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California's Community College Closet: LGBTQ+ Voices

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California's Community College Closet: LGBTQ+ Voices

By

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Pronouns: He, Him, His
DISSERTATION

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California's Community College Closet: LGBTQ+ Voices

Abstract

LGBTQ+ individuals face numerous challenges while attending college, including bullying and harassment, a curriculum that does not reflect their identity, and faculty or peers who do not use their correct pronouns or preferred names. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ students often face significant marginalization that leads to some of the highest suicide rates among any student population (Trevor Project, 2020; di Giacomo et al., 2018). This study is framed according to Vincent Tinto's 1975 Model of Student Integration and 1993 Interactionalist Theory of College Student Departure infused with Rendon's (1994) Validation Theory to explore more fully why these students persist and succeed given the experiences related to their identities. The 7 participants in this study are a diverse group with many facets in their student identity including: gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity/culture, and experiences associated with their identity. From this study, 5 themes emerged: 1) Importance of Faculty Interactions and Support; 2) Importance of Student Services; 3) Sense of Safety—Policing and Restrooms; 4) Validation by Using Proper Pronouns and Preferred Names, and 5) Supporting Trans Outness. The importance of faculty interactions was explored along the outness continuum. At the core of many of these students' community college experiences was the concept of validation and a sense of belonging. Validating experiences contributed to a campus climate where the students felt safe and accepted to be open about their LGBTQ+ identity. LGBTQ+ California Community College students experience college differently from their non-LGBTQ+ or heterosexual and gender conforming peers attributable in some part to the heteronormativity that permeates our society.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, LGBTQ+ students, LGBTQ+ youth, California Community Colleges

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the past, present, and future LGBTQ+ students who seek the higher education that California Community Colleges provide. There is a rainbow of identities associated with the Pride Equality Movement, and this dissertation is dedicated to all of you. Thanks to you, I have learned so much more about myself as a gay cis-male, and I hope it makes me a better student services professional, educational leader, and advocate. I trust that we will continue to work to understand your experiences as students better so that we truly live up to our promise to California that our community colleges are open to all; everyone should feel that they belong at our colleges. Further, this dissertation is dedicated to all of the California Community College faculty, staff, and leaders who have worked to advance LGBTQ+ students' inclusion and acceptance.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

As the largest and most accessible of the three tiers of California's public higher education systems, with 2.1 million students at 116 colleges across 73 districts (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2020), the California Community Colleges system is under increasingly greater pressure from the state legislature and public to increase all students' success rates. Even with seemingly open access, California Community Colleges have been criticized "… for failing to acknowledge or adapt to the diversity in their student populations, resulting in stubbornly low transfer rates and consistently high dropout rates" (Shaw et al., 1999, p. 3). Community colleges may be marginalizing their students unintentionally or intentionally based upon their identities and/or socioeconomic status through policies and practices (Harbour & Elbie, 2011; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). This dissertation research sought to understand the lived experiences of one group of California Community College students, LGBTQ+, as they perceive and engage with their environment in seeking success in college.

LGBTQ+ students are a particularly important group to understand, as they often face significant marginalization that leads to some of the highest suicide rates among any student population (Trevor Project, 2020; di Giacomo et al., 2018). According to the Trevor Project, which cites several United States Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) studies, "Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24," and in particular, "LGB youth seriously contemplate suicide at almost three times the rate of heterosexual youth," and beyond contemplation, "LGB youth are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth" (Trevor Project, 2020; CDC, 2010, 2016). Probably the most sobering suicide statistic is that of the Transgender community, "40% of transgender adults reported having made a suicide attempt. 92% of these individuals reported having attempted

suicide before the age of 25" (James et al., 2016 as cited in Trevor Project, 2020, p. 1). Additionally, "Transgender and gender non-binary (TGNB) individuals are a growing demographic with unique healthcare needs," and youth are the largest growing segment of the TGNB population (Nolan et al., 2019). California Community Colleges have an opportunity to intervene and improve these statistics through an inclusive campus climate and active support for LGBTQ+ students. As such, this study places these students in an active and engaged position by examining their experiences. These students' voices will help faculty, staff, educational leaders, and policymakers understand better the way the campus climate affects LGBTQ+ students' success and persistence at California Community Colleges. In addition, this research is particularly important and timely given the policy change through Assembly Bill 1018, Community College Student Equity Plans (AB 1018, 2017), which added LGBT students to the student equity plan process explicitly in the California Education Code.

Prior to the enactment of Assembly Bill 1018, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office collected data on LGBT self-identified students through the CCCApply system-wide application as requested under Assembly Bill 620 (AB 620, 2011), but the office withheld those data from the colleges/districts and the public, as evidenced by Resolution 7.01 F15 from the the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (Spring 2017) that called on the Chancellor's Office to release such data to the campuses. Assembly Bill 620 (AB 620, 2011) requested (not required) that the University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges allow students to self-report their LGBTQ+ identity when appropriate, as other demographic data were being collected already (i.e., applications and other forms). Hence, in 2017, the California Legislature through Assembly Bill 1018, Community College Student Equity Plans (AB 1018, 2017), added LGBT as a student group that must be

included in Student Equity Plans, which forced the Chancellor's Office to use the data they had been collecting.

Providing an inclusive and open campus climate and culture is seemingly the aspiration of many colleges given increased public attention and scrutiny. As such, California Community Colleges are required through a Student Equity Plan to analyze policies and practices' effects on specific student groups compared to the student population overall to determine whether there is a disproportionate impact. The disproportionate impact areas are: access/enrollment; retention/persistence; transfer level math/English completion; transfer to a four-year university, and certificate/degree completion. In the education code, the legislature has identified specific student groups for analysis; these include race/ethnicity; socioeconomically disadvantaged; first-in-family to attend college; disability; veterans; former-foster youth; gender, and for the first time in the 2019 Student Equity Plan process, LGBT students were included as a group listed in the education code (AB 1018, 2017). The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office provides guidance and support for the Student Equity Plan development process and has the authority over the data analysis procedures under the California Education Code Title 3 Division 7 Section 78220-78222.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Percentage Point Gap Methodology Memo (2017) provided to the colleges/districts allowed the use of only LGBT-all, LGBT-male, and LGBT-female as three discreet data elements. This guidance and practice run contrary to the research literature on LGBTQ+ students in higher education in both 2-year community college and 4-year university settings. LGBTQ+ students are not a single monolithic group; in fact, LGB are sexual identity minority groups, while Trans are a gender identity minority group (Stewart, 2015; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Rasmussen, 2006;

Renn, 2010; Rhodes, 1994; Quaye & Harper, 2015). Thus, the methodology that undergirds the Student Equity Plans analysis is flawed fundamentally as it pertains to "LGBTQ+" California Community Colleges students.

LGBT vs. LGBTQ+. To be as inclusive as possible, this dissertation used the broadest meaning of LGBT identities, as it references "LGBTQ+." This includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the "+" is symbolic of many more groups not indicated explicitly with a letter but associated with the LGBTQ+ Pride Equality Movement. It is noteworthy that the California Education Code delineates only "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender" explicitly as data elements; while the code language could be interpreted to allow for additional groups such as Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Gender non-binary Identities, Gender Non-Conforming Identities, Gender Fluid, and others+, it appears that a narrow definition of "LGBT" is being used at California Community Colleges as evidenced by the use of only "LGBT" in their Student Equity Plans.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQ+) self-identified students at California Community Colleges with respect to their perceptions of, and feelings about, their success. Student data were collected initially through a pre-interview survey that asked both bounded and open-ended questions that allowed free responses; then, students could opt to participate in a semi-structured interview. Initially the plan was to have the pre-interview survey disseminated to students based upon their CCCApply demographic data if permissible by colleges/districts; otherwise, other less direct means through faculty listservs and

LGBTQ+ student support resources were used to distribute the pre-interview survey to collect data and gain access to the students to be interviewed.

LGBTQ+ California Community College students experience college differently from their non-LGBTQ+ or heterosexual and gender conforming peers, attributable in some part to the heteronormativity that permeates our society. While LGBT students' inclusion in the legislature's Student Equity Plans has had some positive outcomes, its implementation has been rather problematic nonetheless and highlights a lack of understanding of the relevant research literature on LGBTQ+ students, which is why the experiences that encourage LGBTQ+ student persistence and decrease attrition could be revealed better by hearing their voices through qualitative interviews. The data obtained directly from LGBTQ+ California Community College students is intended to help colleges support this diverse and multifaceted group of students more effectively.

Problem Statement

Now that LGBT self-identified students have been included in the Student Equity Plan process and the CCCApply LGBT student demographic data have been disseminated to the colleges/districts, California Community Colleges are in a better position to support these students. However, there is "… an absence of literature examining the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community college students" (Garvey et al., 2015, p. 528)—particularly California Community Colleges, given that the data were collected yet withheld. Studies at 4-year bachelor's degree-awarding institutions have determined that LGBTQ+ students' academic and social success is associated with an affirming and inclusive campus environment that embraces gender nonconforming and sexual minority individuals (Stewart, 2015; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Rasmussen, 2006; Renn, 2010;

Rhodes, 1994). The dearth of research that has examined LGBTQ+ community college students leaves scholars and practitioners without empirical evidence-based approaches to substantiate the best practices with which to address the needs of this diverse segment of the California Community Colleges student population (Garvey et al., 2015).

Extrapolations from the 4-year university level to the 2-year community college level may be made; however, community colleges tend to have a rather different student profile and demographic from that of universities because of their differing admissions requirements. The California Community Colleges are considered open-access institutions, as admission simply requires the applicant to be 18 years old or older; high school graduation is not a general requirement but is required for public financial aid awards pursuant to the California Education Code. Moreover, only a few California Community Colleges have on-campus housing; as a result, California Community Colleges are considered commuter campuses (CCCCO, 2020). While some 4-year universities may have limited student housing and similarly be considered commuter campuses, given the admissions differences and academic motivations, it is worthwhile to study LGBTQ+ students at California Community Colleges.

While higher education is the source of much queer theory and research, it has remained substantially untouched by the LGBTQ+ Pride equality movement (Renn, 2010). Renn stated that, “Colleges and universities have evolved to tolerate the generation of queer theory from within but have stalwartly resisted the queering of higher education itself” (2010, p. 132). Clearly, higher education is aware of LGBTQ+ inequities and heteronormativity, but the institution itself has been unable to implement inclusive practices to address these pervasive issues in our society.

Research Question

What experiences do LGBTQ+ California Community College students believe have contributed to their success?

The remainder of the dissertation is organized by theoretical framework, relevant literature, research design, data collection and analysis, as well as implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the foundational structural support of a study based upon prior research and theories; the theoretical framework focuses or frames the research study through contextual support by defining terms, concepts, models, and bounding the relevant literature (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Although several theories related to student success, persistence, retention, and campus climate have been developed, this study used psychological and sociological-based theoretical frameworks related to student persistence, retention, and attrition, including validation, because the study explored the lived experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of community college students as they are developing their own identity and sense of purpose. This is an exploration of student experience, perspective, and perception in relation to action or inaction on the part of the institution.

Persistence, Retention, and Student Departure Theory

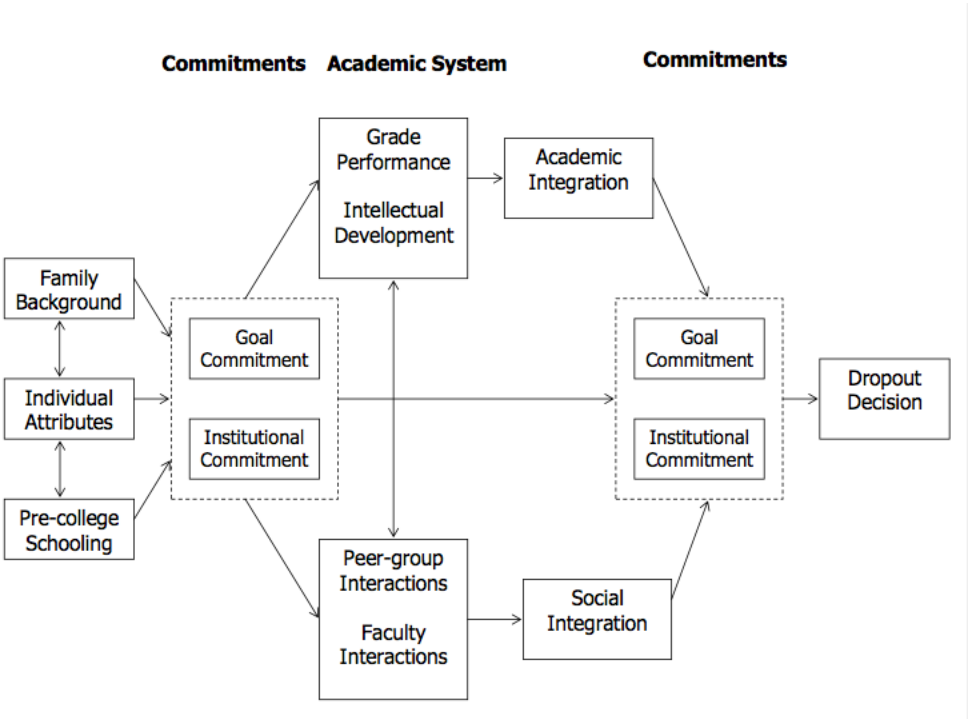
Tinto's 1975 Model of Student Integration and 1993 Interactionalist Theory of College Student Departure forms the basis for this study's conceptual framework. Tinto's work is an evolution of Spady's (1970) Sociological Model of Student Departure, which incorporates components of organizational and psychological theories (Berger et al., 2012). According to Spady (1971), the undergraduate dropout process pertains to the decision to leave a particular social system as the result of a complex social process with factors that include family and previous educational background, academic potential, normative congruence, friendship/peer support, intellectual development, grade performance, social integration, satisfaction, and institutional commitment. Further, Spady's Model of Student Departure notes that the probability of student persistence is predicated on the occurrence of norm congruence between the student and his/her college through academic integration (Berger et al., 2012). In addition, Spady found

that academic performance contributed to student attrition, which of course can influence academic integration.

Tinto's (1975) model of student integration posited that not only social integration, but academic experiences, formal and non-formal, can affect persistence. Further, the model suggested that students' success can be attributed to the level of commitment they have to their academic and career goals as well as to the institution. In Tinto's 1993 Interactionalist Theory of College Student Departure, a revised model of integration, he claimed similarly that students who develop a sense of belonging to their institution are less likely to leave it (Mechur-Karp et al., 2008).

Figure 1.

Tinto's Model of Student Integration.



From "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," Tinto, 1975.

Figure 1 shows the elements of Tinto's Model of Student Integration. This study focused primarily on Socialization and Academic Integration and by way of institutional commitment, peer-group and faculty interactions. Given the interconnected nature of the elements of this student departure theory, the other elements were revealed as well during this research.

