But then you see the other students that are shut down, life
sucks, doing nothing, getting into a gang or whatever. So it could go either way.
The responses of the students supported this observation. Students told stories about how
stigmatizing experiences can have a positive effect, negative effect, or no effect on their
engagement and success.

Some students reported that their experiences with stigma have led them to be
more engaged in college. For example, in the focus group, one student shared that he
became much more focused and successful once his mom kicked him out of the house,
“When I came out she kicked me out and she cut my funds, but that made me stronger
and now I've just been accomplishing everything that I wanted to.” Some students
respond to stigma by becoming educators for the campus community. One focus group
participant shared that the climate of exclusion provides her with a sense of purpose that
keeps her coming back. Like many of the participants, she saw herself as an educator for
people who do not know about the LGBTQ community. As demonstrated here, she
connects this sense of purpose to increased engagement in her classes: “I did start doing
better in my course in terms of participation…based on being driven by that feeling that it
has a long way to go, but it can be a good place.” Susan also believed that increased
engagement and participation could lead to a better world for herself and her community.
When she was asked whether her experience with her health teacher supported or
hindered her future engagement in class, she stated clearly that the experience
encouraged her to engage in class discussions more often: “It will influence my decision
to further participate in discussions like that. I always take that opportunity to educate my
fellow peers.” It appears as though, for some students, current or past stigmatization leads
them to imagine a future in which they are more valued and included. This drive motivates and empowers them to engage in activities that they believe will help build that future.

On the other hand, several students shared examples of ways in which they disengaged as a result of their experiences with stigma. Some students shared experiences of how they had to drop classes, drop out of programs, or not try out for sports teams because of the microaggressions they experienced from peers or faculty. One faculty participant shared a story about a student who came to her for advice about another instructor. The student felt stigmatized by the instructor and did not know what to do. The faculty member shut the student down when he tried to connect his LGBTQ identity with the class discussion (dismissive behavior). He also failed to intervene when students made gay jokes in class (stigmatizing humor, dismissive behavior). As a result, the student decided to drop the class. However, the faculty participant was sure to point out that this student was ultimately resilient; with guidance, he persisted the next semester in taking the class with a different instructor.

Two participants—one faculty and one student—shared stories about how stigma can affect students’ choices to participate in campus social activities as well. After Jacob felt sexually stigmatized by the president of the sociology club, he not only stopped attending that club, but he also decided not to participate in other activities that were sponsored by the sociology club. He lamented that he would have liked to have taken part in a political activity on campus sponsored by the club, but chose not to because he did not “want to deal” with the perceived stigma again. In another example, a faculty member told a story about a gay student who was an active member of a mental health club on
campus. One day, one of the officers asked the club president to tell the gay student not to kiss his boyfriend at club functions. The officer felt as though this behavior was “unprofessional.” The president actively worked with the club advisor to attempt to resolve the issue without making the gay student feel as though he was unwelcome at club functions.

Yet other students talked about how their experiences with stigma had no effect on their ability to engage and succeed. These students described their ability to separate emotionally and cognitively from situations that were excluding or stigmatizing. When Ricardo was asked whether his experience with his math teacher had an effect on him in the long run, he said:

I would say no because I am able to know how to react to that situation. I would rather do it in a mature, calm way than an angrily way, so I try to just dust it off my shoulders and just focus on my education.

He goes on to clarify that he does not think of himself as a “victim.” Instead, he separates his academic and his personal life: “It’s between your personal life and your student life, and student life you have to just focus academically and try to separate it as much as possible from your personal life.” Other students described coping skills that involved separating themselves from situations by ignoring it, forgetting about it, or letting it roll off their backs. A focus group participant summed it up by simply stating that “you try and forget about those teachers.”

Effects of support.

While the participants agreed that disaffirming experiences might either support or inhibit student engagement, they were also clear that affirming experiences
consistently support student engagement. Participants provided multiple examples of ways in which an affirming experience supported student engagement. Those experiences were coded, and themes were created to identify the types of affirming experiences that were likely to support engagement. The themes that emerged included (1) curriculum/classroom support, (2) social networks, particularly through the LGBTQ club, (3) connections between LGBTQ identity to major or career goals, (4) and positive role models.

Curriculum support.

Students and faculty members alike were able to make clear connections between the affirming experiences they had in classes and increased college engagement. A faculty member shared an example that demonstrated how inclusive classroom experiences can clearly, immediately, and directly support student engagement. She had the same lesbian student in two classes; one class included an LGBTQ topical focus, and the other did not, and so she was able to compare the student’s engagement in both settings. The instructor noted that the student was quiet and introverted in the class that did not include an LGBTQ topical focus, but engaged and lively in the class that did include an LGBTQ topical focus.

Several focus group participants said that they felt relieved when they found out that a classroom was a safe space. That relief sometimes directly led to increased engagement with assignments or discussions. For example, one focus group participant shared:

As soon as you feel the acceptance, it's sort of like, I can be myself, I don't have to censor what I say, my answers, my papers, I can have my own perspective and
people understand it and be okay with it. I can be myself and I can bring my... my flare to the class, as opposed to keeping it hidden in the 'closet', so to speak. So it's nice.

Joanne described how she connects her LGBTQ identity with as many assignments as possible, “Basically every paper I write for my classes is always on advocating for gay rights and basically anyone's equal rights, but just more to my standards, what's involved with my life.”

What also emerged from the coding was that these positive classroom experiences often led to increased engagement for all the students in the classroom, and not just the LGBTQ student. Some student participants described situations in which class discussions about LGBTQ topics led to lively participation from the whole class. For example, when Alex did his presentation on transgender students, the whole class was engaged and interested in the topic. Similarly, when Ricardo participated in his political science class by sharing his opinion on gay marriage, the whole class engaged in the debate. He described an instant energy shift in the classroom climate:

I think it made it into an interesting topic. Everyone was like, all dazed and just like, “Yeah, whatever.” And I guess when I brought up the topic… they kind of woke up. It was a giant firework that just bloomed and everybody was just interested in what I had to say, or what the teacher had to say, like this is exactly what we need to define.

Social networks.

There were myriad examples of students who engaged in social, civic, political, and academic topics in association with the LGBTQ club. Students clearly felt as though
the club provided them an outstanding opportunity – and sometimes their only opportunity – to engage in college social life. Susan talked about the positive effect a support network can have in college: “I know that school is used for, like, your education, and concentrating on only your education, but sometimes you need people there to support you; you need a support group no matter what.” Luis talked about how his network of LGBTQ peers helped him find the inspiration he needed to go persist in college: “I feel like…the main thing that actually helped me was having gay friends, and that relates to school, too, because I feel like being a strong-minded person helps academically push you into what you truly want in life.” It appears as though the presence of safe, supportive subcultures help these students feel like they can persist in college. In spaces that are free from microaggressions and other stigma, these participants can thrive in a way they may not be able without that support.

**Connection to major/career choice.**

Sometimes students described how their experiences as a member of the LGBTQ community helped them decide on career pathways. Those career pathways, in turn, help inspire them to stay engaged in academic and social activities. Alex, for example, is majoring in sociology so he can give back to the LGBTQ community when he finishes school. Once Luis created a network of LGBTQ friends, one of those friends inspired him to go into fashion design. He said that having this goal has made it easier for him to stay engaged in college:

I didn't know for the first two years…what I wanted to do, to major in, but I was always into fashion… One of my friends told me she was majoring in fashion… I
looked into it and I actually do want to do it. So, I just felt like I know what I want to do now; I really do have this set goal in life, what I want.”

Jacob described how majoring in fashion design encourages him to be more socially active on campus as well. He said that the reason he joined the LGBTQ club in the first place was to strengthen his academic résumé. He wants to join as many clubs as possible to increase his chances of getting into a top design school. As a result of that decision, he became connected to the LGBTQ peer and faculty support network. By connecting their identities with a major or career choice, participants seem to have created both the motivation and the social support they need to stay engaged.

**Mentors and Support**

One faculty member advised that, with proper role models and mentors, students have a greater chance of success. He described these students as “fighting a war. If they don't have the role models and they're only looking at their surroundings, their parents, their neighbors, how they are looking down at them, then that's when it goes the other way.” Many student participants shared stories of straight and LGBTQ faculty members who support and encourage them to get involved and stay in school. For example, Joanne was connected to the campus domestic violence resource network through an LGBTQ faculty member. Another student talked about how much he appreciated a heterosexual identified instructor who kept him aware of various social and political opportunities for LGBTQ advocacy. The faculty, too, shared stories of LGBTQ students who come to them for advice on what to do when they feel stigmatized in classes or where to go when their families reject them.
Few participants agreed on what kinds of experiences supported and what kinds of experiences inhibited student engagement. However, many participants agreed that more support is needed. Some students reported that they would stay on campus longer and come more often if there were more LGBTQ-related clubs and activities. A few students talked about how they would like to engage more fully in much-needed student services, but they were intimidated because they are not sure if certain spaces on campus are safe or not. Chris wishes that the student services professionals would conduct more outreach to campus clubs so students could get to know them: “I don’t even know who they are… if they could go to club meetings and introduce themselves – I mean, they don’t have time to go to every classroom, but maybe once in a semester, go to every club meeting, introduce themselves.”

A faculty member said something similar during her interview. She felt as though if the college had LGBTQ-identified counselors, then students would be more likely to see them. She based this on her previous experience as a queer-identified counselor at a university. She said that students would wait months to see her because of her sexual orientation. She felt that if the students had more LGBTQ role models, they would be more apt to take advantage of the resources that are already on campus.

Most of the faculty participants shared this similar observation. They noted that students who are stigmatized are less likely to spend time on campus or engage in class assignments and activities. One faculty member said:

I do think, being in a campus community wherein there is this sense by the student, “this is not as welcoming a community as I’d like it to be” does affect how much time they want to spend on campus, you know? Do they want to join
clubs and organizations, or do they feel as though it’s so hetero-centric, it’s so hetero-centric that nobody even bothers to ask the question, “Well, what about the GLBTQ community?”

Summary

Using the conceptual framework described in the Review of the Literature, the data that were collected and coded for this case study were organized around describing the campus climate and student engagement activities from the perspective of the student participants. Those perceptions and experiences were triangulated and that understanding was strengthened by the inclusion of data from faculty interviews and a document analysis. Taken together, a campus climate, experiences with college related activities, and the effect of these factors on student engagement was described.

What emerged from these data and this framework was an image of a campus that is making effective strides toward including LGBTQ students and encouraging them to engage in meaningful college-related activities. At the same time, the college still faces barriers to creating an environment that encourages inclusivity and engagement for all students, including LGBTQ students. As a result, many LGBTQ students walk a thin line between feeling respected and accepted by the campus community, and feeling alienated and stigmatized by many of their peers and faculty members.

The college has a strong infrastructure of students, faculty, student services professionals, and policies. As a result, the campus continues to work toward increasing diversity and respect for all student groups. Even though there are many external factors that are out of the college leadership’s control, there are nonetheless many steps that the college leadership can take to improve the campus climate. Alex captured this delicate
balance between college’s forward momentum and its barriers to increasing inclusivity when he said, “I would say the campus has potential to be totally accepting, but there's a long way to go.”
Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This discussion begins with a summary of the study. Then, a discussion of the key findings in the study is provided. The study’s key findings include those that relate to campus climate, student experiences with college-related activities, and their effects on participant engagement and success. An exploration of the implications for policy and practice follows. This section includes a discussion of the significance of the findings as well as recommendations for practice. Finally, this discussion includes three recommendations for research to further explore campus culture, institutional change, and student experiences.

Summary of Study

This case study set out to explore the perceptions and experiences of LGBTQ community college with campus climate and student engagement activities. The aim of this inquiry was to provide essential feedback for community college leaders. Those leaders could then use that feedback to engage in the kinds of activities that foster an inclusive environment that supports student engagement, not only for LGBTQ students, but for all students. The questions that guided this inquiry included those that explored campus climate for LGBTQ students, the experiences in campus engagement for this student population, and the kinds of experiences that support or inhibit further engagement for these students. This inquiry was developed in response to a raising awareness that LGBTQ students experience campus climate more negatively than their heterosexual peers (Hurtado, et al, 2010). This difference is associated with lower
achievement of academic success measures for LGBTQ students (Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005).

This inquiry focused on community college students because this setting is a unique educational institution. Community college students are more likely than four-year university students to be nontraditional learners. Community college is an open-access educational institution; as such, many community college students face nontraditional barriers to student success. Many come from educationally underserved backgrounds (Dowd, 2003). They work or raise families while they go to school, or they need developmental coursework before they can complete college level classes (Adelman, 2004). As a result, their chances of completing a degree or completing their transfer requirements are lower than for students who are admitted into four-year institutions (Moore & Shulock, 2010). For these nontraditional students entering a community college, it is all the more important to create systems that foster inclusivity and engagement so that they can overcome the multiple barriers to student success that they face (Hurtado, et al, 1998). This examination sought to describe the extent to which one community college is inclusive and engaging for LGBTQ students. The value of this examination is that leaders at all institutions can learn from the rich descriptions from the students themselves about the realities of daily life in this community college. The robust understanding that results from hearing the stories of these students can help inform policy, programs, and services that affect all students.

To conduct this inquiry, I applied a conceptual framework that was constructed from campus climate theory and student engagement theory to LGBTQ students in a community college setting. In order to describe campus climate, the external factors and
internal factors that make up a campus climate, according to campus climate theory as described by Hurtado, et al (1998), have been described. The social, historical, political and context that contributed to campus climate was examined in the Review of the Literature; this context was expanded further through the participant descriptions of home, high school, and community life. The internal context was examined through student and faculty participant descriptions, as well as through an analysis of documentation from the campus. To explore student engagement, students were asked to share stories of how their LGBTQ identity informed experiences in the classrooms, in student activities, and in student services. Finally, students and faculty were asked to describe the effects that these experiences have on the types of engagement activities that lead to student success.

Discussion

1. How do self-identified LGBTQ community college students describe their community college campus climate?

The examination uncovered some key findings about how students experience and perceive campus climate. The descriptions that the students gave of the external and internal factors that contribute to a campus climate were robust and largely consistent. While individual student experiences differed, there were consistent themes that emerged from the data. The first theme that emerged was that students perceived the overall campus climate positively, while at the same time, they consistently reported experiencing microaggressions in multiple settings. Secondly, there was a clear connection between the social, historical, political, and cultural context in which these students were raised and how they experience the overall climate of the campus. Third,
the role of campus leaders, like faculty members and administrators, contribute significantly to how students experience the college climate.

Two faces of campus climate.

There was a complex relationship between how students viewed the campus climate overall and the descriptions of the individual microaggressions that students reported encountering on campus. Overall, the students had very positive perceptions of the campus climate. Faculty and students agreed that the campus was a relatively safe, accepting, and inclusive place for LGBTQ students to be. Student participants described the campus as a place in which the faculty were compassionate, the culture was relaxed, the student body was focused more on education and less on group identities and individual differences. The presence of an LGBTQ club created a sanctuary for these students (Grier-Reed, 2010). Faculty participants described a shift in the campus climate toward greater inclusivity of LGBTQ students over the past five years. They reported that the presence of faculty and administrative leadership who are supportive of the LGBTQ community have made a positive difference in the extent to which LGBTQ students feel safe and respected on campus. The document analysis revealed that the campus was physically safe, with lower rates of violent crime than public two-year colleges overall; the college offered curriculum that was inclusive of multiple group identities; and the language in the nondiscrimination policies was inclusive of sexual orientation. Particularly when contrasted with some of the home, high school, and community climates the participants came from, the campus climate appeared to faculty and students to be inclusive, nurturing, and safe.
On the other hand, students reported encountering an overwhelmingly large number of microaggressions on campus; this constant presence of subtle alienation suggested that there was much more to the story of campus climate at Birch College. Students felt accepted overall, but at the same time, there was a subtle subtext of stigmatization that made students very aware of their otherness. The pervasive presence of these acts of microaggressions belied an undercurrent at the college that was difficult to pinpoint, and therefore even more difficult to address. These actions were sometimes overt, like the multiple reports of seemingly innocuous gay jokes told by instructors or students. Some were subtle or unconscious behaviors, like a barely perceptible glance or even a general sense or feeling of otherness. In fact, in some cases, LGBTQ students may or may not have been interpreting behaviors correctly. It is difficult to tell, for example, if an LGBTQ student is being stared at because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or if there is some other explanation. It is difficult to be sure if a peer is treating an LGBTQ student with disrespect because of their identity or for some unrelated reason. However, what is important is that students interpret these behaviors in such a way as to create an overall environment that is alienating.

Connection to external context.

These two seemingly irresolute characteristics of the campus climate could perhaps in part be a reflection of the larger historical and sociocultural context around LGBTQ people. In many ways, Birch College reflects the historical and sociocultural push and pull that is also prevalent at a national level. The participants of this study, like many LGBTQ people in the United States, faced discrimination and stigmatization associated with their sexual orientations and gender identities in their homes,
communities, and at other institutions (Herek, et al, 1998). At the same time, Birch College students, like many LGBTQ people in the United States, are now more visible, more empowered, and have more legal protections than ever. Birch College, like many institutions and movements in the United States, has taken several steps in recent years to create a culture and an infrastructure that increases visibility and support for LGBTQ students (Messinger, 2009). For this reason, the college is now safer and more accepting of LGBTQ students than the communities and homes from which these students come. At the same time, the student participants, not unlike many LGBTQ people in the United States, continue to grapple with stigma that is still deeply embedded in the culture of the campus (Rankin, 2010).