Student Growth and Development Theory

To frame Tinto's (1993) Student Socialization and Academic Integration elements shown in Figure 1 better, this study drew upon student growth and development theories; these theories are foundational, given that this study focused on students' identity in relation to their interactions with the institution and the way those interactions influence their success. In addition, Tinto's Socialization and Academic Integration is undergirded by the sub-concept of "Sense of Belonging," to which the student's identity is central (Tinto, 1993). Student development theories were developed to describe students' growth during their college years. Student development theory serves as a foundation for student services professionals with respect to the services put in place to support the entire student in and out of the classroom, and, according to Evans et al. (2010), it covers foundational theories of identity development (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1980; Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 1966), ethical development (Perry, 1970), moral development (Kohlberg, 1981), and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Further, student development is based upon integrative theories as Evans et al. (2010) described, including Bronfenbrenner's (2005) developmental ecology model as well as theories on self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999) and faith (Fowler, 1981), and Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. According to Evans et al. (2010), a third branch of theories revolves around students' social development and includes theories on racial (Degaldo & Stefancic, 2000), ethnic (Phinney, 1990), sexual (Fassinger, 1998), and gender identity (Bem, 1981).

In their revised theory of psychosocial development, Chickering and Reisser (1993) described the following 7 vectors of student development: (1) developing purpose; (2) developing competence; (3) managing emotions; (4) moving through autonomy to interdependence; (5) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (6) developing integrity, and (7) establishing identity. These 7 vectors form a psychological contextual understanding of the student/research participant, particularly along the continuum of "Establishing Identity" while interacting with the college.

Developing purpose entails moving beyond the perception of attending college to qualify for a good job to one that helps build skills for a wide range of life experiences and yields a perception associated with lifelong learning (Evans, 2010). Developing competence requires identifying a purpose to achieve goals. Institutions can support developing competence by creating holistic environments where students find an integrated ecological system that supports them academically and socially and links in and out of class experiences with faculty (Blair, 1998; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2010; Brown, 1972). Through the college experience and beyond, students must learn how to act appropriately on the feelings they are experiencing (Evans, 2010). Moving through autonomy to interdependence is a further development of managing emotional complexities and results in increased emotional independence, which is defined as "… freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117). Students also develop instrumental independence that includes self-direction, problem-solving ability, and mobility. Then, they come to recognize and accept the importance of interdependence, an awareness of their interconnectedness with others (Evans, 2010). Managing emotions and moving through autonomy to interdependence synthesizes into mature relationships and experiences with

relationships that contribute significantly to the development of a sense of self. Developing mature relationships is associated with intercultural and interpersonal tolerance and appreciation of differences, as well as the capacity for healthy and lasting intimate relationships with partners and close friends; Reisser (as cited in Evans, 2010) noted that both "… involve the ability to accept individuals for who they are, to respect differences, and to appreciate commonalities" (p. 68). Further, developing integrity includes, "… three sequential but overlapping stages" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51): humanizing values; personalizing values, and developing congruence. Congruence is the synthesis of balancing self-interest with social responsibility through authentic affirmation of values by actions (Evans, 2010).

Finally, establishing identity is the ultimate synthesis of the previous six vectors. In Chickering's revised theory (as cited in Evans, 2010), this vector took on added complexity to acknowledge differences in identity development based upon gender, race/ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation or sexual minority status. Identity consists of "… comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one's social and cultural heritage, a clear self-concept and comfort with one's roles and lifestyle, a secure sense of self in light of feedback from significant others, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration" (Evans, 2010 pp. 68-69). Developing integrity and establishing identity form the basis of the possibility of norm congruence between the student and the college that leads to persistence or attrition (Tinto, 1993).

Validation Theory

While Tinto's framework is foundational, the theory has been criticized because it asserts that students must separate from their pre-college communities to integrate into college life rather than having the institution integrate them (Rendón et al., 2000; Tierney, 1999).

Researchers have questioned Tinto's implication that students must disassociate from their cultural communities and adopt their campus's dominant values and norms to succeed in its academic and social cultures; this justifies Renn's assertion of the "… lack of queering of higher education" (2010, p. 132). With that said, Tinto's research has offered the best understanding to date of student persistence and departure; this study was designed to advance this understanding by focusing on student LGBTQ+ identity and the way their identity affects their success, including persistence or departure in the community college context. Accordingly, rather than relying solely on Tinto's framework, the elements of Academic Integration and Socialization were infused with the sub-concept of validation.

Validation is a psychological process that focuses on supporting students by creating opportunities for them to see themselves as valued and integral educational community members. Validation can occur through in-class facilitated instruction as well as outside of class interactions between students, faculty, staff, family, and friends (Rendón, 1994). Validating and invalidating experiences are associated directly with academic integration and socialization through the aforementioned peer and faculty interactions (Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1993).

According to validation theory, the college must play an active role in developing opportunities for validating experiences. The foundation for providing validating experiences is providing professional development for faculty and staff that trains them to acknowledge and interact actively with diverse student populations, including recognizing implicit bias and micro-aggressions. Faculty must foster a learning environment that "… empowers students, connects faculty with students, and creates an atmosphere of trust, respect, and freedom to learn" (Rendón, 1994, p. 47). Tinto's element of Institutional Comment shines through the college's implementation of Validation Theory in practice and policy.

Finally, Rendón (1994) asserted that the college must also create a therapeutic learning community in and outside of class "… that promotes healthy relationships among students, faculty, and staff, fosters cultural pride and recognizes the potential of all students to attain success…" (p. 49). Therapeutic learning environments provide opportunities for students to develop cultural, gender, and sexual orientation pride, encourage student peer support, and integrate student support services such as counseling and advising (Rendón, 1994).

Similar to Rendón's Validation theory, researchers who have examined inclusive instructional environments and campus climate, "… acknowledge the continuing significance of race and racial identity in ways that can empower and motivate students to transcend the legacy of racism in our society" (Tatum, 2007 p. 2). Tatum (2007) described the "… ABC's of creating inclusive learning environments" as "A, affirming identity; B, building community, and C, cultivating leadership" (p. 22). By extension, these same principles can be applied to homophobia and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, if we can allow the "queering of higher education" (Renn, 2010). Further, Tinto (1993) stated that African American undergraduate students faced many challenges in becoming integrated into college because their life experiences and values were incongruent with the White heterosexual middle-class norms found in many colleges and universities. Tinto's model for student success puts students of color at a disadvantage because they are more likely to encounter a campus climate that is unwelcoming or unfamiliar, and thus makes it more challenging for them to develop a sense of community (Tierney, 1999). In addition, scholars have noted that Tinto's theory of student departure focuses heavily on actual participation in campus life, which is a behavioral measure, rather than focusing on a student's sense of integration, which is a psychological measure (Museus, 2014; Braxton et al., 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

In addition, fostering an openly inclusive campus culture that supports LGBTQ+ identity development is associated with student success (Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). A key aspect of supporting LGBTQ+ identity development is supporting the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ identity and racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. Supporting LGBTQ+ students includes supporting their ethnic/cultural identity in association with their LGBTQ+ identity, which will foster a supportive campus climate (Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Villicana et al., 2016).

Finally, Rendón, Spady, and Tinto's models are useful for studying LGBTQ+ students' persistence from psychological and sociological perspectives by examining not only these students' experiences, but also the influence of their college's environment on their experiences that leads to certain behaviors, such as persisting from one semester to the next or leaving the college. Moreover, these theories have been the foundation for the development of other theories related to persistence, retention, and attrition, such as those of Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) and Bean and Metzner (1985), which have contributed to substantial studies across educational settings. This study examined LGBTQ+ California Community College students' perceptions of institutional commitment as well as peer and faculty interaction experiences related to campus climate to explain these students' willingness to persist at California Community Colleges. Tinto's Academic Integration and Socialization frames the way students persist or depart, while the sub-concept of "Sense of Belonging" through student development framed by validation or invalidation explains the way students persist or depart given the context of student success.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

The research specific to LGBTQ+ community college students is quite limited, particularly given the lack of historic data on LGBTQ+ California Community College students; however, there is a body of literature related to LGBTQ+ students at 4-year bachelor's degree institutions as well as research on campus climate, community college student faculty-interactions, and retention/persistence programs. This literature review comprises three sections: LGBTQ+ student Identity Development; Community College Campus Climate & Student-Faculty Interactions, and Persistence, Retention, and Attrition. Because this study explored LGBTQ+ students' experiences, an understanding of the LGBTQ+ identities as well as their intersectionality with race, ethnicity, and culture is needed first to focus the research from the students' perspectives given their unique identity and positionality.

LGBTQ+ Identity Development

This section provides definitions of LGBTQ+ identities with a brief summary of the developmental theories. As stated previously, the acronym LGBTQ+ is used for individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning, as well as other identities. However, it must be noted that lesbian, gay, and bisexual are terms used to define someone's sexual identity. Rankin et al. (2010) stated that "Sexual identity is usually discussed more narrowly in terms of three distinct, immutable categories: heterosexual, gay/lesbian, and bisexual" (p. 48). The American Psychological Association defines sexual orientation (identity), as "… an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others" (Rankin et al., 2010, p. 48). However, transgender does not denote sexual orientation, but rather indicates someone's gender identity. "Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of hir (his/her) own gender, which may be different from one's birth gender or how others perceive one's gender"

(Rankin et al., 2010, p. 49). It is possible to be transgender as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or straight (Sanlo, 1998; Sanlo et al., 2002). However, in some non-Western contexts, "… gender identity and sexual orientation are presented as more integrated identities," unlike "… the Western medical and psychiatric tradition of segmenting sexual orientation and gender identity into distinctive categories" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005 p. 27). Further, "Some LGBT individuals use the term queer to describe sexual and gender identities that are external to the heterosexual and gender binary classifications (Renn, 2010).

According to Renn (2010), "The research area of greatest growth in volume and potential for theoretical richness is that of LGBT identities and identity development" (p. 135). However, she noted that there is a dearth of research on transgender student identities. Renn (2007) suggested as well that even in the research on LGBTQ+ students, there are few studies on transgender students in particular because their specific needs are not addressed. Moreover, Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012) found a lack of awareness of transgender students' unique needs and the specific support services they require (i.e., mental health services, medical/healthcare services, or lack of health insurance coverage), which affects their campus experiences. Transgender students lived experiences are often ignored in higher education research, which thereby marginalizes this student population further (Dugan et al., 2012). However, in reference to existing transgender student studies, Renn (2010) acknowledged "Ongoing, postpositivist explorations of transgender student experiences provide valuable evidence for the ongoing visibility and normalcy agenda; and a few scholars employ postmodern and queer perspectives to provide theoretical depth to the study of gender identity, genderism, and higher education" (p. 135).

Nonetheless, research on LGBTQ+ student identities is based upon identity development from psychological perspectives (Wimberly, 2015). Student affairs professionals who have adopted psychological models of gay identity development have conducted studies on LGBTQ+ student identities, which led to a collection of quantitative and qualitative explorations of LGBTQ+ experiences at 4-year universities (Renn, 2010). This emerging research, "… compared stage models of sexual orientation identity development to life span and other nonlinear models" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005 p. 27). Further, the authors determined that stage models of sexual orientation were inadequate given their reliance on linear progression; they asserted that a "life span" model explained LGBTQ+ identity development better by supporting the D'Augelli framework. This framework, "… addresses issues often ignored in other models, presenting human development as unfolding in concurring and multiple paths, including the development of a person's self-concept, relationships with family, and connections to peer groups and community" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005 p. 27). Principally, D'Augelli "… suggests that sexual orientation may be very fluid at certain times in the life span and more fixed at others and that human growth is intimately connected to and shaped by environmental and biological factors." In essence, ethnographic studies of LGBTQ+ university students have played an important role in establishing a theoretical connection from the previous psychological-based, stage models to the current context-based models (Renn, 2010).

In addition, research on LGBTQ+ identities emphasizes that members of the LGBTQ+ community are not a homogenous group. Consequently, the separate social constructions of sexual and gender identities imply that a gay male student and a transgender student's experiences and needs may differ based upon their identities. "LGB people are not a monolithic group, the effect of other systems of oppression (racism, sexism, ageism, classism, etc.) has

prompted the development of communities within communities" (Quaye & Harper, 2015, p. 122). As an example, a student who identifies as Latinx, trans-female, and lesbian could identify with four different marginalized communities: racial minority; gender minority; transgender minority, and sexual minority. Although such a student has two other identities than being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ students are often seen as a monolithic group when programs and services are being designed for them (Renn, 2010).

Because of their intersecting social identities, some LGBTQ+ students of color may encounter discrimination from within the LGBTQ+ community itself based upon their race or ethnicity (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010) because "… the LGBTQ community is largely defined by the privileged majority-white culture" (Rankin, 2003, p. 25). Supporting LGBTQ+ students includes supporting their ethnic/cultural identity in association with their LGBTQ+ identity to foster a supportive campus climate (Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Suárez-Orozcoet al., 2015; Villicana et al., 2016). For example, Villicana et al. (2016) highlighted the differences in outness between gay White males and gay Latinx males, in which the White culture supports verbalization of outness, while Latinx cultures support nonverbal outness, and both are equally healthy and rooted in cultural norms. The authors indicated that being authentically true to one's identity is healthy, and verbal disclosure is not the only way to be authentically gay or out. Being openly "out" about one's LGBTQ+ identity really means that one is not living a duality of identities or concealing one's true identity (Villicana et al., 2016; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). Therefore, it appears that although there is existing research on LGBTQ student identity development and their experiences, more studies are warranted to enhance our understanding to support student success more effectively.

Community College Campus Climate & Student-Faculty Interactions

This section is divided into the following subsections: Campus Climate & Campus Micro-climates; Community College Campus Climate; Student-Faculty Interactions, and Micro-Aggressions.

Campus Climate & Campus Micro-climates

Campus Climate. Fostering an openly inclusive campus culture that supports LGBTQ+ identity development is associated with student success (Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Suárez-Orozcoet al., 2015). Rankin and Reason (2008) defined "'climate' as the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards and practices of employees and students of an institution." Further, "campus climate" research is the "… focus particularly on those attitudes, behaviors, and standards/practices that concern the access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (p. 264). Rankin's definition has been the basis for several campus climate research studies including one at the University of California.

However, Rankin's work is built upon that of Hall and Sandler (1984) who were the first to study the "chilly" classroom climate that women experienced in higher education. This study revealed the gender bias in the classroom and laid the foundation for future campus climate studies (Siefried, 2000). Male faculty members were found to contribute greatly to the "chilly" classroom climate that women in the study endured (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Seifried, 2000). Although Hall and Sandler's (1984) report has been criticized for its lack of empirical evidence and heavy reliance on anecdotes (Constantinople et al., 1988; Crawford & McLeod, 1990; Seifried, 2000), their study was the first in a surge of subsequent research that focused on campus climate in higher education. Campus climate is related directly to student development and success. Students who participate in the classroom and engage actively in extracurricular

activities are more likely to succeed and persist to graduation (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993; Rankin et al., 2010). Students who feel self-conscious, irritable, and depressed because of marginalizing experiences within the campus environment are less likely to be involved, and therefore less likely to succeed (Astin, 1984; Schlossberg, 1989; Evanset al., 2010). By assessing campus climate regularly, scholar-practitioners would have a better understanding of the environmental stresses and challenges that students face.