The Birch College campus climate is also informed by the cultural norms embedded within its local communities. Participants were quick to point out that Birch College students are often from the local community. Many participants believed that these ethnic and religious communities stigmatize LGBTQ people. Many of the LGBTQ students themselves were raised in Latina/o and/or Catholic or Christian households and communities in which LGBTQ stigmatization was a cultural norm. Of course, not all of the participants’ ethnic and religious cultural backgrounds were stigmatizing. Some students said that they felt included and visible in their church or in their predominantly Latina/o communities. However, these experiences tended to be reported less often. More often, LGBTQ students at Birch College experienced stigma within the local cultural contexts in which they live. Given this context, it is not surprising that LGBTQ students at Birch College continued to experience stigma despite the steps the college community had taken to create a safe and inclusive climate.
College leadership.

The third major finding of this study is that the deliberate actions of the college leadership appeared to have had a major effect on this campus climate. Faculty participants with institutional memory described the evolution of the current climate. Based on those interviews, it became clear that this relatively inclusive environment for LGBTQ students is fairly new; it resulted from changes that have been made in the last five years or so. These changes began with directive actions taken by LGBTQ faculty members. These faculty leaders created clubs, introduced LGBTQ-related topics in campus committees, pushed for expanding safe spaces on campus, and created safe opportunities in their classrooms for all students – hetero and LGBTQ – to express their questions about, opinions regarding, and experiences with the LGBTQ community. In addition to these faculty leaders, administrative leaders helped to foster this change by helping set institutional priorities, eliminating institutional barriers, and facilitating broad communication across campus. These deliberate actions led to a campus shift that created more opportunities to engage in campus activities that are safe, inclusive, and empowering for LGBTQ students.

Based on the results of this case study, it appears as though a campus climate can simultaneously be safe and frightening; it can be inclusive and stigmatizing for LGBTQ at the same time. These two seemingly contradictory characteristics can exist side by side because the climate is reflective of a sociocultural context that is equally torn between different ways of thinking about LGBTQ people. In the final analysis, community college leaders can do little to affect the bifurcated external factors that contribute to an ambivalent campus climate. However, it is clear that community college leaders can have
a major impact on campus climate by providing leadership and taking deliberate actions to build the supportive structures that LGBTQ students need to feel safe and included – at least on the community college campus – and sometimes nowhere else.

2. What are the experiences of self-identified LGBTQ students who engage in college-related activities?

Student participants were able to share many stories that demonstrated the range and relative impact of experiences with college-related activities. Some stories left the students feeling valued, empowered, and relaxed, while other experiences contributed to a stigmatizing or hostile learning environment. According to campus climate theorists, these experiences have a direct impact on engagement. When students feel valued and comfortable, they are more likely to engage in meaningful college activities (Hurtado, 1992; Kuh, 2001). Creating a comfortable environment is particularly important for fostering LGBTQ student persistence. There is evidence that suggests that LGBTQ students are less likely to feel comfortable or very comfortable on campus, and more likely to consider dropping out than their heterosexual peers (Rankin, et al, 2010). Taken in total, themes emerged around all three areas of engagement, including classroom engagement, social engagement, and student services engagement. Overall, it seemed as though the experiences that involved faculty and the LGBTQ club were the most directly impactful in terms of determining the extent to which the students felt safe, comfortable, and included on campus. However, the other social and student services arenas also had significant impacts on the students’ overall experiences of the campus.
Classroom experiences.

Based on the findings of this study, it seems as though classroom experiences can have an incredibly powerful impact, positive or negative, on how students engage with their learning environments. Participants described in no uncertain terms how faculty behaviors and attitudes about the LGBTQ community influenced classroom engagement for LGBTQ students. Seemingly subtle behaviors, like making passing jokes, or even lack of behaviors, like failing to intervene when microaggressions happen in the classroom, can have leave LGBTQ students feeling alienated from the learning environment. On the other hand, other behaviors, like intervening when microaggressions occur in the classroom, or incorporating relevant LGBTQ topics into the course curriculum, had a huge impact as well. These small gestures of inclusion went a long way in terms of allowing LGBTQ students to feel like they can open up and engage more fully in the classroom.

The stories of inclusion and exclusion had themes of their own. Positive stories tended to be about one of two things. First of all, students told several stories about faculty who were able to tie in LGBTQ topics into the class discussions and assignments or were supportive of students who took the initiative to bring up LGBTQ topics of their own volition. Students were clear about how much they enjoyed connecting their own experiences and knowledge to salient topics in their classes. It was fairly easy for participants to make direct connections between their own identity and knowledge as an LGBTQ student and curriculum in a wide range of subjects, such as sociology, psychology, health, anthropology, philosophy, English, art, and political science. Instructors who were able to foster these connections made an instant connection with
participants. Student participants and faculty participants alike were able to testify to the power of a classroom experience to create a safe, comfortable environment for these students. Once students felt safe and comfortable, they consistently described that they were able to engage more actively and thoughtfully in the course content.

Second, participants often described the transformative power of an LGBTQ role model in supporting educational engagement. These role models were both heterosexual and LGBTQ faculty who created safe spaces for students to talk about their identities both in class and out of class in a safe environment, free from threat of microaggression or stigma. Student participants described multiple ways in which faculty can be role models for LGBTQ students. Some instructors revealed their own sexual orientations (including one instructor who “outed” herself as heterosexual) in the context of their class lectures. Some instructors (again, both LGBTQ and heterosexual), empowered students to be politically and socially active in LGBTQ issues. Some created safe spaces in their offices and made themselves present and available for students outside of class. Students who were stigmatized by their families found vital support networks from these faculty members who were openly supportive of their learning and growth. For many students who did not have LGBTQ support networks in their homes or in their communities, these faculty may have provided a key difference between whether LGBTQ students viewed their campus climate as hostile and unwelcoming or comfortable and inclusive.

Negative experiences tended to evoke one of three defense responses: (1) emotional separation, (2) disengagement, or (3) active engagement. Some students responded to microaggressions by emotionally separating themselves from the behaviors. These are the students who reported that they separate their education from their LGBTQ
identities. For these students, their instructors’ heteronormative or homonegative beliefs and behaviors did not have much of an impact on their learning. It is reasonable to assume then, the many LGBTQ community college students have no major response to heteronormative or homonegative instructor beliefs and behaviors.

However, other students felt significantly impacted by these behaviors. These are the students that community college leaders would do well to consider when they create programs and services that have an impact on classroom climate. Some students responded to faculty microaggressions by disengaging from the learning environment. These students are the ones who remain quiet in class, or who take steps to make sure that the instructor does not find out that they are a member of the LGBTQ community. These students are also the ones who quietly drop the class once they perceive that the classroom is not safe for LGBTQ students. In these cases, the faculty may never know that their behaviors have had any negative impact on student learning.

Other students respond to these behaviors by actively engaging with the situation. When faculty encounter these students, they are made well aware of the impact that faculty behaviors can have on LGBTQ student learning. One student approached a faculty member and respectfully explained why her behavior was stigmatising. Other students openly confronted faculty who made gay jokes or homonegative statements in class. Yet other students approached their LGBTQ faculty mentors to seek guidance about what to do. These stories sometimes had the best outcomes. When the students were empowered enough to seek guidance, and the sought faculty were open enough to listen and respond sensitively, students were able to turn a potentially stigmatizing situation into empowering learning experiences.
This study revealed a number of ways in which community college leaders can make positive changes to classroom practices. Faculty can learn more about the LGBTQ community so they can avoid unwittingly committing microaggressions themselves, or so they can intervene when they see microaggressions occur in the classroom. They can explicitly state that their classrooms are safe spaces that are free from discrimination or disrespect for any student group, or make themselves available to LGBTQ students who need support and guidance. They can also create opportunities for students to make connections between their LGBTQ identities and relevant classroom topics. Changes like these will not create safe environments for every LGBTQ student. Some students will remain fearful or disengaged in their classrooms. Other students’ levels of engagement do not seem to be affected by faculty microaggressions. However, if instructors can incorporate some or all of these activities into their teaching practice, they will engage the majority of LGBTQ students who may fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

**Social experiences.**

According to student engagement theory, classrooms are not the only places where educationally meaningful engagement can take place. Social activities, like sports, clubs, and community work, are also important predictors of college success; in fact, peer association is one of the most predictive factors for student success (Hurtado, Milem, Clayon-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). Peer association is particularly important for underrepresented students, who may perceive that the campus climate as a whole is more hostile or less inclusive than other groups (Fisher et al, 2008; Sheet & Mohr, 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).
The findings of this study supported this theory, and enriched this understanding with descriptions of how this phenomenon is experienced by LGBTQ community college students. This description yielded two major findings. One major finding is that the college provides a powerful source for positive engagement and support through the LGBTQ club. The second major finding is that there is also a significant source of intergroup conflict between the religious groups and LGBTQ groups on campus; ultimately, this intergroup conflict may be a manifestation of a larger sociocultural debate.