The scope of these studies expanded to include the perceptions of other groups, first non-White students and later LGBT students (Hurtado et al., 1998; Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo, 2005; Soufleris, 2001). However, the inclusion of LGBT student perceptions into the literature was relatively slow. Early campus climate literature on LGBT students in the 1990s was the result of a combination of official university-designated ad hoc committees, and faculty, staff, and students who initiated research on their own (Rankin, 2003).

Although campus climate assessments grew to incorporate the LGBT student community, the initial research pertaining to this population was collected and analyzed in different ways at different universities (Rankin, 2003; Renn, 2010; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). In partnership with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, Rankin (2003) conducted the first national campus climate assessment of LGBT-identified faculty, staff, and students. The study found that the majority of respondents described their campus environment as “hostile” (Rankin, 2003). Renn’s (2010) evaluation of LGBT and queer research in higher education called for the incorporation of a queer theoretical approach in future studies, even those that are not focused on LGBT populations. Renn (2010) stated that predefined categories, such as male/female or

Black/White, limit the way students construct their identity. By allowing them to self-identify, researchers gain a more accurate picture of their participants (Renn, 2010).

However, as colleges and universities are vast enclaves of people (thousands of students and employees), campus climate is one's perception and interpretation of the collective actions or inactions of the institution as an anthropomorphic single entity. Further, given that campus climate relies largely on perceptions and feelings, its definition can be either institutional or situational. It is noteworthy that definitions of campus climate tend to be broad examinations of perceptions and are not focused solely on the traditionally excluded, underserved, underrepresented, disproportionately impacted, or marginalized (Rankin & Reason, 2008).

Campus Micro-climates. While campus climate research is usually an assessment of perceptions of an educational institution as a whole, perceptions tend to be developed based upon individual interactions in specific areas of the campus. Vaccaro et al. (2012) expanded Ackelsberg et al.'s (2009) initial definition of "micro-climate" beyond faculty departments to localized groups based upon subgroups, roles, and identity. Essentially, examining micro-climates uses the principles of campus climate but localizes them to smaller enclaves within the larger organization to measure the issues at the micro level synthesized through the macro-climate (Vaccaro et al., 2012). Contrary to the wider literature, "the intersections of social identity membership and campus role shaped LGBT people's climate experiences and perceptions. To create welcoming and affirming campus climates for LGBT people, higher education professionals must attend to both organizational-level climates for undergraduates and microclimates for faculty, staff, and graduate students" (Vaccaro, 2012, p. 443).

Exploring campus climate on both the macro and micro levels is worthwhile to ensure inclusionary practices are implemented throughout the institution. Because microclimate issues

tend to percolate up to the larger macro-climate, scholar-practitioners should explore campus micro-climates to inform policy development and implementation better (Vaccaro 2012).

Community College Campus Climate

Most campus climate research has been conducted at the 4-year university level. Community College or 2-year associates granting institutions tend to have a rather different student profile and demographic from universities because of the differing admissions requirements and academic motivations. The California Community Colleges are considered open-access institutions where admissions requirements are being 18 or older and applying; high school graduation is not a requirement except for public financial aid awards pursuant to the California Education Code. Further, many California Community Colleges do not have on-campus housing (cccco.edu, 2020).

As stated previously, student development and engagement are integral to the college experience, particularly the development of purpose and identity (Evans, 2010; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Given the commuter nature of community colleges where students may be on campus only for classes and have very little, if any, engagement outside the classroom other than passing minor interactions, it can be asserted that student-faculty interactions and relationships constitute the vast majority of the students' perceptions of campus climate. However, student-faculty interactions can occur outside class as well, such as during office hours, in the classroom just before or after class, and other venues on campus.

Student-Faculty Interactions

Chang (2005) conducted a quantitative analysis of community college student-faculty interactions using data collected from the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students (TRUCCS) survey. The study examined the student-faculty interactions at community

colleges, which the author defined as students' speaking up and engaging in class discussion, asking instructors questions or speaking with them before or after class, and attending office hours; office hours were the least common form of student-faculty interaction. The author correlated student characteristics with faculty contact, which revealed low interaction levels overall, most notably minimal with Asian American/Pacific Islander and Latinx students. Generally, having positive perceptions of the college environment and interacting with other college community members, from peers to academic counselors and staff, had the strongest positive association with faculty contact. The study noted that African American students tend to show the greatest student-faculty interaction, followed by White and then Latinx and Asian American/Pacific Islander students. Further, older students and non-first-generation students, referred to also as students with higher parental education, were more likely to interact with faculty; in addition, "As expected, students who spend more time on campus also engage more with faculty. Conceivably, those students who leave campus right after class because of work or family obligations have less time to meet with their instructors outside of class" (Chang, 2005, p. 779.)

Micro-Aggressions

An inadvertent yet detrimental form of interaction and engagement on the part of faculty are micro aggressions. "Micro-aggressions (MAs) are "… brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative… slights and insults" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271) toward individuals of underrepresented status (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Students can internalize and realize these invalidating phrases about their identity that affect their success overall.

Micro-aggressions have a cyclical effect in which students transfer them from faculty to their peers; Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) discovered this tendency, and stated "Most of the student initiated MAs targeted other students. However, instructors were most frequently the perpetrators of the MAs," and "… though the literature predominantly considers Mas perpetuated by members of the majority on members of underrepresented groups, we found that a diverse range of instructors across the gender, age, and ethnicity/race spectrum initiated Mas" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). A rather disturbing finding of their study was that the most common place in which microaggressions occurred was in remedial classes White faculty taught. Students should feel empowered by faculty, not invalidated and demotivated. Further exploration of the intersection of identity, student-faculty engagement, and campus climate at community colleges may yield interesting findings. While this study did not target MAs specifically, they were found indirectly in this research.

Persistence, Retention, & Attrition

Research has recommended that higher education institutions devote financial resources to retention and persistence programs rather than new student recruitment (Craig & Ward, 2008); however, the literature has revealed that institutions are disregarding this recommendation and continuing to focus more time and resources on student recruitment (Astin, 1993; Fike & Fike, 2009; Hossler, 2006; Tinto, 2006). Tinto (1999) argued that although college budgets include numerous recruitment programs and strategies, little money is allocated to retain currently enrolled students. Tinto's argument was supported further by California's Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 (SB 1456, 2012) that devoted financial resources at the California Community Colleges to recruitment and matriculation activities such as application, orientation, English/math assessment testing, and student education planning (SB 1456, 2012).

Further, Hossler (2006) reported that the few higher education institutions that have retention/persistence programs in place rarely evaluate such efforts' effectiveness; he asserted that retention strategies must be campus-wide efforts led by college administrators and should include a shared-governance approach in planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Student retention is one of the key metrics legislators and public policymakers use to determine funding for public higher education (Conway, 2009), which is evidenced further by California's Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 (SB 1456, 2012). California has since shifted the California Community College financial model away from a recruitment incentive structure to one of persistence and outcomes through the amended Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012: matriculation: assessment Bill (AB 705, 2017) and the Higher Education Trailer Bill of 2018 (AB 1809, 2018). In contrast to these financial incentives to support student persistence, some community college students' goals, such as updating job skills for a promotion, could be achieved in a single semester without awarding a formal degree or certificate (Bailey, 2004).

Given the increasing pressure for California Community Colleges to understand student persistence as evidenced by the Student-Centered Funding Formula that created a funding system that rewards student persistence and completion in specific areas (AB 1809, 2018), many studies have been conducted that relate to persistence, retention, and attrition and have explored a number of associated variables, including demographics, aspirations, motivation, personality, values, and institutional characteristics. Researchers and practitioners use the words persistence and retention interchangeably, but each has a different connotation, in which retain indicates to hold back and persist to continue; this research approaches the issue through the persistence lens. Various models are used to explain student attrition (the antithesis of persistence) (Bean, 1980;

Bean & Metzner, 1985; Ishitani, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Although these models have identified factors associated with attrition and persistence, there is concern that they do not recognize cultural variables when applied to minority students (Guiffrida, 2006). The following are some of the persistence/retention models many higher education scholar-practitioners use.

Although persistence and attrition rates are the major determining factors used to measure performance and institutional effectiveness at community colleges overall, most of the studies on student retention/persistence have investigated undergraduate students who attend 4-year universities (Astin, 1975, 1993; Bean, 1980; Braunstein et al., 2000; Cabrera et al., 1993; Davig & Spain, 2004; Fox, 1986; Friedman & Marsh, 2009; Liu & Liu, 1999; Nora & Cabrera, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Rhee, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1981; Tinto, 1987). Additional research has extrapolated these studies to focus specifically on community college student attrition and persistence (Bailey et al., 2006; Behrs & Smith, 1991; Caberera et al., 1993; Craig & Ward, 2008; Friedman & Mandel, 2011; Halpin, 1990; Mohammadi, 1996; Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Terenzini et al., 1981). Further, generally accepted persistence and attrition theories and models include the development theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984, 1993), the Sociological Model of Dropout Process (Spady, 1970), the General Causal Model (Pascarella, 1985), the Student Departure Model (Bean, 1980), and the Social Integration Model (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Many scholar-practitioners have used these theoretical frameworks to explore the college student persistence and attrition phenomena. Although these models and theories have guided many studies, they have limited utility when examining issues that affect minority students' persistence, including LGBTQ+ students at community colleges.

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model is one that has provided the most comprehensive framework for student departure decision-making as well as the greatest influence on student persistence. The model considers the way students' characteristics upon entering college, such as family background, individual attributes, and precollege schooling experiences, influence the college student departure process. Tinto posited that students' college entry characteristics influence their initial commitment to an institution and likely graduation. "Social integration pertains to the degree of congruency between the individual and the social system of a college or university" (Tinto, 1993, p. x). Forms of social integration include informal peer group associations, extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and administrators (Tinto, 1993). Students whose level of social integration was satisfied with their institutional belonging had a greater chance of persisting academically. Tinto (1993) recognized that different groups of students (i.e., at-risk, adult, honors, and transfer) had distinctly different circumstances that require group-specific retention policies and programs. In addition, he reasoned that there are different types of postsecondary institutions (i.e., nonresidential, 2-year community college, urban, and large public) that also require different types of retention policies and programs.

However, Tinto's improvement of Spady's model of social integration neglected to include the distinction between students' interactions in the academic and social systems, particularly given their psychological sense of identification and affiliation with the campus community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). According to Tinto's social integration model, students must leave behind their home-life and begin to engage with their academic interests, take on the majority values of other students and faculty, and commit to pursuing those values and behaviors rather than integrating their home life into college life through a social synthesis. This presents problems for student groups who have been historically marginalized in higher education

(Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Critics of Tinto's model have made substantial commentary on the issues of acculturation and the assumption that cultural differences should be diminished to be successful in college—the minority must adopt the dominant White heterosexual norms and values (Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1992). This presents a problem for students who have difficulty navigating participation and membership in different communities and spaces in college like LGBTQ+ students. Tierney (1992) argued that this concept of breaking away was not applicable to minority college students because the model was intended to describe the developmental progression within a culture rather than assimilation from one culture into another.

These models and theories related often to undergraduate retention have in common propositions that suggest students' successful integration into the social system is associated with student attrition or academic experience (Pascarella, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). Astin's (1984) development theory of student involvement, Spady's (1970) sociological model of dropout process, and Tinto's (1975) social integration model are sociological and involve a search for common behaviors that distinguish groups of students who persist from those who leave. On the other hand, Bean's (1980) student departure model is psychological and is concerned with the way individuals assess themselves in an educational setting. Bean (1980) and Pascarella (1985) found that student background is a variable that can influence student interactions with institutional members and have social and academic affects. Further, in these models, peer groups had a greater influence on student integration into academic and social systems. Emerging student persistence research is shifting to models and theories that adopt holistic approaches that include all members of the campus community (Thayer, 2000; Veenstra et al., 2009).

In conclusion, the literature suggests that additional studies that represent the diversity of geographic regions and student populations such as LGBTQ+ are necessary to form a more complete picture of community college students' persistence, and it is particularly imperative that colleges conduct their own studies to determine the effectiveness and effect of persistence on their diverse student bodies (Astin, 1993; Hossler, 2005).

Chapter 4. Research Design

This chapter describes the setting, policy context, population and sample, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures. The study used a qualitative design. Qualitative methods emphasize the students' perspective, and college settings usually have a greater potential to inform education practitioners and leaders (Maxwell 1996). Further, Maxwell (1996) blamed the limited effect of education research on educational practice on the fact that quantitative work is disconnected from the realities and experiences of the educational environment (Maxwell, 1996). Because of the lack of research focused specifically on LGBTQ+ community college students nationally, and specifically in California, education research has not adequately documented these students' experiences from their perspective and through their voices, and thus, this study's qualitative design was crucial to provide that insight for the field of education.

Also, I conducted a qualitative case study to better explore the complex and rich experiences of LGBTQ+ California Community College students. Qualitative research is "… based upon the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting in their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Rather than determining correlations or comparisons, the qualitative methodology can document a "slice of life." Therefore, the qualitative aspect of this study demonstrates concern for understanding behavior, experiences, and the meaning people have constructed from their own realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998). Using qualitative methods in this study allowed the students to provide a realistic description of their experiences in their own words. The main benefit of using qualitative methods rests with the credible results and theories based upon experiences, an

opportunity to improve practice and policy, and an ability to collaborate with the participants rather than just study them from afar (Maxwell, 1996).

Qualitative data take on many forms, including "… direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" obtained through interviews, observations, and various types of documents (Merriam, 1998, p. 69 as cited in Patton, 1990). Data were collected through a pre-interview survey followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews. The pre-interview survey tool and interview protocol were derived from the Pride Index's survey, which is a national LGBTQ+ campus climate survey of higher education institutions. The initial plan was to select interviewees purposefully based on their pre-interview survey responses to ensure diversity of the population interviewed, but because of non-responses, all survey respondents who opted to be interviewed were contacted and offered the opportunity to be interviewed for the study. Traditionally, surveys are a quantitative tool, but the qualitative survey is an emerging tool. "While the statistical survey analyses frequencies in member characteristics in a population, the qualitative survey analyses the diversity of member characteristics within a population" (Jansen, 2010, p. 1). The intent of these methods was to collect rich student experience data to provide answers to the research question.

Research Setting

While the potential setting for this research was the entire California Community College system, the participants attended only 6 colleges: Butte; Cosumnes River; Gavilan; Napa Valley, Santa Rosa, and Sierra; for simplicity, omitted are the words college, community, or junior from college names. Each college has a distinct student population. Tables 1 and 2 present the demographic data for the 6 colleges included in this study; these data derived from the Fall 2021 semester in which the study occurred and were taken from the CCCCO Datamart. Both Tables 1

and 2 show the overall student population for each college; the tables give total numbers and percentage comparisons within each college population. These two tables present the diversity within each distinct college community as well as provide context in relation to the colleges in the study.