It appears as though these students derived a strong sense of belonging and identity through their affiliation with the LGBTQ club. Similar to the sanctuaries or counterspaces that Grier-Reed (2010) described, the club provides a safe space for students to feel welcome and normal. The fact that students identified this club as their primary, and sometimes their only, social network underscores its importance. Students saw the club as an opportunity to learn about their own LGBTQ community, to teach others on campus about the community, and to find peer support and acceptance that is vital to student success. It is noteworthy that this club was described as particularly inclusive, even when compared to other LGBTQ clubs. This may account for why this club has such a high membership when compared to LGBTQ clubs at other community colleges. This may be an indication that the mere presence of an LGBTQ club is not alone sufficient to create a successful peer support network. To create a powerful network such as this one, the club needs also to be open and accepting of all potential members, irrespective of cultural background, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
While the LGBTQ club provided participants with the most inclusive social experiences, the Bible club provided participants with the most frustrating and stigmatizing social experiences. Participants were frequently confronted by Bible club members who reproached them for being members of the LGBTQ community. While a few interactions between the LGBTQ students and the Bible club students were peaceful, the vast majority of the stories that stood out for students were those that were characterized by intergroup conflict.

This campus tension between the religious group and LGBTQ group may again be a microcosm of a larger sociocultural debate occurring in the United States. For example, LGBTQ rights advocates are attempting to enact legal assurances that LGBTQ marriages will be recognized by civil governments; however, some religious groups, including many Christian and Catholic churches and congregations, oppose the legal union on religious grounds. As a result, a contentious debate between groups on either side of the issue has erupted. The confrontations between the LGBTQ club members and the Bible club members may be a manifestation of this larger debate. This conflict may also be rooted in the recent increased visibility of LGBTQ students on campus. Hurtado, et al (1998) warned that increasing the visibility of an underserved group on campus may result in increased conflict among other groups. The increased visibility of LGBTQ students, along with the increased tension in the larger sociocultural discourse, may be contributing significantly to this intergroup conflict.

In the final analysis, it appears that the social arena for these LGBTQ students can vacillate sharply between being supportive and confrontational. The presence of the very support structure that participants depend on for sanctuary may also be contributing to
increased conflict with other groups. That is, the presence of a large and active LGBTQ club has raised the visibility of this group on campus. As Hurtado, et al (1998) explain, this increased visibility can sometimes result in increased intergroup conflict on campus. In this case, potential for conflict may be compounded by a sociocultural debate that puts LGBTQ students at odds with Christian and Catholic students. The result is a social arena that provides opportunities for both support and confrontation, inclusion and exclusion for LGBTQ students.

**Student services.**

Finally, there was one major finding in the area of student services engagement. This evidence revealed that, although LGBTQ students utilized many student services, the service that they seemed to want the most was emotional and behavioral support. This finding may not come as surprise. Many participants had grappled with stigma, abuse, and rejection. Many also said they had limited support networks at home. These participants were also particularly academically resilient. They were likely to seek out the help they need to be successful. Given those characteristics, it makes sense that this may be a population that both needs and seeks these particular support services.

The counseling and group therapy services appeared to provide supportive resources for students who were struggling with stigma from families or relationship trouble. However, the counseling services were not adequate to serve the needs of other students. The student who sought counseling because he had been the victim of sexual violence, for example, did not find the services adequate. Other students, who had reported that they had not seen a counselor because they were either afraid or had had bad experiences in the past, were also not served.
Based on the experiences of these students, it appears as though counseling services are needed and desired. However, it also appears as though, at least for some of these students, these services would be more effective if more outreach was done to this student group. For example, if the student who was the victim of sexual violence had been connected to the myriad of violence intervention services that are available through campus, he may have been able to receive additional vital resources. If counselors had introduced themselves or were otherwise made known to the LGBTQ club, they could have made it clear to students that counseling offices were safe spaces for LGBTQ students. Then, students who needed counseling but felt reluctant to seek it out may have taken the extra step to seek out those services.

Birch seems to provide LGBTQ students with many college-related activities that are positive and affirming; however, students are often left feeling alienated and unsupported in the classroom, social, and student services areas. On the one hand, students describe having access to LGBTQ faculty role models, supportive social networks, and student services that help them build academic resilience. At the same time, it appears as though the counselors, faculty, and students remain unaware of the subtle ways in which they can contribute to an LGBTQ student’s sense of otherness. As such, the college may benefit from increased awareness and increased dialogue about how to include and celebrate diversity, not only as it relates to ethnicity and gender, but also as it relates to sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. How do members of the campus community, including faculty, staff, and LGBTQ students, describe college practices, interactions, or experiences that support or inhibit LGBTQ student engagement?

Two key findings emerged from this analysis. One key finding in this area is that it is difficult to determine how disaffirming or stigmatizing experiences might affect student engagement for these participants; some students may not be affected by stigma, while some students may disengage, and yet other students may engage further as a result of their disaffirming experiences. The second key finding is that it is not difficult to determine how supportive or affirming experiences affect student engagement; students consistently reported that their positive college-related experiences resulted in increased engagement and student success.

There appeared to be no predictable response to stigma. Rather, each student brings with them their individual blend of personal experiences, emotional strengths, personality characteristics, and areas of need. Some students emotionally separated from stigma fairly easily. They were able to let the microaggressions pass without evoking an overt emotional response. Other students felt empowered or became more resilient because of the stigma. Two major types of empowerment/resilience emerged. The first and by far most common form of empowerment came from students who saw themselves as educators or ambassadors of the LGBTQ community. These students seemed to believe that stigma and discrimination stem from ignorance, not from innate cruelty or hate. As such, for these students, the way to alleviate that stigma is to address that ignorance. These students actively sought opportunities to educate peers and faculty about the LGBTQ community. They were eager for students to ask them questions about
being an LGBTQ person so that they could raise awareness, clear up misunderstandings, and clarify realities and myths about the LGBTQ community.

The other common form of resilience came from students who responded to stigma by working harder in order to succeed. Some students were more engaged academically because they either wanted to prove those who had alienated them wrong or because they wanted to help others who are in similar situations. Either way, the effect of stigma for many of these students was to engage more in the kinds of academic and social activities that are associated with student success.

However, many students disengaged in response to stigma. Those students who chose not to disclose their LGBTQ identity during class discussions, remained quiet in class for fear of being stigmatized by faculty or peers, dropped their classes, did not try out for sports teams, or avoided campus clubs and social activities were all doing so as a direct result of a stigmatizing event or events. It should be noted that the participants of this study self-selected. As such, these participants were highly engaged and resilient. If I were to have interviewed students who were not “out,” not connected to the LGBTQ club, or had dropped out of college altogether, I may have gotten a different set of responses.

While stigma had varied results on student engagement, it was clear that the presence of supportive, affirming experiences almost always had a positive effect on engagement in a variety of areas. Students regularly reported that their engagement in the LGBTQ club provided them with peer support and coping skills that they needed to remain engaged in academic work. Students also reported that their interactions with peers and instructors in the classroom had a direct impact on their engagement. Students
often reported that they were able to relax and be themselves once they perceived that a classroom environment was a safe space. Once that comfort level was established, students wanted to go to class more often and reported being more likely to express their LGBTQ identities in classroom assignments and discussions.

Ultimately, the examination of Birch College revealed a campus climate that is improving for LGBTQ students. Right now the college climate, the college activities, and the student experiences are mixed in terms of their ability to support or inhibit LGBTQ student engagement. However, the campus climate has dramatically improved for LGBTQ students in recent years. In addition, an infrastructure and a forward momentum is now set that may help launch the campus forward in terms of its ability to build a culture that is inclusive and affirming of all student groups. While Birch has some room for improvement, other community college campuses have much to learn from the hard work that these college leaders have completed.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

**Significance**

There are four reasons why community college educators should be interested in learning from the experiences of students like the participants of this study. First of all, educators should be interested because community colleges are in the business of improving lives for all students, irrespective of race, sex, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation. The LGBTQ group is made up of rich and diverse individuals. They come with different personal strengths and needs, socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, races, sexes, gender identities, abilities, disabilities, and sexual orientations. However, one thing that these students have in common is an identity that
puts them at risk for stigmatization in a number of academic and social arenas (Rankin, et al, 2010). It is the community college’s mission to help all students reach their educational goals, irrespective of their individual or group identities (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Knowing that these students interact regularly with subtle forms of aggression on community college campuses should be motivation enough to take steps to create a safer, more inclusive environment.