Table 1 presents the Gender Data available for each of the 6 colleges in this study broken down by Male, Female, Non-binary, and Unknown. It's worth noting that Napa Valley did not report non-binary gender data to the CCCCO Datamart for the Fall 2021 semester. All 6 colleges are majority female—over 50% female. For the 5 colleges that reported non-binary gender data, less than 1% was reported, which could be attributed to this being a new data element being collected thus some of which may still be lost in the Unknown category that is larger in comparison for most of the 5 colleges. The gender data is not delineated by Cis-gender and Trans-gender. Students who may actually identify as Trans could be indicating Unknown, Non-binary, Female, or Male—it's not clear from the CCCCO Datamart Data Definitions.

Table 1

Gender

	Student #	Student %
Butte	10,108	
Female	5,610	55.50 %
Male	4,342	42.96 %
Non-Binary	52	0.51 %
Unknown	104	1.03 %
Cosumnes River	14,087	
Female	8,053	57.17 %
Male	5,777	41.01 %
Non-Binary	62	0.44 %
Unknown	195	1.38 %
Gavilan	5,447	
Female	3,011	55.28 %
Male	2,362	43.36 %
Non-Binary	5	0.09 %
Unknown	69	1.27 %
Napa Valley	4,689	
Female	2,682	57.20 %
Male	1,912	40.78 %
Unknown	95	2.03 %
Santa Rosa	20,011	
Female	11,574	57.84 %
Male	7,918	39.57 %
Non-Binary	72	0.36 %
Unknown	447	2.23 %
Sierra	16,355	
Female	8,952	54.74 %
Male	7,050	43.11 %
Non-Binary	80	0.49 %
Unknown	273	1.67 %

Table 2 presents the ethnic demographic data for each college. Butte and Sierra are both majority White/Non-Hispanic—over 50%; however, Hispanic is the next largest group at both colleges. While White/Non-Hispanic was the largest ethnic group at Santa Rosa at 40%, Hispanic was the next largest at 37%. Gavilan is majority Hispanic—at nearly two-thirds of students. Cosumnes River and Napa Valley reported Hispanic as their largest group but not a majority over 50%, and White/Non-Hispanic was reported as the second largest group at both colleges. Cosumnes River was the only college to have a third group report within 5% of the second largest group; that group being Asian at about 21%, so while Cosumnes River has no majority ethnic group, it has three ethnic groups (Hispanic, White/Non-Hispanic, and Asian) that combined to make up a majority of the student population. At the other 5 colleges no other ethnic group aside from Hispanic and White/Non-Hispanic reported above 10% except for Unknown at Santa Rosa and Filipino came close to 10% at Napa Valley reporting at 9.49%. It's worth noting that Santa Rosa's Unknown category is an outlier compared to the other 5 colleges with all 5 of which report less than 6% Unknown and furthermore 3 of the colleges report less than 3% Unknown. Cosumnes River College has the largest African-American student population at 1,232 or 8.82% of students. Sierra reports the largest Multi-Ethnic students at 1,169 students or 7.15% of the student population; however, all 6 colleges report Multi-Ethnic at above 3% and further 4 colleges report it above 5% including Sierra.

Table 2

Ethnicity

	Student #	Student %
Butte	10,108	
African-American	255	2.52 %
Native American/Alaskan Native	107	1.06 %
Asian	566	5.60 %
Filipino	12	0.12 %
Hispanic	3,130	30.97 %
Multi-Ethnic	621	6.14 %
Pacific Islander	34	0.34 %
Unknown	235	2.32 %
White Non-Hispanic	5,148	50.93 %
Cosumnes River	14,087	
African-American	1,242	8.82 %
Native American/Alaskan Native	50	0.35 %
Asian	2,954	20.97 %
Filipino	653	4.64 %
Hispanic	3,952	28.05 %
Multi-Ethnic	947	6.72 %
Pacific Islander	178	1.26 %
Unknown	807	5.73 %
White Non-Hispanic	3,304	23.45 %
Gavilan	5,447	
African-American	102	1.87 %
Native American/Alaskan Native	11	0.20 %
Asian	234	4.30 %
Filipino	110	2.02 %
Hispanic	3,480	63.89 %
Multi-Ethnic	176	3.23 %
Pacific Islander	17	0.31 %
Unknown	158	2.90 %
White Non-Hispanic	1,159	21.28 %
Napa Valley	4,689	
African-American	221	4.71 %
Native American/Alaskan Native	13	0.28 %

Asian	159	3.39 %
Filipino	445	9.49 %
Hispanic	2,140	45.64 %
Multi-Ethnic	250	5.33 %
Pacific Islander	25	0.53 %
Unknown	212	4.52 %
White Non-Hispanic	1,224	26.10 %
Santa Rosa	20,011	
African-American	409	2.04 %
Native American/Alaskan Native	90	0.45 %
Asian	714	3.57 %
Filipino	122	0.61 %
Hispanic	7,576	37.86 %
Multi-Ethnic	888	4.44 %
Pacific Islander	67	0.33 %
Unknown	2,025	10.12 %
White Non-Hispanic	8,120	40.58 %
Sierra	16,355	
African-American	440	2.69 %
Native American/Alaskan Native	89	0.54 %
Asian	915	5.59 %
Filipino	415	2.54 %
Hispanic	4,013	24.54 %
Multi-Ethnic	1,169	7.15 %
Pacific Islander	70	0.43 %
Unknown	291	1.78 %
White Non-Hispanic	8,953	54.74 %

Student Equity Plan Policy Context

This dissertation is associated with the California Community Colleges' Student Equity Plan, which is an important policy context because these plans are the only publicly available data on LGBT California Community College Students, and it shows the way the leadership from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to the colleges/districts view this student population. California Community Colleges are required through a Student Equity Plan

to analyze the effects of policies, procedures, and practices on specific student groups compared to the student population overall to determine whether there is a disproportionate impact. Disproportionately impacted student groups are determined through a quantitative analysis established by the legislature in the California Education Code Title 3 Division 7 Section 78220-78222. These Student Equity Plans outline the way funding will be targeted to address specific issues that various groups of students face. The disproportionate impact areas are access/enrollment; retention/persistence; transfer level math/English completion; transfer to a four-year university, and certificate/degree completion. The legislature has identified specific student groups for analysis in the education code; these include race/ethnicity, socioeconomically disadvantaged, first-in-family to attend college, disability, veterans, former-foster youth, and gender. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office provides guidance and support for the Student Equity Plan development process across the colleges/districts.

In 2017, the California Legislature through Assembly Bill (AB) 1018, Community College Student Equity Plans added LGBT as a student group the California Education Code explicitly mandated to be included in Student Equity Plans. Part of the rationale for adding LGBT students to the Student Equity Plan process was to force the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to use and release the data on LGBT students collected under Assembly Bill 620 from 2011. Assembly Bill 620 (AB 620, 2011) requested (not required) that the University of California, California State University, and California Community Colleges allow students to self-report their LGBTQ+ identity where appropriate as other demographic data were already being collected (i.e., applications and other forms). Thus, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has collected data on LGBT self-identified students through the CCCApply system-wide application as requested under Assembly Bill 620 (AB 620,

2011), but withheld those data from the colleges/districts and the public as evidenced by Resolution 7.01 F15 by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (Spring 2017) calling on the Chancellor's Office to release the data.

However, as mentioned previously, the education code section only delineates, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender" as specific data elements; while the code language allows colleges/districts latitude to specify additional groups, such as Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Gender non-binary Identities, Gender Non-Conforming Identities, Gender Fluid, and others+, they are not enumerated explicitly in the education code so they may not be delineated in Student Equity Plans. This research study used the broadest meaning of LGBT identities as it references "LGBTQ+" but "LGBT" will refer to the California Education Code's narrower definition and policy limitation, in which "The chancellor shall establish a standard methodology, including guidelines, for measurement of student equity and disproportionate impact for disaggregated subgroups of the student population of the California Community Colleges. The chancellor shall establish the methodology for use in the student equity plans of community college districts" (California Education Code Title 3 Division 7 Section 78220-78222). In setting the methodology, the Chancellor has the authority and responsibility to disaggregate "LGBT" into its component subgroups as well as provide guidance for this mandated data analysis.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Percentage Point Gap Methodology Memo (2017) provided to the colleges/districts allowed only three discreet data elements to be used, LGBT-all, LGBT-male, and LGBT-female. This guidance and practice contrasts with the research literature on LGBTQ+ students in higher education in both 2-year community college and 4-year university settings. LGBTQ+ students are not a monolithic group;

in fact, Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) are sexual identity minority groups, while Trans are gender identity minority groups (Stewart, 2015; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Rasmussen, 2006; Renn, 2010; Rhodes, 1994; Quaye & Harper, 2015). Thus, the methodology undergirding the Student Equity Plans analysis is flawed fundamentally as it pertains to the narrower "LGBT" as well as to the more inclusive "LGBTQ+" California Community Colleges students.

Furthermore, Student Equity Plans are the basis for targeting funding to fill student success gaps. While the colleges/districts are granted authority in the way to target funding, Student Equity Plans are a justification for the college's future spending as well as an accountability report on past funding use, including goal achievement for the groups identified (California Education Code Title 3 Division 7 Section 78220-78222). Some colleges, such as American River College and Sierra College, indicated funding support in their Student Equity Plans specifically for Pride or Queer resource centers with dedicated space and services for the LGBT student population, while others, such as Butte, Cosumnes River, and Folsom Lake, included support for LGBT students and attempted to foster an inclusive campus climate across intersecting student identities by funding a larger scope of equity and diversity programming for students, faculty, staff, and college leadership. While the Student Equity Plan is based upon a quantitative disproportionate impact analysis, its reach can extend far beyond those five key metrics that public policy defined previously. The Student Equity Plan is not necessarily binding but serves to a greater extent as an accountability tool and strategic planning document that is associated with funding, and because of this association, it is important to note that the Student Equity Plan is an element of a much larger financial funding model for the vast California Community Colleges system.

Student Equity Plan Data

There are no publicly available reports specifically on LGBT California Community College students other than the 2019-2022 Student Equity Plans the colleges published. However, in 2021, the CCCCO Datamart was updated to include gender non-binary data in many reports that have gender data, but as you can see previously in Table 1, these non-binary data are incomplete for some colleges. The Student Equity Plans' data are based upon the 2017-18 academic year data, given that the plans were developed during the 2018-19 academic year. Thus, they neither provide a clear indication of the total number of LGBT students nor disaggregate them by each sub-group (i.e., broken down individually by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender). The reports do report the data based upon gender (i.e., LGBT Male and LGBT Female); however, the reports provide neither non-binary nor gender non-conforming data. This gender disaggregation is an oddity given the definition of transgender, non-binary, and other gender non-conforming identities provided in the literature review chapter.

Tables 3 and 4 attempt to showcase some of the data available on LGBT students from the colleges' Student Equity Plans. The Student Equity Plan Disproportionate Impact Data on Tables 3 and 4 were compiled from the 6 colleges' plans publicly available on their websites. Two areas in the Student Equity Plans are related tangentially to the research question: Retention from Fall to Spring semesters and Transfer to 4-Year University. The data in Tables 3 and 4 are presented as it appears in the respective college's plan. DI in the tables refers to the disproportionate impact. There are reporting inconsistencies when comparing the reports; namely, that Cosumnes River College's Student Equity Plan does not report any specific numbers on disproportionate impact of the populations specified (CRC Student Equity Plan, 2019). Also, some colleges reported just percentages while others just reported student totals—

Butte reported both. Also, Butte was the only college that reported its LGBT student population, in which they indicated that they had 243 LGBT students in the 2017-2018 academic year or 2% of their total student population (Butte College Student Equity Plan, 2019). Additionally, Napa Valley did not indicate any disproportionate impact on LGBT students in any area; while they reported numbers on other student groups, they did not report any specific numbers for LGBT (Napa Valley College Student Equity Plan, 2019). On Table 3, only Cosumnes River and Sierra reported a disproportionate impact in Fall to Spring retention for LGBT students while on Table 4 all colleges except Napa Valley reported a disproportionate impact in transfer to a 4-year university for LGBT students.

Table 3

Student Equity Plan Retention Disproportionate Impact Data

	LGBT Retention Fall to Spring	Baseline Data Overall Student Population
Butte	No DI LGBT-all retention rate 2016-17: -12.4% 2017-18: -0.8%	(# retained students/# enrolled) 2015-2016: 8,137 / 11,881: 68.5% 2016-2017: 7,924 / 11,535: 68.7% 2017-2018: 7,942 / 12,116: 65.5% For a total of 24,003 retained students out of 35,532 enrolled an average three-year Retention rate of 67.6%
Cosumnes River	DI: LGBT-all and LGBT-Female	62.8%
Gavilan	No DI	3,692 Students
Napa Valley	No DI Attained the Vision Goal Completion Definition	4,366 students
Santa Rosa	No DI	69.7%
Sierra	DI: LGBT-female 248	72% of students were retained from Fall to Spring in 2017-2018

Note: DI=disproportionate impact

Table 4

Student Equity Plan Transfer to 4-Year University Disproportionate Impact Data

College	LGBT Transfer to a 4-year University	Baseline Data Overall Student Population
Butte	DI: LGBT-all and LGBT-male Transfer Rates LGBT-All 2016-2017: 63.6% 2018: 80% LGBT-Male 2016-2017: 32.4% 2017-2018: 74.9%	(# students that transfer / total enrollments) 2014-2015: 1,465/16,924: 8.7% 2015-2016: 1,405/16,615: 8.5% 2016-2017:1,249/15,999: 7.8% For a total of 4,119 students out of 49,538 enrolled an average three-year transfer rate of 8.3%
Cosumnes River	DI: LGBT-all and LGBT-male	1,339 students transferred
Gavilan	DI: LGBT-female Transferred: 2017: 3 2018: 4	450 students transferred
Napa Valley	No DI Attained the Vision Goal Completion Definition	581 students transferred
Santa Rosa	DI: LGBT-male Transfer Rate: 2017: 4.6% 2018: 6.1%	7.2% Transfer Rate
Sierra	DI: LGBT-female and LGBT-male 2017 Transfer: 26 LGBT-Female 12 LGBT-male	*1,348 students successfully transferred to a UC/CSU in 2016-17. A further 689 students successfully transferred to a private college or out of state*

Note: DI=disproportionate impact

Once this study was approved, I attempted to obtain LGBT student demographic data from the Los Rios Community College District and Sierra College District, and was denied access because of direction from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Legal Counsel, which stated that the data in question were confidential and not for research purposes

beyond that mandated in the California Education Code—alluding to the Student Equity Plans. Therefore, the pre-interview survey was used to gain access to conduct interviews as well as explains why additional quantitative analysis could not be conducted from the pre-interview survey data.

Participants and Sampling Criteria

The participants in this study were a diverse group of 7 students each with a unique identity intersecting across race/ethnicity/culture, gender, LGBTQ+, and other facets. The participants attended 6 California Community Colleges: Butte; Cosumnes River; Gavilan; Napa Valley, Santa Rosa, and Sierra. After the informed consent for the survey was obtained, three qualifying questions were asked to ensure that the respondents met the criteria to participate in the study. The first two qualifying questions required an affirmative response to proceed to the survey. First, the respondents had to affirm that they were age 18 or older and that they were either a current or former California Community College student. The third qualifying question asked whether the respondent identified with the LGBTQ+ Pride Community, and a "no" or non-response prevented access to the survey, while responses of yes, maybe, or "I don't know" to this third qualifying question allowed students to participate in the survey. A total of 4 of the 7 participants were currently enrolled at a California Community College during the Fall 2021 semester in which the interview was conducted. A total of 3 of the 7 were enrolled formerly at a California Community College, 2 of whom completed their program of study in Spring 2021, while the third finished in Spring 2020, so all 3 had been enrolled at a California Community College during the past 1 to 2-years. Table 5 shows a tabulation of the participants by college, including the college's city and county to provide better geographic context. Also, if a former student is represented in the college's data, that is indicated as well.