Second, there is evidence that demonstrates that creating an environment that is inclusive of underserved student groups increases the climate for all students (Astin, 1996; Kuh, 2003, 2009). Student stories demonstrated that including LGBTQ topics in classes not only includes LGBTQ students into the academic conversation, but it also engages the entire class in a timely, relevant, and significant set of topics with implications for a number of disciplines. By taking a look at the social, historical, and political context that makes up a campus climate, it seems that LGBTQ-related topics have powerful and far-reaching implications for all students. Topics like gay pride, gay marriage, Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and teaching LGBTQ content in K-12 curriculum are active debates in the current political landscape that have a real impact on students’ lives. The visibility of LGBTQ leaders and figure heads, from celebrities to teachers and administrators, has increased. LGBTQ topics are highly visible and very relevant to the U.S. identity. As such, faculty have a chance to connect their disciplines to timely and relevant real world topics about which all students have opinions and questions. Engaging in these topics in a respectful, educated way is likely to create a campus climate that is more inclusive and a curriculum that is more relevant to the lives of community college students.
The third reason that educators should care about these students’ perspectives and experiences is that these stories demonstrate that campus climate can help these students feel welcome and included in community colleges. In the case of Birch College, students encounter stigma from many sources. Some were kicked out of their homes or alienated by their parents and communities, many describe being unsupported by their religious institutions, and some were harassed on the streets. All participants describe acts of microaggression that they encountered on their campus. Nonetheless, they described this campus as one that was inclusive and welcoming. This dichotomy is indicative of the power of creating a campus climate that includes social activities, faculty support networks, and classroom practices that allow LGBTQ students to feel respected and valued. By (1) fostering campus dialogues, (2) creating opportunities to learn from these LGBTQ students, and (3) creating safe support networks for students, campus leaders can make a significant impact on how students perceive the extent to which they are welcome and included on campus.

If those reasons are not compelling enough, there are also potential legal implications to not addressing an undercurrent of stigma on a college campus (GLSEN, 2005). Both federal law (U.S.C. §1681) and California law (California Education Code, §66270), protect students from sexual harassment. They also protect students from circumstances that may negatively impact their ability to benefit from public academic programs. While the federal law does not specifically include sexual orientation in its language, case law has demonstrated that these laws apply irrespective of the sex or sexual orientation of the aggressor or the victim (U.S.C. §1681; California Education Code §66270). California also prohibits harassment or discrimination, and explicitly
protects students who have been harassed on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (California Education Code, §212.5).

On this campus, the vast majority of the examples of stigma did not include acts of prohibited discrimination and harassment; however, the undercurrent of subtle stigma creates a campus climate that systematically excludes and alienates LGBTQ students. In such an environment, it is not unlikely that these microaggressions could erupt into legally actionable acts of discrimination and harassment. Many such law suits have been brought against public schools since 1999 for failing to protect LGBTQ students from harassment and discrimination in public schools. If campus leaders wish to protect their institutions from costly law suits, they should think strategically and deliberately about how to foster an environment that is safe from discrimination and harassment.

Recommendations

Creating safe spaces for LGBTQ students is a legal requirement for public institutions of learning. Although AB 537 was passed in 1999, which included sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of groups that are legally protected from discrimination and harassment, many questions still remain about how to create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQ students (Knotts, 2009). For this reason, in 2001, a task force was put together to make recommendations for public schools to create climates that are safe from acts of discrimination and harassment (Gill & Marshall, 2001). These task force recommendations were created to provide guidance to schools that were looking to comply with AB 537 (Gill & Marshall, 2001). In all, there were twelve recommendations for improving public institutions made by the task force (See Appendix G). From those 12 recommendations, some recommendations had already been
met at Birch College, while others were specific to the K-12 system. Of the remaining recommendations, five major recommendations were supported by the findings of this study, including recommendations for (1) offering opportunities for campus learning, (2) creating a more inclusive curriculum, (3) generating more research, (4) improving the climate for transgender students, and (5) fostering visible leadership.

These recommendations create a useful framework for understanding how community college leaders can take deliberate action to create a campus climate that is inclusive for all students, including LGBTQ-identified students. The major findings from this study can help bring a real-world context to many of these recommendations. Several of the student and faculty respondents took advantage of the opportunity they were given through their interviews and the focus group to make recommendations for campus improvement. Their recommendations are infused with the recommendations here. The result is a list of recommendations for practice with real-world examples, complete with the barriers, strengths, and potential solutions that may apply at least at one large urban community college, and perhaps at others as well.

*Offer opportunities for learning.*

One key recommendation that emerged from the Task Force and was supported by the findings of this study was to integrate sexual orientation and gender topics into existing required and statewide trainings. As was demonstrated through the stories and perceptions of the faculty and student participants, many faculty who behave in offensive, alienating, and otherwise stigmatizing ways are not doing so intentionally. Many of these faculty members are approachable, sensitive professionals who are embedded in a hetero-normative culture. Many faculty members, irrespective of their sexual orientations, may
not be aware that their behaviors are causing any level of discomfort. Similarly, many of
the student microaggressions that were reported were not intentionally committed. Many
students may not be aware that they are behaving in stigmatizing ways. For example,
avoidance microaggressions, like feeling uncomfortable around LGBTQ people, and
nonverbal microaggressions, like staring at LGBTQ students, may be entirely
unconsciously committed.

One recommendation is to create more awareness and training around how to
create a climate that is inclusive of all groups, including LGBTQ students. This
recommendation is supported by the work of Hurtado, et al, (1998), who recommended
that, as underserved groups become more visible on campus, the campus leadership needs
to create opportunities for different groups to interact. They also recommend increasing
campus-wide discussion about diversity, and increasing efforts to establish fair and just
practices for all students. One faculty participant suggested that a district task force or
conference would be an appropriate venue to foster a regional conversation about
LGBTQ-related topics, as well.

A number of organizations provide training and resources, like the Allies
Program, Safe Spaces, and Rainbow Educators. Organizations like PFLAG (Parents,
Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight
Education Network), specialize in helping colleges and universities create more positive
campus climates (GLSEN, 2005). This kind of campus wide dialogue is perhaps needed
now more than ever. On a campus like Birch, the larger sociocultural debate around gay
rights is manifesting itself through intergroup conflict between LGBTQ students and
Bible club students. Under contentious circumstances like these, there is an opportunity
to foster a dialog about how to interact with peers respectfully and collegially, even when groups disagree over what they see as fundamental issues.

Another important resource for educating faculty and staff are the LGBTQ students themselves. The participants repeatedly expressed that they had taken on roles as educators for their campus community about LGBTQ topics. There were examples of students who shared their experiences and identities openly in order to enrich class discussions, and students who felt safe and valued enough to speak up to their instructors when microaggressions occurred in classrooms. In each of these examples, positive outcomes emerged. Classrooms became engaged in LGBTQ-related topics and instructors became more informed about how to teach in a way that is respectful of diversity.

*Create more inclusive curriculum.*

A second task force recommendation that was supported by the findings of this research was that schools should acknowledge LGBTQ figures, concepts, and examples in the curriculum and expand on the LGBTQ literature available (Fisher et al, 2008). One of the most common themes that emerged from the data was that students derive motivation and educational benefit from connecting their LGBTQ identities with class assignments and discussions. Again, these connections allowed students to engage more fully with class materials. At the same time, they created opportunities for the entire class to engage with current, relevant social, political, and philosophical themes.

At Birch College, there are courses in which sexuality is the topical focus. These courses were offered regularly each semester. There were several references to these classes in the student interviews. Student participants enrolled in these courses because
they provided them with opportunities to make these vital connections between their college education and their orientations and identities. Some students would like to see more of these kinds of classes; some students said that they would like to see the college add queer studies programs or other LGBTQ-focused courses.

Inclusion of LGBTQ topics into curriculum could be accomplished in a number of ways. It could be done in a seamless, integrated way. Training could be offered to faculty interested in infusing relevant LGBTQ-related topics into their existing curriculum, thus creating a seamless integration of these topics into an existing system. Alternatively, colleges could create a separate curriculum or a program. Community colleges could build a gender studies or LGBTQ studies courses or programs for university transferrable credit.

**Generate more research.**

There were also recommendations made for developing a greater understanding of the needs of LGBTQ students through data collection and inquiry. One of the limitations of this study was that the LGBTQ population is one that is largely hidden. As the participants demonstrated, there is likely much more sexual diversity in community colleges than many campus community members realize. Many students, staff, and faculty choose not to disclose their sexual orientation or identity to the campus community (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). For this reason, it is particularly challenging to conduct a comprehensive qualitative or quantitative inquiry into the strengths and needs of these students. Sexual orientation and gender identity is currently not asked on any college applications that emerged during the document analysis. This makes it
particularly challenging to gain perspectives of students who choose not to identify themselves.

However, there are ways to reach out to this currently hidden community. Many community colleges like Birch College have periodic surveys that are sent out to all students in the college or district. Colleges could include questions about LGBTQ identity on that survey, and disaggregate responses about campus climate, student engagement, and student success by sexual orientation and gender identity. Colleges could also invest in conducting focus groups or further research about these issues to gather rich, robust data about student experiences and perceptions of campus climate.

*Improve climate for transgender students.*

Another Task Force recommendation is to create committees and task forces to address issues that relate to unlawful discrimination and harassment of LGBTQ students on public school campuses. The Task Force recommended that schools develop a permanent committee to make further recommendations, particularly to protect transgender children in schools. This need for greater awareness around transgender students also emerged in this case study. The nondiscrimination policies listed in the college documents did not explicitly include real or perceived gender identity on the list of groups that are protected from discrimination, although this characteristic is included in the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (California Penal Code, §422.55c).

This exclusion may be indicative of an overall sense of exclusion and invisibility of transgender students reported by participants in the focus group. Students reported that, of all the groups included in the LGBTQ community, transgender students faced the least
inclusive, most hostile campus climate. There are steps that campus leaders can take to improve this climate. Colleges may consider participating in Transgender Awareness Month. The could also Create gender-neutral bathrooms to reduce the occurrences of nonverbal microaggression stigma transgender students feel when they walk into campus restrooms. They could also examine the experiences of transgender students more closely through further research.

*Foster visible leadership.*

Another recommendation from the Task Force was that schools create an advisory committee to review policies and procedures and to make recommendations for further compliance. What emerged from these findings was that visible, dedicated leadership on campus made a notable difference in the climate of the campus. Faculty interviews revealed that the inclusive campus climate that exists today for LGBTQ students did not exist five years ago. They point out that it was not until LGBTQ faculty were hired that inquiry, clubs, and interest in providing safe spaces for these students began to form. However, after the infusion of LGBTQ faculty leaders, the campus climate shifted into one that now includes safe spaces, an LGBTQ club, and LGBTQ inclusive language in campus documents. It is also noteworthy that the presence of administrative support has been key to the improvement of campus climate for LGBTQ students. Administrators help to ensure that information is communicated, barriers are addressed in a timely fashion, and a campus wide commitment to diversity and inclusivity is created. This was consistent with Messinger’s (2009) finding that working cooperatively, within the campus system, is an effective way to create a more inclusive climate for LGBTQ
students. Based on this feedback, it appears as though faculty and administrators could work together to begin to shift the culture of a campus.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This case study revealed some rich, detailed information about LGBTQ student experiences in the community college setting. Although the generalizability of this study is limited due to nature of the inquiry, the findings that emerged nonetheless provided important details that community college leaders could use to begin thinking about the experiences of LGBTQ students on their own campuses. In conducting this study, I found that several questions emerged that were not adequately addressed by the data available within the bounded parameters of this study. Specifically, I found myself wanting to know more about (1) how Birch or similar colleges can effectively change institutional culture, (2) what kind of information a purely ethnographic approach to this study would have revealed, and (3) the experiences of students who did not volunteer to participate in this study.

**Institutional change model.**

I was fascinated by the fact that the shift in campus culture had happened relatively recently. I wanted to know more about how the campus leaders managed to affect this institutional change; however, since the evolution of this particular institutional change was not the focus of the study, I was unable to glean enough information about this phenomenon to create a comprehensive picture of how that shift took place. Affecting institutional change is a slow and difficult process, and particularly so at community colleges (Kezar, 2001). By better understanding how some organizations
have successfully implemented institutional change, other community college leaders can learn to be more effective change agents themselves.

It would be useful to conduct an examination of the process of the institutional change that took place at Birch College or at another community college that has effectively improved campus climate for LGBTQ students. This could be done by applying a framework that includes institutional change theory to cases in which colleges have improved campus diversity (Kezar, 2008). Such a study could even be longitudinal in nature, following an institution over time to see how/if the change is sustained, and how the change adapted to the long term needs of the institution.

**Sociocultural context and campus climate.**

Part of the examination for this case study revealed an interplay between the sociocultural context and campus climate. What emerged was a wealth of rich information regarding how multiple systems interacted to create individual students’ experiences with identity. This study began to scratch the surface of a culture that is endemic to this institution. To examine this culture more closely, it would be interesting to see a similar study done with a purely ethnographic approach. Such a study could focus more specifically on the attitudes of the entire campus towards LGBTQ students. It could also examine the culture of the surrounding community more closely.

The stories that these students told provided wonderful information that can be used by community college leaders to start examining their own college’s strengths and needs. In order to help build an understanding of the range of different strengths and needs on different campuses, it would be useful to have this study or a similar study conducted at a site with a dissimilar cultural profile. I found myself wondering how this
climate would have looked if the college were located in a different community. I wondered how the student perceptions, faculty beliefs and behaviors, and student services offerings would have differed if the college had a different ethnic, religious, generational, or geographic profile.

**Hidden populations.**

Again, the stories that these students told were invaluable in terms of the insight into student experiences that they provided. Because these participants were engaged, empowered, and resilient, they were able to contribute to a strengths-based understanding of what works to empower LGBTQ community college students. What would strengthen this understanding even more would be to conduct a similar examination of student experiences and perceptions, but to focus on more hidden or disengaged students. In that way, community college leaders could begin to learn more about students who are less visible. Such a study could focus on those who (1) may be disinclined to disclose their sexual orientations or gender identities openly, (2) have already disengaged and therefore did not have access to the posted research announcements, or (3) did not feel comfortable talking to an unknown person about their personal experiences. It would be helpful to see how the needs, strengths, experiences, and perceptions of such a student population may differ from those of the participants of this study. While such an examination would require more time in the field than this bounded study allowed for, I believe that a researcher who spends more time in the field could access these hidden populations.

**Concluding Statement**

LGBTQ students, like many students from other underrepresented groups, are more likely to have characteristics that put them at risk for academic failure. This
problem may be more prevalent at community colleges. Community colleges’ open door policies often act as both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, they offer new educational opportunities for students who have been unsuccessful or have felt uncomfortable in educational settings in the past. On the other hand, many of these students come to college facing multiple academic and non-academic risk factors, leading to notoriously low completion rates.

With this examination, I attempted to focus on community colleges as a unique destination for LGBTQ students. LGBTQ students who did not academically prosper in high school or at other colleges have opportunities for second and third chances at these institutions. Community colleges have the opportunity to provide a new beginning in a safe space, where students can learn to engage, take risks, and thrive. In order to create that safe space, leaders need to be aware of how underserved groups perceive campus climate. If students see the campus climate as unwelcoming or hostile, leaders need to know what steps to take to improve that climate.

With this investigation, I attempted to raise leaders’ level of awareness about what LGBTQ students experience in community colleges. I also attempted to make recommendations to leaders to create positive change at their respective institutions. This research supports the following conclusions: (1) LGBTQ students do not experience campus climate in the same way that heterosexual students do; (2) campus climate and college activities can have a major impact on student perceptions and levels of college engagement; and (3) leaders can create a more inclusive climate for LGBTQ students. With this research, I propose that community college faculty, administrative, and student
leaders have it within their grasp to create a positive, engaging environment. That environment can in turn build academic resilience that has the power to change lives.
References


California Education Code, §220.

California Education Code, §51500 – 51501.

California Education Code, §66270.

California Penal Code, §422.55 – 422.57.

California School Board Association, 2008 *SB 777 Questions and Answers*


Appendix A: Student Interview Protocol

LGBTQ Support and Engagement Programs
Student Interview

Background:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As we discussed, this interview is part of an exploration of your experiences as an LGBTQ community college student. During the interview, we will talk about your perceptions of your campus and your participation and experiences in the classroom, with student services, and on campus.

Informed Consent:

Before we begin, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the consent form. This conversation is strictly confidential and care will be taken to exclude all names and identifying characteristics from the data. Further, any responses that you provide will not impact your performance in a class or in the district. I would like your permission to record our conversation on tape so that I can more accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences.

Instructions:

During the interview, we will talk about your participation in and experiences with classroom and campus activities. We have about 1 hour to answer about 25 questions. Feel free to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, and you may also ask me to stop the recorder or end the interview at any time. We are going to begin the interview. Do you have questions before we begin?

Demographic Questions:

Are you a Community College student?

What is your educational ultimate educational goal?

What is your educational goal at this college?

What is your ethnic identity?

What is your age?

What is your sexual orientation?