Table 5

Colleges & Participants

College	# Participants	# Former Students	College City/County
Butte	1		Oroville/Butte
Cosumnes River	1	1	Elk Grove/Sacramento
Gavilan	1	1	Gilroy/Santa Clara
Napa Valley	1	1	Napa/Napa
Santa Rosa	1		Santa Rosa/Sonoma
Sierra	2		Rocklin, Grass Valley, Truckee/Placer
Total	7	3	

Data Collection Methods

Merriam (1998) suggested that the concept of data collection for qualitative research could be misleading because the data are not there waiting to be collected but rather the researcher determines the uses of data based upon the purpose they serve for the study at hand. To document the experiences of LGBTQ+ community college students fully in a trustworthy and safe way, I used both a pre-interview survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The study participants engaged in this research first through a pre-interview survey and then opted to participate in an interview. Everyone who opted to be interviewed was given the opportunity to be interviewed for the study; however, some who opted to be interviewed did not respond to schedule the interview session. Informed consent for both the survey and interview were collected before each.

Pre-interview Survey

A pre-interview survey with both bounded questions and open-ended free-response questions was distributed to students enrolled currently or recently in a California Community College who self-identified as LGBTQ+. The survey protocol (Appendix A) was delivered to recently enrolled California Community College students through the University of California,

Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center and California State University, Sacramento Pride Center and to current California Community College students through the Sierra College Pride Center and Butte College Queer Resource Center as well as to faculty through the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office "CCC LGBT Community" faculty email listserv, and they were asked to distribute the survey to their students via Canvas or other means.

As stated previously, the pre-interview survey was constructed based upon questions from the Pride Index with two continuums: Student Identity Profile and Student Experience. The Student Identity Profile is divided into two sections: College Student Profile and Student Identity Profile, while the Student Experience is divided into LGBTQ+ Support & Institutional Commitment and LGBTQ+ Academic Life. The student profile section asked questions about when and where they attended college, when they planned to graduate, their major, and college goals. The student identity profile section asked questions about the student's identity, including race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, outness, and other facets of their LGBTQ+ identity. Many demographic questions, such as those on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, were open-ended with guiding examples that allowed the students to express their true LGBTQ+ identity and the multiple facets of their identity in this research freely by not being bound by predetermined options as supported by the relevant literature (Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010). The Student Experience continuum asked about their interactions with the college, including preferred name and pronoun use, being outed, or feelings of being discriminated against; these experiences were probed deeper during the interview. The survey's primary purpose was to establish a detailed student identity and experiential profile for each student. The survey highlights the diverse identities of the students in the study. This pre-interview survey allows the analysis of both frequency tabulation and diversity characteristics.

The pre-interview survey was distributed using the Qualtrics survey tool, and the data were kept secure within Qualtrics and upon their export, were kept in a password-protected file folder. This design saved time during the interview and supported the study's validity as well by triangulating the data between the interview and survey. Any personally identifiable information revealed in the survey was redacted. The data from survey respondents who either opted out or were not interviewed were neither analyzed nor reported.

The pre-interview survey yielded a total of 44 responses. All 44 provided informed consent to participate and all but 1 affirmed to be age 18 or older. As those under 18 cannot legally provide informed consent, they were not permitted to participate in the survey. In addition, 5 respondents did not affirm that they were a current or former California Community College student, and 3 more did not meet the criteria for the third qualifying question. Thus, the 3 qualifying questions disqualified 9 respondents. Another 7 responded to the 3 qualifying questions to access the survey but provided no data on the survey. As a result, these 16 respondents were omitted from further data reporting and analysis; I provided them here to support the credibility of the study. Finally, a total of 28 individuals participated in the pre-interview survey. The primary purpose of the pre-interview survey was to gain access to conduct the interview as well as collect initial demographic identity and preliminary experiential data. Further, the pre-interview survey added credibility and validity because data from the interview could be compared to the pre-interview survey data. Because of access limitations and the small number of responses to the pre-interview survey, further analysis beyond tabulation was not possible; however, these tabulations add to the study's credibility overall and support future research.

Interviews

Of the 28 pre-interview survey participants 16 opted to be interviewed, but two did not provide contact information to schedule the interview. Originally, interviewees were intended to be selected purposefully based upon the survey data, but after a month during which the individuals selected did not respond to emails, phone calls, and text messages to schedule the interview, all of those who opted to be interviewed were emailed at least once to schedule the interview. A total of 7 participants were interviewed for this study.

The semi-structured interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes, although one took approximately 2 hours. The interview participants were compensated for their time with a $25 Target Visa Gift Card. Because the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted on the virtual Zoom platform. Verbal informed consent was obtained before the interview began, as well as permission to audio record the interview for data collection and analysis purposes. Only the audio of the interviews was recorded and transcribed, and the audio files were destroyed after transcription. While as the researcher, my video was on to foster trust with the participants, they were not required to have their video/camera on, and video was not recorded. The interview participants were informed of the audio recording and that video was not being recorded before the interview began. Further, I took notes by hand to ensure that I represented the participants' experiences accurately.

The interview protocol asked probing questions about the students' lived experiences related to attending community college and their LGBTQ+ identity. Interview responses were triangulated with the participants' survey responses to ensure the study's validity and reliability. Any personally identifiable information in the interviews was redacted or destroyed to ensure the participants' anonymity, and pseudonyms were used for all interviewees.

An interview is a purposeful conversation between two people intended to gather information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviews provide information on past events and are the best technique to gather information directly from a source (Merriam, 1998). Interviews are a crucial component of the qualitative data collection process because students can share in confidence their unique experiences related to attending a California Community College as experienced from the perspective of their student LGBTQ+ identity without the fear of reprisal. The interviews were largely retrospective to provide a glimpse of past events through the participants' eyes (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative studies, interviews are used for data collection as a way to "… gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103). Therefore, the interviews provided important insights into the students' experiences and the climate they experienced while attending college.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to obtain rich experiential data from many student identities. While multiple interviewees had the same single identity characteristic, such as gay, other demographic characteristics, such as outness, gender, and/or race/ethnicity differed. The interview protocol was semi-structured to allow for follow-up clarifying questions to gain deeper insights into each participant's experiences and perspectives.

Using formats Lichtman (2006) and Merriam (2009) suggested, the interview protocol was developed with the intention to obtain information from the students. The initial questions were broad and included their selection of, and attendance at, their community college, and then focused on specific themes related to their lived college experiences, including interactions with faculty, staff, and peers and the way their LGBTQ+ identity played throughout these experiences. Using a semi-structured interview protocol also provides opportunities for

elaboration and probing questioning strategies (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 2009). The interview questions are provided in Appendix A. These questions were piloted with a group of LGBTQ+ community college alumni to eliminate any confusing questions and ensure that the protocol was able to provide the data needed for the study.

Hatch (2002) asserted that qualitative researchers should ask open-ended questions and listen intently for cues that may reveal the way the participants make sense of their experiences. Therefore, I used an interview protocol, but I also asked probing follow-up questions by using the cues that revealed the participants' experiences. The protocol was informed by the literature on LGBTQ+ students at both community colleges and 4-year universities, student persistence, and campus climate (see Appendix B). The interview questions were semi-structured and therefore, were sufficiently flexible to allow me to ask questions based upon emerging themes from the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

The interview participants were referred to community mental health resources, given that the questions could elicit traumatic feelings or lead them to recall unpleasant experiences. It was important to ensure that the interview was guided by a protocol to achieve consistency, but that it was not so rigid that it limited the scope of the interviewees' stories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described qualitative data analysis as "… segmenting and taking apart data (like peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together" (p. 154). The qualitative analysis program Atlas Ti was used to code the interview transcripts deductively and identify the emergent themes. The cyclical qualitative data analysis process consisted of reviewing and organizing the transcript data then using an open coding process.

Through this coding process, I looked for similar trends in the responses that corresponded with those in the literature. Coded data tend to fall into three broad categories: expected codes based upon the literature; unforeseen codes, and unusual codes of conceptual interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). After establishing open codes, I used analytical coding procedures to organize the open codes into themes focused on building interpretation and meaning. Some of the pre-interview survey data were infused into this analysis to reinforce the themes. Further, I looked for patterns in the coded responses based upon the student demographic profiles from the pre-interview survey data, such as sexual orientation (LGB), gender identity, Trans identity, outness/closet, and race/ethnicity/culture. Lastly, the data were reduced using an open and inductive process to develop culminating themes and understanding.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies do not have experimental designs, and as a result, the criteria used to determine the study's validity and reliability differ. Lincoln and Guba (1986) discussed these criteria as exploring the truth (internal validity), finding the applicability of the study (external validity), exploring the consistency (reliability or replicability), and ensuring its neutrality (objectivity). A qualitative case study that relies on studying natural settings to construct truth can be deemed trustworthy if the criteria are explored.

In qualitative research, "… the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2009 p. 15). Merriam warned that, "… the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might impact the study" (p. 15). To address these potential issues and ensure reliability and consistency, I used member checks, peer review through a dissertation committee, and a positionality statement. Through member checks, the students interviewed in the study had an opportunity to provide feedback on emerging findings as part of the preliminary

analysis. Further, the dissertation committee provided on-going feedback and peer review, and the positionality statement outlined my role as a Los Rios Community College District Employee as well as my personal associations with the study population and my motivations for conducting this research.

Credibility

This qualitative study's internal validity was determined by making it credible. Merriam (1998) argued that the research study should match reality to ensure its credibility. The construction of reality is multi-faceted and the researcher, as a human, interprets the participants' reality through observations and interviews (Merriam, 1998). Although interpreting another's reality may appear to be a weakness of qualitative research, it is actually a strength, in that the researcher is much closer to the data rather than if an instrument were used (Merriam, 1998). The literature on qualitative research points to criteria that establish a study's credibility (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998). These include: prolonged engagement; triangulation; peer debriefing; negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), and by meeting these criteria, I enhanced the study's credibility.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a process of using multiple data sources, multiple investigators, or multiple methods to confirm qualitative findings in a study (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this case, the data from the student survey response data, interview data, and college websites were triangulated.

Peer Debriefing. To ensure this study's credibility, it was important to include disinterested professional peers in the inquiry process to examine the data and keep the researcher honest (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I engaged with other Ed.D. students through the CANDEL Program and other

colleagues through various writing seminars. In addition, I belong to a number of professional community college student services-related organizations as well as LGBTQ+ professional organizations, so I had many peers who assisted in debriefing and provided additional insights as I analyzed the data.

Negative Case Analysis. Using negative case analysis was a vital component in the study's credibility. Negative case analysis allowed me to share and discuss data that contradicted the themes or patterns emerging from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Creswell (2009) indicated that because reality includes different viewpoints that do not always converge, the researcher should present all of the information that contradicts the general perceptions that emerge in the data. By presenting data that contrast with the general emergent themes, the study becomes more realistic and credible, particularly given the diversity of this population; themes emerged for one part of the LGBTQ+ student population that contradicted another segment, particularly given the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and LGBTQ+ identities.

Member Checks. An important step in maintaining the study's credibility was the use of member checks. Member checks allow the participants an opportunity to see the anonymized data before they are finalized (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 1998). A part of the interview process entailed presenting parts of the survey data and the college Student Equity Plan to the student interviewees and documenting their reactions. Further, after I conducted the student interviews, I emailed them a copy of their interview transcripts so they could respond to them. Member checks helped facilitate triangulation as well as contributed to the study's credibility.

Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher has an inherent influence and power over conducting a study (Maxwell, 1996). Hatch (2002) stated that, "… while it may improve chances for access and ease the sometimes- cumbersome task of building rapport, studying settings with which you are familiar is generally a bad idea" (p. 47). Despite this warning, a critical feature of this study was that it addressed deeply personal themes associated with the participants' identity, and by leveraging my professional work role to gain access and then taking advantage of my own personal gay identity to facilitate trust with the participants, it yielded data that could not be obtained otherwise given their sensitive nature. The synthesis of my professional and personal identity facilitated access and the trust required to collect the data. My gay cis-male identity, in conjunction with my roles as a student services professional, student, and researcher allowed me to co-construct knowledge with the participants rather than served as a limitation. Through research journals, note-bracketing, and member checks, I was able to respond and reflect on the data to limit my own bias as I collected and analyzed the data.

Positionality

I am a gay White cis-gender male who is legally blind because of a genetic optic nerve disorder. Further, I am the first in my family to attend university, and the only one with a bachelor's degree not to mention a master's or doctoral degree. Professionally, I am the Alternate Media Design Specialist in the Center for Excellence (CFE) at Folsom Lake College; previously, I served as a Student Personnel Assistant in Disability Support Programs & Services at Cosumnes River College for approximately six years. My own personal student experience receiving services based upon my disability colors the way I approach my professional work. Generally, education is empowering, and I work to empower the students I serve. I do not let my

disability define me, which is why the order of my personal identity as a gay White male comes ahead of living with a visual impairment.

Education is a fundamental value in my family. My parents always stressed the importance of attending school, working hard, and doing the best possible—taking shortcuts or trying to take the easy way out was never acceptable. Obtaining good grades was not as important as the learning process and being engaged with the school; of course, grades matter, but simply earning a good grade does not always equate with knowledge and critical thinking skills. Sometimes a difficult journey offers unplanned lessons in and of itself, and learning occurs beyond the classroom.

Despite my disability, my parents encouraged me to attend college; the choice of institution and major were my own. Although my parents could not understand my college struggles fully, they were always there for me and accompanied me on the journey. Further, my own educational journey has motivated my siblings to attend community college and better themselves. My mother was the first in her family to graduate from high school; she attended community college on and off for many years and eventually completed her associate's degree in Business Administration by the time I was in middle school. My sister attended community college for many years off and on as well but never completed a degree program. Both my mother and sister attended American River College—a Los Rios College. My brother is using his G.I. Bill benefits to complete his associate's degree after having served in the United States Marine Corps.

As a gay White cis-male, I have certain power and privileges that stem from that intersectional identity. In my opinion, being gay is socially more tolerable or acceptable, particularly given the legalization of gay marriage by the United States Supreme Court in 2014,

which followed the slow dissolution of the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy of the United States Defense Department President Barack Obama initiated in 2010. Further, my White privilege certainly factors into my social acceptance and status. However, tolerance and acceptance have not reached the remainder of the LGBTQ+ Rainbow of identities and intersections with race, ethnicity, and culture. From my position of privilege, I have seen the inequities, discrimination, and injustices within the LGBTQ+ community and from outside it through my affiliations with the Los Rios Spectrum employee group, Sacramento LGBT Community Center, Sacramento Gay Men's Chorus, BENT Sacramento LGBTQ Film Festival, and by having attended various LGBTQ+ Pride-themed events.

There is a synthesis between my personal identity, family link, and professional work that motivated me to conduct this research. My professional work provided the foundational access to conduct this research. While I do not work exclusively with LGBTQ+ students, some of them are related with my student disability services professional work, which does cross-link with me personally given my own identity as gay and disabled, and finally, there is my familial association with community college experiences.

While this research is rooted in my personal journey as a student-to-student services professional to a scholar-practitioner leader, this research is not about me; it is about the systemic issues and inequities at the core of California's public higher education segments with a focus on one in particular—community college. I take advantage of my positionality and privilege to shine light and amplify voices to effect the change necessary to evolve and improve the education systems so that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the introspection process that qualitative researchers undergo because they are not impartial scientists, but the research tool (Hatch, 2002; Kleinsasser, 2000). Hatch (2002, p. x) stated that qualitative "… researchers are a part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable," so they need to keep track of their influence on the research setting. Therefore, documenting biases through note-bracketing of initial thoughts and emotional responses allows the researcher sufficient closeness to the participants to understand the phenomenon undergirding the study more fully, as well as an authenticity to be able to collect the data. In addition, Bodgan and Biklen (2007) recommended that qualitative researchers practice reflection and on-going data analysis during data collection. They suggested using brackets to document the observer's thoughts and reactions within field notes.

While I was not a direct participant in this study, given my own positionality, I could have been easily had I been a student at a California Community College. In addition, as a student services professional, I have regular direct interactions with many students who could potentially be participants. Given these facts about my positionality, I used a strict protocol of documenting my thoughts and impressions along with the qualitative data as they were collected and analyzed. Further, I managed biases through member-checks as well as peer debriefing and feedback from my committee and cohort. My positionality allowed for this study, but I had to balance that access with the closeness to the research participants and my own biases and prejudice.

Chapter 5. Student Vignettes

This chapter presents the interview participant vignettes. The participant vignettes are descriptions that illustrate each student's lived experience at a California Community College and reflect the way their LGBTQ+ identity affected their perception of success in college. Because of the small number of survey participants and the way the survey had to be solicited to gain access to students, the survey data were analyzed and are reported only in relation to the themes that emerged from the interviews. Only those who were interviewed are reported.

Student Identity Data

To support the study's credibility, Table 6 presents the interview participants' identities from the pre-interview survey. Survey questions 7, 8, 9, and 12 asked participants about their identity, specifically LGBTQ+, gender, birth/preferred name, race, ethnicity, and cultural identities. These were open-ended questions with examples to guide responses but participants were free to write in anything. Further, questions 10 and 11 asked participants about their outness in the college and family contexts.

Table 6

Student Identities

	LGBTQ+ Id	Gender Id	Name Id	College Out/ Closet	Home Out/ Closet	Race, Ethnicity, Culture ID
Bellamy	Omnisexual	Bigender, equally split between male & female, but not comfortable identifying as non-binary.	Birth/ Given Name	Closeted	Closeted	Caucasian, Italian American.
Morgan	Queer, Transgender	Trans, specifically nonbinary masculine	Birth/ Given Name	Out	Out	White with some Latino ancestry
Charlie	Bisexual trans man	Trans-Male (but in a he/they way?)	Preferred, Chosen, or another Name	Out	Out	White
Dakota	Queer, Lesbian, Bisexual	Non-Binary/ Gender Non-Conforming	Birth/ Given Name	Out	Closeted	White
River	Gay	Cis-gender Male	Birth/ Given Name	Out	Out	Hispanic/Latino
Alex	Queer	Cis-female	Birth/ Given Name	Closeted	Out	White, atheist, middle class
Justice	Bisexual/ Queer	Cis-Female	Birth/ Given Name	Out	Closeted	Irish, Serbian, Nordic, German

It is noteworthy that three of the 7 interview participants expressed a single LGBTQ+ identity; thus, the majority expressed multiple LGBTQ+ identities. Similar to Gender Identity, 4 of the 7 students expressed gender as something other than the heteronormative male/female gender binary; however, three participants identified with the traditional cisgender male/female binary. For race, ethnicity, and cultural identities as well, three identified as a single identity, while the majority expressed multiple facets to their race, ethnic, and cultural identities.

Interview Vignettes

The following interviewee vignettes are descriptions that illustrate their California Community College career and the way their identity has affected their college experience.

Bellamy

Bellamy identifies as an "Omnisexual individual," and Caucasian, specifically Italian American. Bellamy defines Omnisexual as a mixture of pansexual and bisexual where one may have a gender preference in a particular relationship. Their gender identity shifted from the time of the survey to the interview; in the survey, they identified as a "bi-gender individual, who feels equally split between male and female, but does not feel comfortable identifying as non-binary," and during the interview they identified as a Cis-female. They've struggled with the college's predetermined pronoun options and not being able to select "They/She" or "They/He." Bellamy considers themselves largely closeted, as they are out only to one professor and their children.

Bellamy is studying Criminal Justice at Santa Rosa Junior College where they plan to finish their associates degree by December 2022 and transfer to a four-year university, although are unsure which university yet. Bellamy is a single parent and uses several student services, including CalWORKS, EOPS, Next Up, and Disability Services. They also served in the military formerly and use the Veterans Resource Center. In addition, Bellamy is very appreciative of the

Queer Resource Center on campus; they attribute going to college to finding their true identity. While Bellamy attends Santa Rosa Junior College primarily because of its convenience and proximity, they highly recommend that LGBTQ+ students do research on the college, including looking up the professors on "Rate My Professor," and that they enjoy their college experience.

Morgan

Morgan is a queer, nonbinary trans masc individual who is White with some Latino ancestry. Morgan is attending the University of California, Davis, currently, but transferred from Cosumnes River College (CRC) where they studied Plant Biology; they attended CRC from Fall 2017 to Spring 2020. While attending CRC, Morgan used the DSPS Office for counseling and attributes their ability to transfer to UC Davis in part to the Office's support. Morgan decided to attend CRC primarily because of convenience, but also believes their Trans identity was a factor because of fears about the communal housing environment at the university. They always wanted to attend UC Davis but are very glad to have started at a community college first. Morgan feels their community college education and experience prepared them for UC Davis better.

One of Morgan's many challenges while attending CRC was using the restroom facilities. CRC has very few gender-neutral or single stall restrooms, and those that are available are not located conveniently in the areas that Morgan frequented. Similarly, Morgan believes that the college should allow students to change their name and gender identity information easily, including pronouns; while Morgan goes by their Birth/Given Name, they know of others who have struggled with name and gender changes with the college. In addition to easing the administrative process, Morgan would like simpler ways to report issues and problems, such as negative interactions with faculty and staff; according to Morgan, there is no clear or simple way to report issues to college leadership for resolution. Further, along the same lines, Morgan

believes that CRC needs to evaluate their faculty, as UC Davis does at the end of the academic term. A significant recommendation Morgan would make to college leadership would be to eliminate the campus police department or at the very least, prevent them from carrying guns. Morgan feels strongly that guns have no place in schools. These changes could improve the way Trans students like Morgan feel about the college. Morgan advises that LGBTQ+ students need to build a network of support and find community to be successful and feel connected to the college.

Charlie

Charlie identifies as a White bisexual trans-male. Charlie attends the University of California, Davis currently, but transferred from Gavilan College where they earned their associates degree in communications. They attended Gavilan College from Fall 2017 until Spring 2021. Charlie used the Veterans Resource Center at Gavilan. They attended Gavilan before UC Davis largely because of financial reasons, and admitted that classes seem easier at UC Davis, which they attribute to their experience at Gavilan. Charlie felt sufficiently accepted at Gavilan to come out about their bisexual and trans identities; they attribute some part of their coming out to the online learning environment during the COVID pandemic. They began to go by their Preferred/Chosen Name at Gavilan in Spring 2020; however, they had issues with changing their name on the college's Canvas learning management system. Charlie admits to some nervousness about coming out at Gavilan, but everyone's reactions were accepting. Charlie is out to their parents but no other family members. Charlie also credits their stepmother for not dropping classes—she simply would not allow it.

Charlie admits to not taking full advantage of the services and resources available at Gavilan, but does appreciate the support they received from the Counseling Office to ensure that

they completed all of the classes necessary to transfer to UC Davis. Charlie recommends that LGBTQ+ students like them attend a community college that is convenient for them to attend, but also to seek out resources and a support community to be successful.

Dakota

Dakota identifies as a non-binary/gender non-conforming queer, lesbian, bisexual, and White student. Dakota is attending Butte College currently and studying communications. They started at Butte in Fall 2019 and hope to finish their associates degree and transfer by Spring 2022. Dakota selected Butte College because of its proximity to their home; their identity was not a factor in the decision. Dakota describes themselves as out to their college friends; however, they are closeted completely about their LGBTQ+ identity in their home and family environment. They are not out to their family because of their family's religious beliefs. Dakota attended a Catholic high school to which they attribute being closeted about their true identity. Dakota feels comfortable sharing their identity with faculty and staff when it arises in relevant conversation, but are cautious in relation to sports/athletics because their brother is involved in sports at the college.

Dakota admits to not using the student services available to them at Butte fully, but appreciates the Counseling Office's support with course selection. Further, Dakota feels supported and affirmed by the tutoring services because they use their correct name and pronouns while providing services. In addition, they feel a sense of belonging because of the events and services the Queer Resource Center provides, and they enjoy spending time there. The QRC put on a Queer Mascaraed event and a pumpkin smashing event to relieve the stress of finals. However, Dakota notes that although gender-neutral bathrooms are available on campus, they are rather inaccessible to students. Dakota feels supported by Butte College, including the

College President, with whom they have had several conversations. Dakota encourages LGBTQ+ students like them to attend community college to discover themselves and find community.

River

River identifies as a Hispanic/Latino gay cisgender male. He attends Sierra College where he studies Business. River has attended Sierra off and on since Spring 2015 and hopes to transfer with an associate degree by Spring 2023. He has stopped attending college for personal and work-related reasons. River is out about his gay identity both at college and home, and if it comes up in regular conversation, he does not shy away from talking about it. River admits to not taking full advantage of the services and resources available at Sierra. He feels that Sierra College leadership should know that not all students have the support network they need to be successful. River advises that LGBTQ+ students like him do their best to "stick it out" and not drop out.

Alex

Alex identifies as a queer cisgender female, White, atheist, middle class student. Alex is attending the University of California, Davis currently, but transferred from Napa Valley College, which they attended from Fall 2013 until Spring 2021 and earned their associates degree in winemaking. They did not intend to transfer initially, but their goals shifted in 2016 after they took a class in winemaking. Alex selected Napa Valley College because of convenience and proximity, and attended a community college in the Santa Cruz area previously.

Alex felt more out while in Santa Cruz than Napa as they could not seem to find community at Napa. At Napa, they rarely talked about their personal life and did not correct faculty or staff who made assumptions about their identity—like references to boyfriends—

because they simply wanted to avoid conflict. Alex never used the counseling services at Napa, but did use the math tutoring services and felt supported by them. Alex also used the financial aid office but only for transactional reasons. Alex did not belong to any other programs on campus; their feelings about the college support they received overall are mostly neutral. They did not see any specific supports for the LGBTQ+ Community at Napa. Alex recommends that LGBTQ+ students like them find and use resources on campus, as well as find community and a way to feel like they belong at the college, which are things they wish they had done at Napa.

Justice

Justice identifies as a bisexual/queer, cisgender female with an Irish, Serbian, Nordic, and German background. During the interview, Justice clarified that they identify more as pansexual as they do not believe in the construct of gender, but also indicated that they are "technically Bi". Justice attends Sierra College where they study Film and Video Production. They have attended Sierra since Fall 2017 and plan to complete their program of study in Spring 2022. Their goal is to earn an associate with a certificate as well as transfer to a university. At Sierra they were a part of a TRIO Program. Justice attends Sierra out of convenience and proximity. However, they did state that it was much easier to express their identity as they saw some staff and faculty who identified as LGBTQ+ expressing their identities at the college. While Justice feels safe and comfortable being out at Sierra College, they are not out to their parents because their mother is religious. Hence, Justice has told their siblings but no other family members. Justice dropped out for a period of time because of a mental health crisis, and returned to Sierra later, and feels that the college could have reached out to them at that low point with resources or services such as CalFresh and housing assistance. However, Justice felt supported by the LGBTQ curriculum at Sierra. They also work in the Sierra College Counseling Office as a student ambassador.

Through their synoecized experiences learning and working on campus, Justice feels that attending community college is less stressful because there is no pressure to finish in a particular amount of time and they feel a sense of community and belonging. They recommend that other LBGTQ+ students like them try to find that same sense of belonging and community.

Summary of the Interview Participant Vignettes

This study consisted of a pre-interview survey and semi-structured interviews. Of the 7 students interviewed, 3 were former California Community College students, while 4 were enrolled currently at a California Community College during the Fall 2021 semester in which the interviews were conducted. These students are diverse members of the larger California Community Colleges' LGBTQ+ community who represent intersecting identities, including multiple sexual orientation, gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural identities. These vignettes described each student's community college educational career, the way they came to their college, as well as the way their LGBTQ+ identity affected their college experience.

Chapter 6. Findings

This chapter presents the key findings discussed within the context of the problem and purpose statements, research question, theoretical framework, and relevant literature. The study used a pre-interview survey and a semi-structured in-depth interview protocol to understand the experiences of 7 LGBTQ+ California Community College students to address better the research question: What are the experiences of LGBTQ+ California Community College students that they feel contributed to their success? The pre-interview survey data from the 7 interview participants was interwoven through the themes to support the credibility and reliability of the data analysis.

Overview of Emergent Themes

There were 5 emergent themes: 1) Importance of Faculty Interactions and Support; 2) Importance of Student Services; 3) Sense of Safety—Policing and Restrooms; 4) Validation by Using Proper Pronouns and Preferred Names, and 5) Supporting Trans Outness. The importance of faculty interactions was explored along the outness continuum. The importance of student services was revealed in many areas, including financial aid, disability services, counseling, and tutoring, which culminated in students either finding community through LGBTQ+ student services or wanting to find community because of the lack of such services on their campus.

Theme 1: Importance of Faculty Interactions and Support

Faculty interactions generally are positive or negative. This theme indicated the way positive faculty interactions yield validation and help LGBTQ+ students come out in college, while negative faculty interactions yield invalidation and thoughts of dropping classes or dropping out. This theme highlighted being out and in the closet. The theme was organized according to Positive Interactions & Validation, Out in College and Faculty Validation, Negative

Interactions that Result in Invalidation & Thoughts of Dropping Out, and Reporting & Faculty Evaluation.

Positive Interactions & Validation

As the literature reveals, positive interactions with faculty can offer college students validating experiences and be a contributing factor to their success overall. While the interview probed student-faculty interactions directly and indirectly, River expressed indifference to his faculty interactions. Indifference, while not necessarily invalidating, is not as reinforcing as positive validating interactions, and could still have negative outcomes because of the absence of positive interactions. In River's case, more validating experiences with faculty may have altered their persistence trajectory; perhaps they would not have dropped-out if they felt positive support from faculty at the college. This is only speculation but treating indifference similarly to negative invalidating experiences would support the inherent force at work with positive validating experiences better, as positive student-faculty interactions can yield validation.