What is your gender identity?
**Campus Climate**

Can you remember an occasion at this college when you felt included because of your sexual orientation/identity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your ability to succeed in college? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when you felt excluded because of your sexual orientation/identity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your ability to succeed in college? If so, how?

Based on your own personal experience, how diverse would you say this campus is?
   - Can you remember an occasion in which this stood out for you?
   - If so, can you tell me about it in as much detail as possible?

How would you describe the campus’ overall attitude towards LGBTQ students?
   - Do you feel that this attitude has affected your ability to succeed in college? If so, how?

**Student Engagement**

Can you remember an occasion at this college when your sexual orientation/identity led you to either participate or not participate in a classroom activity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your desire or ability to participate in other classroom activities? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when your sexual orientation/identity led you to either participate or not participate in a college-related social activity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your desire or ability to participate in other social activities? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when your sexual orientation/identity led you to either participate or not participate in a student support service?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your desire or ability to participate in other student support services? If so, how?
Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

LGBTQ Support and Engagement Programs

Program: LGBTQ Student Support and Engagement Experiences
Facilitator: Crystal Kiekel

Date: _______________ Time: _______________

Participants: ____________________________________________

I. Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning. Thank you for taking the time to come together for this focus group
discussion with us today. I will be leading today’s discussion about your experiences in
classrooms, on campus, and with student services.

Purpose of the focus group:
I’ve invited you to this focus group so that I can learn from you about your experiences
with respect to how this campus has supported and engaged you as an LGBTQ student.
This focus group is part of a study examining the campus climate and student
engagement of LGBTQ students. The goal of this exploration is program improvement.

Confidentiality:
Any information you share with us today will be used for research/evaluation purpose
only. I (Crystal Kiekel) will be aggregating results from all focus groups and will not be
attributing comments to any particular person. You will not be identified by name,
department or office, position, or any other personally identifying information in any
report or document. Your name or personally identifying information will not be used in
any published or public reports.

Today’s focus group session will be audio-recorded. I (Crystal Kiekel) will also be
taking notes of the conversation. The audio recordings will be transcribed for analysis.
The audio recorded file, transcribed file, and notes will be stored securely in a password-
protected laptop of the evaluator until completion of focus group analysis. Upon
completion of analysis, files and notes will be destroyed. Only the evaluation staff, I
(Crystal Kiekel), my faculty sponsor, and my dissertation team, will have access to the
files and notes. The files and notes will be accessed and analyzed in strict confidentiality.
However, the protection of confidentiality does not constitute legal protection. You have
the right to know that your information and responses cannot be legally kept confidential,
if subpoenaed by a court of law.
Informed consent:

This consent notice communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for subjects, potential benefits to subjects, payment to subjects for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research subjects. Procedures in this focus group are limited to semi-structured focus group sessions. Because the sample program deals with issues that are sensitive, some focus group questions may involve issues of a professional and/or personal nature, including experiences with and/or perceptions of colleagues, programs, and/or the students that are served by the sample program. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these focus group questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this focus group is part of the evaluation that will assess the campus’ support and engagement practices. Thus, findings of this study may lead to improvements in support programs for LGBTQ students and may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. Focus group participants and/or research subjects will not be paid for their participation in this focus group. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the focus group at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty of any kind. You can halt your participation in the focus group at any time, including up to 30 days after the focus group session has been conducted. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this focus group. Data of this focus group are not protected from subpoena and may be surrendered with valid court order.

In addition to this informed consent notice, please find an informed consent form as part of your focus group session packet. At this time, I ask you to read, review, and sign the informed consent form. If you have questions, please ask them now. If you would like to ask a question in private, please let me know.

Identification and contact information of evaluator:
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Crystal Kiekel, M.S.W. at her email address or telephone number listed here.

kiekelcr@piercecollege.edu
818-710-2234

Timing:
Today’s focus group will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?
II. Focus group

**Campus Climate**

Can you remember an occasion at this college when you felt included because of your sexual orientation/identity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your ability to succeed in college? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when you felt excluded because of your sexual orientation/identity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your ability to succeed in college? If so, how?

Based on your own personal experience, how diverse would you say this campus is?
   - Can you remember an occasion in which this stood out for you?
   - If so, can you tell me about it in as much detail as possible?

How would you describe the campus’ overall attitude towards LGBTQ students?
   - Do you feel that this attitude has affected your ability to succeed in college? If so, how?

**Student Engagement**

Can you remember an occasion at this college when your sexual orientation/identity led you to either participate or not participate in a classroom activity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your desire or ability to participate in other classroom activities? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when your sexual orientation/identity led you to either participate or not participate in a college-related social activity?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your desire or ability to participate in other social activities? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when your sexual orientation/identity led you to either participate or not participate in a student support service?
   - What was your reaction to this situation?
   - Do you feel that it affected your desire or ability to participate in other student support services? If so, how?

**Closing Questions**

*I would like give you a final opportunity to help us evaluate campus engagement and support activities. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have any*
other issues related to campus or classroom experiences? Have you said everything that you anticipated wanting to say but didn’t get a chance to say?

III. Debriefing
Thank you for participating in today’s focus group session. I appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any published reports or documents. Only de-identified data will be used for published reports of sample program performance. I (Crystal Kiekel) will be combining information gathered in the focus group with information gathered from the other data sources (e.g., document and archival analysis). The data from this focus group will be stored and maintained in a password-protected laptop of the researcher and transcriptionist (only during transcription). Further, de-identified data will be maintained in a password-protected laptop of the researcher for a period of one (1) year after the date of this focus group session, after which the data will be destroyed. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this focus group. Do you have any questions at this time?
Appendix C: Student Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate in Research
LGBTQ Support and Engagement Programs
Student Form

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Crystal Kiekel (Principal Investigator), M.S.W., and Gregory Knotts (Faculty Sponsor), Ph.D., from the Graduate School of Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies at the California State University, Northridge. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) an LGBTQ community college student, (2) who is willing to share your experiences. **Your participation in this research study is voluntary.**

This consent form includes sections that explain (1) the purpose of the study, (2) procedures, (3) potential risks and discomforts for subjects, (4) potential benefits to subjects, (5) payment to subjects for participation, (6) confidentiality, (7) participation and withdrawal, (8) identification of investigator, (9) rights of research subjects, and (10) signature of research subjects.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is an exploration of how students perceive the effectiveness of your campus’ LGBTQ support and engagement. This research study is part of my dissertation. I am interested in examining the extent to which campuses support and engagement LGBTQ students. The goal of this exploration is program improvement.

**Procedures**

If you elect to participate in this study, you may be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a 1 hour interview session and/or
2. Participate in a focus group.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts to Subjects**

Because the program deals with issues that are sensitive, some interview questions may involve issues of a professional and/or personal nature, including experiences with and/or perceptions of colleagues, projects, and/or the students that are served by the program. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. **You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study.**

**Potential Benefits to Subjects**

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this exploration addresses the needs of underrepresented LGBTQ community college
students. Thus, findings of this study may contribute to our limited knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may lead to greater awareness of and support for these historically underrepresented students. The findings may also inform members of the larger community and professional who work knowingly or unknowingly with LGBTQ students in the college or in the community.

**Payment to Subjects for Participation**

Interviewees and/or research subjects will not be paid for their participation in this study.

**Confidentiality**

*Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.* Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a random, three-digit number to protect you. No identifying information will be used. Further, your institutions and program will not be identified by name. With your permission, the interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. **You may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview.** Prior to the finalization of the study, you have the option of reviewing and editing your comments as included in the report. Audiotapes will be stored in a locked drawer at the residence of the principal investigator. Audiotapes will be retained for one year, after which they will be erased. Questionnaires and journals will also be transcribed. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions will be maintained for a period of one year after they have been transcribed.

**Please note that** I am a mandated reporter. I am obligated by law to report any information that you share with me that indicates that you pose threat to yourself or others. I am also obligated to report any reported abuse of a minor or other dependents.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. **You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind.** You may discontinue completing questionnaires and/or stop maintaining journals at any time for any reasons without consequences of any kind.

**Identification of Investigator**

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this research and your participation in this study, you may contact the following:
1. Crystal Kiekel (Principal Investigator) via email at kiekelcr@piercecollege.edu;

2. Gregory Knotts (Faculty Sponsor) via email at greg.knotts@csun.edu.

Rights of Research Subjects

You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You can halt your participation in the study at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, California State University, Northridge at 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330, (818) 677-2901.

Signature of Research Participant

I have read and understand the procedures described in this “Consent to Participate in Research.” My questions have all been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

___________________________________________  ____________________
Name of Participant                           Signature of Participant  Date

Signature of Investigator or Designee

In my judgment the research subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

___________________________________________
Name of Investigator or Designee

___________________________________________  ____________________
Signature of Investigator or Designee  Date
Appendix D: Faculty/Staff Interview Protocol

LGBTQ Support and Engagement Programs
Faculty/Staff Interview

**Background:**

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. As we discussed, this interview is part of an exploration of your experiences as an LGBTQ community college student. During the interview, we will talk about your perceptions of your campus climate towards LGBTQ students, and LGBTQ student participation and experiences in the classroom, with student services, and on campus.