Charlie and Dakota expressed generally positive feelings and positive recollections about their interactions with faculty; Dakota stated, "It has been overwhelmingly positive. It has been the best couple of years of my life... I had found people that accept me for being me. All of the professors are super nice most of the time." While Dakota's experience was generally positive, we cannot discern any specific factors, attributes, or experiences that evoked these feelings; however, the fact that they feel so positive about their college experience may indicate that there were certain validating experiences that they just did not recall specifically during the interview.

However, three of the interviewees—Justice, Morgan, and Bellamy—provided specific detailed accounts of interactions with faculty that appeared to be validating. Justice described the

way they met and interacted with a faculty member who shared their LGBTQ+ identity. They said:

> My film professor, I get along really, really well with and I feel super safe with her just because one of the first things that she had mentioned is that she had a wife, and I was like, Oh, okay, I feel like you are a person that I can give this information out to… She's been very understanding… She's understanding, but she also doesn't pry at the same time... She knows that it's still technically my business... She would just be like, 'Your significant other is?'[and,] just let me fill in the blank.

Justice made a strong connection with one faculty member and through that single relationship found community and a sense of belonging at the college. Justice can see themselves in this faculty member, which is validating.

Morgan received validation from a faculty interaction via graduate school advice and encouragement; they recollected:

> …I was talking to one of my biology professors. I was asking him about how to get into grad school, or what does grad school look like, because nobody in my immediate family has done the kind of school that I want to do, so I don't really know what it looks like. I was asking about that, and he didn't super explicitly say anything, but he was one of the biology professors that did know my pronouns. He was cautioning, like, 'Sometimes your graduate advisor could be transphobic' or something like that. I think I remember talking about trans stuff, even if it was just talking about the [Sacramento] Gender Health Center in his earshot. It was a very subtle either acknowledgment of me or just acknowledgment that I care about this topic, and in a way that I think was respectful. It was good."

Morgan summarized their faculty interactions by saying, “The handful of professors that I came out to were good, or very passively, subtly came out to were very good about it, but I could see a lot of them not being [good about it].” The fact that faculty members were willing to relate to a student through their identity and provide advice on their academic career may have had an effect on Morgan’s academic trajectory beyond community college, particularly because they transferred ultimately to a four-year university.

Conversely, Morgan did express that the negative faculty interactions they had did leave a stronger impression on them than the positive ones, and said, “Weighted-wise, I think the negative was more than the positive.” Clearly, just one invalidating faculty interaction has the power to nullify the validation from positive faculty interactions like the profound one that Morgan shared.

Bellamy indicated that they had a positive interaction with a professor and said:

> There’s only really one professor that I really feel comfortable sharing with, and that’s the professor for LGBTQ art and literature. They’ve always been just a very open, happy, great individual to talk to. They’re the person that inspired me to just be myself, whether it’s through campus activities or even through homework assignments, or to the discussion posts. While there are a few others, I do feel comfortable being… I just feel hesitant… Again, being omnisexual, people don’t understand what that is, and they say, ‘You’re confused between bisexual and pansexual.’ It’s a huge controversial topic. I don’t really want to get into it…

Like Dakota and Charlie, Alex also shared generally positive feelings toward their college experience; however, with respect to expressing their identity to faculty, they did not feel as comfortable at Napa Valley College as at Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz. Alex attended two

California Community Colleges, and while most of their responses focused on Napa, this was one contrasting point. They attended Cabrillo before Napa, and generally felt more out and more comfortable with the Cabrillo faculty than the Napa faculty. With reference to growing and preparing to come out during their college experience, Charlie said that "Toward the end, I would say 100% [out], but I was there for four years. Toward the beginning, not at all [out]." Conversely, Alex went back into the closet from one college to another. Faculty support can determine whether a student who identifies with the LGBTQ+ community feels safe to be out in the college setting.

Out in College and Faculty Validation

Generally, the interview participants characterized themselves as "out" about their LGBTQ+ identity in the college context when asked. As discussed previously, outness is a continuum. In the college context in this study, outness ranged from Bellamy to River. River stated confidently, "I am fully out within the college environment. I don't shy away from it at all." On the other hand, Bellamy was the only interview participant who indicated "Closeted: Not Out" in the college context on the pre-interview survey, but admitted to being "out" to at least one professor, as well as using the LGBTQ+ student services available. Bellamy indicated "Closeted" in the family context as well. Alex marked "type own response" on the survey, but provided no additional details. However, during the interview, they indicated that they were more "out" at Cabrillo College than Napa Valley, yet not closeted. The other five interview participants indicated "Out: Not Closeted" on the survey, and while their interview responses varied based upon their experiences, all could be characterized as being out to some degree about their LGBTQ+ identity at college.

While Bellamy felt sufficiently comfortable to share their full identity with one faculty member who inspired them just to be themselves in college, they explained their closeted nature further by sharing, "…I'm honestly most comfortable around the counselor just because I know they have that confidentiality, and they're not going to just go around or accidentally slip up. …I have been trying to trust people more, but again, because of trust and boundary, and anxiety issues, it's very hard for me to reach out to people without feeling like I made the wrong decision." Thus, Bellamy demonstrated a sense of vulnerability in revealing their identity. Validating experiences and relating to other faculty members could lead Bellamy to evolve from being more closeted on campus to being more out about their identity.

Dakota has dual and intersecting closet versus outness given that they are closeted with their family but try to be out in the college context. Dakota compared their family closeted-ness to their college outness directly by saying, "A complete opposite of the college context." Dakota explained their duality as follows. "I don't think I would necessarily share with the sportspeople, just simply because of my family, because my brother is heavily involved in sports. I don't want that to get passed along to him." Dakota was involved in sports for a while. They elaborated further about sharing their identity with faculty and said, "…it would just depend on the professor. If I was relating a story back to my life, I think I would share it but I don't think if it was absolutely necessary, I would necessarily share." But, "I would tell them my pronouns…" In Dakota's case, the family and college contexts conflict, and thus limit their sense of safety to be out at college.

Similar to Dakota, Alex experienced forces external to the college that affected their sense of outness in college. While Dakota was more closeted because of external forces, Alex

felt safer to be more out at Cabrillo College. They highlighted their outness dichotomy by sharing:

> I think, at the time when I was going to Cabrillo Community College down near Santa Cruz, I had a really supportive partner at the time. I felt more comfortable just being my authentic self out in public in a variety of spaces. When I went to Napa College, it was a little bit later in life and I think I was single at the time and I just didn't really feel comfortable discussing my personal life. I also felt like I didn't really find community in that area as well when I was living in Napa. I felt apprehensive about sharing my identity.

Therefore, while the college and faculty can affect and support a student being out on campus, there are also various external forces in some cases that could be beyond the college's control or influence.

Alex elaborated about their Napa Valley College experience, in that they were more motivated academically to achieve their goal to transfer to UC Davis; they shared further, "I think now I've changed as an undergrad, but in terms of community college, I never really would discuss it… I think I just wanted to avoid conflict," in which "it" refers to their identity. Alex explained further that not being as out at Napa was attributable in part to their major; they said:

> I felt like a lot of the classes I was taking at community college, I also didn't meet anyone who was out either in my classes, and then just having the experience in the industry, in general, in the wine industry don't really get to meet a lot of folks that are out. I wouldn't say it's a massive challenge, but I would say I would feel slightly uncomfortable with just being in the closet and feeling like I didn't really see myself in a lot of other folks that I was working with.

Identifying with those around you fosters a sense of belonging. Validation can support that sense of belonging as well by recognizing the experiences and identities of those present.

Even River, who is "fully out", appeared to constrain themselves a bit in terms of outness when they elaborated further, and said "I feel pretty comfortable. If it comes up in conversation or if it comes up as something that I can leverage within a specific course, I'll do it. Just essays and stuff like that, pretty open if the conversation comes up." It appeared that River does not draw attention to their identity, and while they did not indicate this explicitly, this may be because of the intersectionality of their Hispanic/Latino and gay cis-male identities—River acknowledged this possibility during a member-check. As discussed in the literature, Latino cultures tend to take a passive approach to gay outness.

Like River, Justice shared, "I'm pretty out… most of my co-workers know. It's usually just like if they ask, then they receive, kind of thing. I'm not going around necessarily announcing it, just because it's not applicable most of the time. If somebody asks, then I'll usually be pretty open about it." Hence, in Justice and River's case, their outness is contextual, in that it varies according to how relevant they perceive their identity is to the situation at hand. Validation can be used to help a student like River see their identity's relevance to what is occurring or being discussed.

Like Justice and River, Morgan also constrains their outness at times; they explained, "I talk about my partner a lot… If I'm talking to my professors in a more personal context, just like… any personal anecdote, that might come up, I don't really think about it too hard unless I don't feel safe with them." Further, like Dakota, Morgan compared their outness in the family context to the college context by saying, "I'm more out with my family than at college." Hence,

Morgan constrains their outness based upon a sense of safety. Validation can lead to trust and thus help a student like Morgan feel sufficiently safe to be out.

Trust extends beyond the sense of safety. Justice highlighted finding trust in college staff when they said, “Because I’m so very much out until questioned about it, I feel pretty comfortable with just about all of them. Obviously, there are specific people. Having worked in the counseling center, there’s specific people I go to… because I know that they’re going to get things done. I don’t ever really feel unsupported...” Justice feels support because while their interactions with college staff may be transactional, they trust that they will receive what they need when asked. However, it appears that Justice, like River and Morgan, may constrain their outness to a degree when questioned about their identity. Justice explained further, “I just don’t want the discourse… I have anxiety, clinical anxiety that already affects my body. It is a very physical effect. I always just try to keep myself away from some of those things that may cause that extra stress, just because it’s not worth my energy...” Justice went on to say that, “Obviously, I do want to fight for that, but not in the middle of my Saturday class. It’s one of those things where… you just have to pick and choose your battles, and sometimes it’s just not worth it. You can always tell… [that] their mind is definitely not going to be changed on a subject.” Questioning a student’s identity can be an invalidating experience, so constraining one’s outness may be a defensive mechanism.

Validation and a sense of belonging are powerful ways to support LGBTQ+ students’ sense of outness at a community college. Dakota shared that community college, “… just more than anything [has] given me a space to figure out and to be myself.” Charlie explained that they weren’t “used to” or comfortable with sharing their identity or personal life with faculty. They explained their uneasiness and said, “I would always be nervous about it, but when I did it, they

reacted fine. I would just be nervous… I guess because I was just beginning to come into my identity." Having personal interactions with faculty can be validating experiences and yield a sense of belonging that supports the student's identity development. To foster a sense of belonging and validation better, Alex recommends having, "…weekly or bi-weekly meeting of some sorts, finding ways to get involved, finding ways to network. It could be college leadership... and folks that do feel like they identify and belong within the community and that could come to these events or offer to have chats with students so that the students could see themselves represented in that kind of role." Charlie reinforced Alex's recommendation, and shared, "Generally, I had a good time of it because most of my friends were also LGBTQ and then at the rare events, I don't know, I'd stock up on stickers and things. That was fun." Thus, fostering community fosters a sense of belonging.

While it is key to support students' outness, it is important to note that being open and out versus being in the closet is very personal and rooted in a sense of safety. Even those who consider themselves "out" may choose to still conceal parts of their identity depending upon the person, situation, and/or environment.

Negative Interactions that Result in Invalidation & Thoughts of Dropping Out

The interview protocol yielded substantial data from nearly all of the interview participants about negative faculty interactions. Dakota and River were the only two interview participants who gave no examples of negative faculty interactions. Some interviewees provided certain generalizations of negative faculty interactions, while others offered very detailed and specific accounts.

Justice generally recounted the added stress of faculty reactions and interactions related to their student identity:

> I've had professors that are obviously very opinionated and a little less welcoming toward students of certain identities, but I usually keep it to myself, unless the professor brings it up. I think just because I'm always afraid that they're going to use it against me, not necessarily that they would, but there's always that underlying idea of like they're going to grade me a lot harder, or they're going to not be as understanding because of my identity… It's just like an added thing that's always in the back of my mind… I'm like, 'Oh, God, is this going to be an issue?' If we're talking about an LGBT subject and something comes up, I want to be able to be vocal about it, but I never know unless I've seen their opinions on it and feel safe talking about it.

The anxiety that Justice exhibited can explain the varying degrees of outness we see on campus. Students may feel more comfortable being out with particular faculty or staff than others, and the reason a student may choose to closet themselves can be situational and/or environmental. Justice elaborated further and said, "That's an extra little thing that just sticks out in my brain that you can't always be yourself around everybody, particularly in Northern California, unfortunately."

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, some faculty interactions can strike at the core of a student's identity. Charlie, who is Bi and Trans recalled that, "I had one professor that said that bisexuals don't exist, but I didn't really talk to that professor because it was just a strictly-lecture class, so I'd just sit there in the audience and listen... He did say that bisexuals don't exist, so that one was weird." Charlie's experience was not targeted specifically at them, but nonetheless, it left an impression that could have been invalidating if not for Charlie's own self-confidence. When asked how the experience had made them feel, Charlie elaborated by saying, "Well, it didn't make me feel insecure because I just knew he was wrong. He said that whenever he talked

to a bisexual, he would always ask them which gender they preferred, and they would always have an answer, which meant that they liked one gender better than the other, and it was like, well, you still like both even if you like one more than the other." Faculty bias and prejudice have the potential to have lasting effects on students.

Morgan described probably the most profound of the negative faculty interactions. They recalled an experience with a faculty member who they felt was disseminating false information about their Trans identity and felt compelled to confront the faculty member about it. Morgan shared that:

> She was giving this incorrect information, this dangerous information to a whole room of future mental healthcare professionals and social workers. This may be their first instance being exposed to trans people. Because at this point, it was a little bit less hyper-visible, or it was on the way there. I think it was after Caitlyn Jenner came out... Still, it was less talked about than it is right now, I think, so more likely that people hadn't heard of it. I think there were [students] who were raising their hand and saying, 'I've never heard of this very much.' It's so scary to me to see that this may be the very first thing that they're hearing about trans people… It would be so hard to just stand by and watch." Thus, Morgan felt compelled to confront the faculty member, "I went up and I said, 'Hey, these are not true. This is not good data. This is not good.' I guess I said it in a way that made me come across as trans, and she [said] basically, 'Well, you're one of the good ones, I guess. You're one of the real trans people, not one of the faking or not real trans people.' I'm paraphrasing greatly here. I don't remember exactly what she said, but it was just so upsetting… One article, in particular, that I'd just seen be debunked as completely not

correct and very biased. She told me to bring her sources, as if it's not her job to check her sources ahead of time.