**Informed Consent:**

Before we begin, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the consent form. This conversation is strictly confidential and care will be taken to exclude all names and identifying characteristics from the data. Further, any responses that you provide will not impact your performance in a class or in the district. I would like your permission to record our conversation on tape so that I can more accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences.

**Instructions:**

During the interview, we will talk about your perceptions of and experiences with LGBTQ students in classroom and campus activities. We have about 30 - 45 minutes to answer about 20 questions. Feel free to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, and you may also ask me to stop the recorder or end the interview at any time. We are going to begin the interview. Do you have questions before we begin?

**Demographic Questions:**

What is your role at the community college?

What is your connection to LGBTQ students on this campus?

**Campus Climate**

Based on your own personal experience, how diverse would you say this campus is? Can you remember an occasion in which this stood out for you? If so, can you tell me about it in as much detail as possible?

How would you describe the campus’ overall attitude towards LGBTQ students? Do you feel that this attitude affects students’ ability to succeed in college? If so, how?
Student Engagement

Can you remember an occasion at this college when a student’s sexual orientation/identity led the student to either participate or not participate in a classroom activity?
   What was your reaction to this situation?
   Do you feel that it affected the student’s desire or ability to participate in other classroom activities? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when a student’s sexual orientation/identity led the student to either participate or not participate in a college-related social activity?
   What was your reaction to this situation?
   Do you feel that it affected the student’s desire or ability to participate in other social activities? If so, how?

Can you remember an occasion at this college when a student’s sexual orientation/identity led the student to either participate or not participate in a student support service?
   What was your reaction to this situation?
   Do you feel that it affected the student’s desire or ability to participate in other student support services? If so, how?
Appendix E: Faculty/Staff Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate in Research
LGBTQ Support and Engagement Programs
Faculty/Staff Form

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Crystal Kiekel (Principal Investigator), M.S.W., and Gregory Knott (Faculty Sponsor), Ph.D., from the Graduate School of Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies at the California State University, Northridge. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) an employee of the community college in the study, (2) who has knowingly had contact with LGBTQ students on this campus and (3) who is willing to share your experiences. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

This consent form includes sections that explain (1) the purpose of the study, (2) procedures, (3) potential risks and discomforts for subjects, (4) potential benefits to subjects, (5) payment to subjects for participation, (6) confidentiality, (7) participation and withdrawal, (8) identification of investigator, (9) rights of research subjects, and (10) signature of research subjects.

Purpose of the Study

This study is an exploration of how students perceive the effectiveness of this campus’ LGBTQ support and engagement. This research study is part of my dissertation. I am interested in examining the extent to which campuses support and engagement LGBTQ students. The goal of this exploration is program improvement.

Procedures

If you elect to participate in this study, you may be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a 1 hour interview session and/or

Potential Risks and Discomforts to Subjects

Because the program deals with issues that are sensitive, some interview questions may involve issues of a professional and/or personal nature, including experiences with and/or perceptions of colleagues, projects, and/or the students that are served by the program. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study.

Potential Benefits to Subjects

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this exploration addresses the needs of underrepresented LGBTQ community college students. Thus, findings of this study may contribute to our limited knowledge on the
subject. The information gleaned from the study may lead to greater awareness of and support for these historically underrepresented students. The findings may also inform members of the larger community and professional who work knowingly or unknowingly with LGBTQ students in the college or in the community.

Payment to Subjects for Participation

Interviewees and/or research subjects will not be paid for their participation in this study.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a random, three-digit number to protect you. No identifying information will be used. Further, your institutions and program will not be identified by name. With your permission, the interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. You may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Prior to the finalization of the study, you have the option of reviewing and editing your comments as included in the report. Audiotapes will be stored in a locked drawer at the residence of the principal investigator. Audiotapes will be retained for one year, after which they will be erased. Questionnaires and journals will also be transcribed. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions will be maintained for a period of one year after they have been transcribed.

Please note that I am a mandated reporter. I am obligated by law to report any information that you share with me that indicates that you pose threat to yourself or others. I am also obligated to report any reported abuse of a minor or other dependents.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may discontinue completing questionnaires and/or stop maintaining journals at any time for any reasons without consequences of any kind.

Identification of Investigator

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this research and your participation in this study, you may contact the following:
3. Crystal Kiekel (Principal Investigator) via email at kiekelcr@piercecollege.edu;

4. Gregory Knotts (Faculty Sponsor) via email at greg.knotts@csun.edu.

Rights of Research Participants

You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You can halt your participation in the study at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, California State University, Northridge at 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330, (818) 677-2901.

Signature of Research Participants

I have read and understand the procedures described in this “Consent to Participate in Research.” My questions have all been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

___________________________________________
Name of Participant

___________________________________________
Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator or Designee

In my judgment the research subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

___________________________________________
Name of Investigator or Designee

___________________________________________
Signature of Investigator or Designee

Date
Appendix F: Research Invitation

Research Invitation

Dear ________.

My name is Crystal Kiekel, and I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of my dissertation on the effectiveness of campus efforts to engage and support LGBTQ students. I am interested in examining the extent to which community colleges engage and support LGBTQ students. The goal of this exploration is the improvement of LGBTQ student engagement and support.

If you elect to be a part in this study, you may be asked to participate in a 1-hour interview session and/or participate in a 1-hour focus group. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants will receive no compensation. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me as soon as possible. I can be reached by phone or e-mail:

818-710-2234
kiekelcr@piercecollege.edu

Sincerely,
Crystal Kiekel
### Task Force Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that all school personnel are informed of the provisions of AB 537 and that all district and site personnel are trained in the law’s requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and provide guidance for students about their rights and responsibilities related to AB 537. Support student participation in preventing harassment, violence, and discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that exemplary educational resources used to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and hate-motivated violence based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity are identified and developed for use in California schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate methods to monitor compliance with AB 537 into existing educational compliance systems and develop additional systems to support compliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek resources to develop a public information campaign to promote awareness of AB 537 and educate school board members, district administrators, certificated and classified staff members, parents/guardians, community members, students, and businesses regarding the purpose, protections, and benefits of AB 537.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a permanent advisory committee to review policy, legal compliance, training, resources, and data issues and to provide suggestions on revisions incorporating AB 537 requirements, issues, and concerns into curricular standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request the Legislature to appropriate additional resources for civil rights compliance and training related to AB 537 and for a full-time staff position to assist school districts with AB 537 compliance requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender historical figures and related events, concepts, and issues in the revisions of content standards and curriculum frameworks, when appropriate. Identify and expand the available lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender resources for school library materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propose legislative or budget language to fund research of promising programs preventing discrimination, harassment, and violence based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity and to fund replication of effective models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify existing data gathering systems to provide information on the prevalence in schools of threats, harassment, or violence against students based on sexual orientation or gender identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge the permanent advisory committee with developing further recommendations that specifically protect the rights of transgender students in California public schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend that the California State Board of Education revise its policy on Hate-Motivated Violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: List of Documents Collected for Analysis

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Academic services website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Accreditation reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Admissions application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Athletics website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Campus newspapers (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>College catalog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Compliance policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Daily and monthly sheriff office reports from 2002 - 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Faculty and student surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Fee waiver application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Fliers and brochures from campus (HIV testing, crisis hotlines, violence prevention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>LGBTQ Club social networking site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Meeting minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Professional development activities calendar (December, 2009 - June, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Professional development guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Sheriff’s office (in person and website)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Student services website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Student union website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I: Compiled Birch College Crime and Incident Report: 2002 - 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime/Incident</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annoying phone call/student/messages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault (w/ or w/o a weapon)/Battery/Domestic Violence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterfeit money/false id</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbance/Disorderly conduct/Verbal disturbance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible fondling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graffiti/vandalism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand theft auto/motor vehicle theft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>16.93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate Crimes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecent exposure/lewd conduct</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcotics/drugs/controlled substances</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, unspecified (e.g. incident, suspicious circumstances)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>14.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of a weapon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape by force</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Battery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist threat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft (grand or petty)/burglary/attempted burglary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>36.51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trespassing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrants/arrests</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2002 - 2005 data were compiled from annual reports generated by the campus sheriff’s office. 2006, 2007, and 2011 data were compiled from monthly logs generated by the campus sheriff’s office, with 13 months missing. 2008 - 2010 data were compiled from collective annual reports by the county sheriff’s department.*