When probed deeper about why they felt so compelled to confront the person, Morgan further stated that, "Just this fear because it is so, so difficult to get healthcare and get care in the medical community, even just normal health care, but particularly gender-related care. In the mental health community, from professionals, it's so scary and it's so hard. I've been discriminated against in that context multiple times." Morgan contined by saying, "If it wasn't so hard to report that sort of thing, I would have. I tried to, but there wasn't an easy way to do it that I saw. I tried bringing it up with [my DSPS Counselor] and [they] told me, 'I could talk to the dean,'" but Morgan did not feel comfortable about sharing the encounter outside the safe relationship they had with their DSPS Counselor, and they were somewhat afraid as well that they would not remember the encounter sufficiently well for it to matter or make a difference.

Not all invalidating faculty interactions are related to the student's identity, but still have profound effects on their college experience. Alex recalled:

> I had a really negative experience with an instructor once. It didn't have to do with my identity, but it did not make me feel comfortable attending the class. It was a college-level math course and this instructor was very demeaning to the students, would call people names and he would humiliate some of the students by just being an obscene character and find seating arrangements. I remember him yelling at me when I came into class right on time, it was right before class was going to begin, but I had to sit toward the back end of the classroom, it was full… he yelled at me and humiliated me in front of the class and forced me to change my seating position several times throughout the course. That was just really uncomfortable having that really negative attention because I'm a

very serious student. I, one, didn't like the attention. I don't really like to draw attention to myself very much. Two, I didn't like being scolded by someone who was your instructor [and] is an authority figure in that situation. That felt super uncomfortable…

Further, similar to Alex, Bellamy shared that a professor, "…would talk down to you like you're his five-year-old child. If you would say like, 'Hey, I don't understand something. Can you please help clarify, because the book says one thing, your model says the other?' He would snarkly respond with, 'You're just not reading the material. If you don't understand it, then I don't know what your problem is. You get it or you don't. It's not that hard to grasp.'" Faculty clearly have power and control in their classroom as the authority figure, but the way they use their power can have profound influences on students.

Alex elaborated further on their negative faculty interaction by sharing that:

I ended up filing an administrative complaint, which is something that I also had no experience with and didn't really feel like I wanted to do but felt compelled to just by the behavior. It was just really unprofessional and I didn't want any other students to feel like that in the future but, that being said, I halfway stuck it out. I filed it and the instructor had to make a formal apology in writing, but after that, I never saw them on campus. I think they stopped teaching at the college fairly soon after that. I don't think it was related but I do know there were some other students that were also going to take some motion. Students that actually had worse treatment than I did that were also going to file some formal complaint, but I didn't really get any feedback other than a few sentences from the instructor just saying that, 'Oh, I'm sorry that you experienced this in class and I do my best to make sure that everyone learns well.' It didn't really feel very sincere.

Student's perceptions of the college derive largely from faculty interactions, particularly as that is the way they engage with the college primarily, but there are other college institutional interactions that can be just as profound as faculty interactions. The way a Dean or college leader intervenes in student and faculty interactions and reinforces the negative experiences make the student feel even more powerless. The resolution of faculty-student conflicts will shape the student's perceptions and college experience overall.

Reporting & Faculty Evaluation

The students discussed issues related to reporting negative faculty interactions. The interview protocol did not ask specifically about reporting faculty behavior or evaluation. Nonetheless, Alex shared that they reported their negative faculty interaction and received an "insincere" written apology from the faculty member. Alex felt this resolution "did not solve the problem". On the other hand, Morgan did not feel sufficiently confident to recall the encounter accurately to report it. Morgan did end by sharing the negative faculty interaction with their DSPS Counselor who advised on the process of reporting it to the Dean. Morgan felt that telling their DSPS Counselor about the experience should have been sufficient to report it, and their DSPS Counselor should have been empowered either to resolve it or refer it to a higher authority for them. Morgan stated that, "If I report something to somebody, they should be able to file that report for me. If I were to go to an academic counselor or a staff member or a faculty member and say something about that, they should be able to report that for me. I think something like that would be useful…" Morgan elaborated further on the various reporting procedures at UC Davis and the way they were disseminated to them beyond attending orientation.

Like Morgan, Justice said, "I was too scared to [report it]. I didn't know how to, and I was too scared to do that. I was 19 when it happened, and so it was one of those things where I

was like, 'You're the professor, you know best.' It really discouraged me from any form of art for years, and it still does stick in the back of my brain." Colleges should find ways to resolve student-faculty conflicts and negative experiences so they do not invalidate the student. Accountability for faculty conduct treads on faculty academic freedoms and possible collective bargaining rights, but nonetheless, is a viable tool with which to validate students' experiences with faculty.

Morgan recommended further, "… having an option for students to give feedback on professors every semester and maybe have one of the questions be, 'Did you ever feel discriminated against by this faculty member?' I know at UC Davis, they do course evaluations every quarter. At CRC, it was more sporadic. It was not every semester… Make sure that they [the students] know it's completely anonymous, the professors will not see it until after the class is over or at all…" Morgan further recommended a more immediate reporting, "…mechanism on Canvas could be nice… [Canvas is] a very easy-to-use thing that everybody knows how to use. Well, maybe not everybody, but a lot of people know how to use…I know Canvas is very accessible." Charlie reinforced Morgan's recommendation and said, "… there's probably someplace that they can report… because, at Davis, they make it very clear just at the orientation-type events, there are hotlines that you can call if anything bad happens to you. That was not present at Gavilan College." Addressing faculty conduct and minimizing invalidation are important to support LGBTQ+ California Community College students.

Theme 2: Importance of Student Services

This theme examined the influence of student services in the LGBTQ+ student experience at a California Community College. This theme is broken down into 1) Financial Aid & Dropping Classes, 2) Disability Services (DSPS) and Validation, 3) General Student Support

Services, Counseling, and Tutoring, and finally 4) Finding Community: LGBTQ+ Services & Resources. This theme showcased validation theory beyond the classroom in cocreating knowledge through a sense of community supports or highlighted areas of invalidation from outside the classroom. Financial Aid is a service from beyond the classroom but has impacts linking to classroom experiences. Disability services appears to be a model of student services validation. And, the presence or lack thereof LGBTQ+ specific services and resources can impact a student's sense of belonging on campus.

Financial Aid & Dropping Classes

Like many students who qualify for financial aid programs, LGBTQ+ students feel the financial pressures associated with college because of the direct and indirect costs of attendance. Many of the interview participants referenced the cost of attending college, such as tuition and books**,** or mentioned tangential costs associated with basic needs like housing or food. Financial aid programs can cover direct and indirect costs associated with attending college. When asked which student services supported their success, Bellamy, Dakota, Alex, and Charlie all mentioned Financial Aid. Alex summarized the thoughts and feelings about financial aid: "I would access the financial aid department quite often, but it was more a transactional relationship I had with that staff." The students recognized financial aid's importance in supporting their college success, but the sentiment was more an end to a means in comparison to the way other student service areas were perceived, such as counseling or disability services. The interview participants did not elaborate extensively beyond the costs of college and the way financial aid covered those costs.

However, Morgan elaborated on the stresses and difficulties of navigating financial aid. "I think one of the difficulties with getting financial aid is sometimes you can be homeless and

your parents could be rich and the way that college calculates financial aid is based upon depending on how old you are, depending on your parents." Morgan provided an example, "Let's say you're 19 years old and your parents kicked you out, you're homeless. You want to go to college, but you can't afford the hundreds of dollars that the classes cost, but your parents make $200,000 a year, which doesn't matter because you don't have any access to that. Maybe there are workarounds and I'm just not aware of them." Morgan further recalled, "I think there is a question that I've seen in financial aid things where it's like, 'Are you homeless?'" Morgan elaborated further on financial aid by saying, "You can also be technically not homeless and still very poor, and not have access to your parents' money. I just know that that's specifically a very common experience for a lot of bisexual people also, experience pretty high levels of [housing insecurity]." Morgan shared that they did not qualify for financial aid but had the family support necessary to attend college. While the stress and/or awkwardness of having to ask for parental financial and tax information is not necessarily unique to the LGBTQ+ student community, the outness at home factors in as well as the fear of being outed at home from the college environment, which, as discussed previously, plays a tangential role related to financial aid for LGBTQ+ students.

Morgan referred to housing insecurity when they talked about financial aid, which is an issue associated with the LGBTQ+ identity and financial aid via the student's outness in the family context. As indicated previously, Justice and Dakota are not out to their parents, and they are required to submit parental financial and tax information to qualify for financial aid. If Justice and Dakota's LGBTQ+ identity was revealed to their parents, this could jeopardize their financial aid and possible housing situation if they were living at home. Morgan referred to the possibility of a homeless provision in financial aid policy, but expressed uncertainty about it.

First ensuring that the interplay between college and family does not lead to being outed at home, but also validates college experiences could help the student seek resources financial or otherwise in the event the student feels they need additional support to continue in college.

Bellamy highlighted the other side of the financial aid stress continuum as a backstop to dropping classes by sharing, "…if I were to drop a class then you have to pay it back or you're going to have a problem with [financial aid]. They elaborated further when asked about dropping classes, "… when you need to take this class out of a requirement for a certificate or for your bachelor's or associate's, you don't have a choice. Repeating it, I guess you could, but, again, that's time and money lost." Morgan reinforced further that financial preasures prevents them from dropping classes. "I avoid dropping classes, I never drop a class unless I can get a refund, because that's my money. That's money I can't afford, and I can't afford the loss of time. I took long enough as it was, I couldn't afford to take longer. I never did drop any classes for that reason, but I did think about it…, and maybe I even should have." There are financial pressures associated with college for all students, not just LGBTQ+ students, but as Morgan and Bellamy indicated, they may stay in classes despite invalidating faculty interactions because the financial aid backstop makes them feel they cannot drop the class. This backstop pressure is not necessarily unique to LGBTQ+ students, but the negative experiences associated with their identity are. Financial aid could be a source of compounding invalidation because of the pressures against dropping these students felt. Finances were a factor in persistence for these students, but the degree varied by each student.

Disability Services (DSPS) and Validation

The survey asked whether the participants used specific student services because some California Community College students incorporate those programs as part of their identity,

including Disability Services. Many California Community Colleges use the "DSPS" acronym for their disability services; the acronym derives from the California State Budget categorical fund to support California Community College disability services as established in the California Education Code. Eight of the twenty-eight survey participants reported using disability services while two of the interviewees indicated specifically that they use disability services. Morgan indicated that "… the DSPS was very helpful, probably one of the best resources... Definitely helpful, probably with more things than [my DSPS Counselor] would have been expected to be. Very helpful, did everything and more that I needed from [them]. I think I was at least slightly more successful than I would have been otherwise." Morgan attributed their successful transfer to UC Davis to their CRC DSPS Counselor who helped them navigate the complex transfer process. Similarly, Bellamy shared their impressions of the "… disability resource center, only because when it comes to me specifically, I suffer with lot of anxiety and OCD, and so when I have that opportunity to either get maybe a little bit more time on exams or homework, or just a breakdown better of what the instructor expects, it lessens that anxiety. I can feel like I can just take my class like everybody else… It's one less thing to worry about. It makes your college experience a little bit more easier to approach."

Under the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended in 2008, Rehabilitation of 1973, California Education Code, and California Title 5 Regulations California Community Colleges support students with disabilities based upon documentation as well as the "interactive process" to support the student's individual needs based upon the "… functional limitations because of their disability." By design, disability services uses validation theory in its service delivery model. Morgan shared further that, "I felt supported the way that one might feel supported by a friend." In addition, Morgan indicated that while they were mostly "out" about

their Queer identity in the college context, with respect to their Trans identity, their DSPS Counselor was the only one they shared that part of their identity with at college specifically. Given the inherent medical and mental healthcare the Trans community requires, there is a clear intersection between the Trans identity and student disability services. The other LGBQ+ identities may not have such a strong relation with disability services as Trans students; with that said, this study did not probe specifically into LGBTQ+ students' mental health or medical care. While LGBTQ+ students' experience with disability services is not necessarily unique to them, other student services could be modeled similarly to take advantage of validation to achieve a greater sense of belonging and support LGBTQ+ students better, particularly on the continuum of being "out" on campus.

General Student Support Services, Counseling, and Tutoring

Overall, the interviewees shared positive experiences pertaining to student services, and highlighted counseling, tutoring, and similar student success-related services. River indicated that, "… Sierra, they do offer a lot of counseling for the students in their classes, and they're pretty regular with staying on top of the students as well. I don't know if it's just myself, or if it's others, but I have a person that pretty frequently checks in and just makes sure that everything within my current curriculum is working out perfectly. If I need any additional assistance, they leave whatever additional resources might benefit me." While River admitted that they do not use many of the services offered, they did indicate that tutoring, library, and other "third-party" services were available to them. Justice, who also attends Sierra, had an experience very similar to River's; Justice recalled an interaction with a staff person at Sierra, "It's more of like, 'Hey, I just want to remind you.' Like a friendly reminder. My sister actually does it sometimes too, where she'll be like, 'I know I haven't heard from you in a while, but just a friendly reminder, I

exist and I'm here to help.'" Justice compared their student service support at Sierra to family support. Bellamy had an experience similar to that of River and Justice while at Santa Rosa by sharing that, "… the student success team was very helpful, extremely…. Because like the name says, they're there to help you succeed… I remember talking to one guy about this class I was almost tempted to drop, and he said, 'You know what? You're doing great. Just do your best and reach out to these people, and before you know it, it'll be all over.' He was right. I moved on… still did the class, still a little frustrating, but if I keep that in mind, it's going to end soon."

Dakota and Charlie noted that counseling services supported them as well. Dakota said, "… counseling because they're helping me figure out what I want to do and where I want to go." Similarly, Charlie said, "I had already gone on the website and figured out all of the classes that I needed to take… Mostly, counseling was just like there were some things that I wasn't completely sure about that I was able to get answers to." Charlie noted that counseling encouraged them to use the Queer Resource Center on campus. Charlie elaborated further on the way student services supports them in particular: " …tutoring because whenever I go in and I talk to anybody, they use my right pronouns and they don't make it weird." Using the "right" pronouns fosters a sense of belonging by validating the student's identity through their pronouns. Several of the survey participants who opted out of the interview highlighted the antithesis of Charlie's experience. Proper pronoun use is unique to the LGBTQ+ community, which began in higher education and has spread elsewhere to highlight inclusivity by reducing assumptions and bias. Our heteronormative society forces us to make assumptions about a person's pronouns rather than opting by default for the neutral/inclusive 't'. In addition, having a Queer Resource Center on campus can be a positive validating factor as well. Specifically, Charlie recalled being encouraged to use those resources given their identity, which they probably shared openly to

receive such a referral. In summary, Dakota said, “I do feel my college provides a lot. I can’t think of how they could provide more.”

Finding Community: LGBTQ+ Services and Resources

From the interviews, it was clear that Butte, Sierra, and Gavilan Colleges all have student services specific to LGBTQ+ students. These assertions were validated by reviewing each college’s website, on which all three list services specific to some degree to the LGBTQ+ student community. Bellamy shared that Santa Rosa has, “… the QRC, they have a closet for gender-affirming clothing,” Also, “…they have places that are LGBTQ safe where they get a haircut or get food, or just to have a friendly conversation with people who might share the same interest as you… It’s open to everybody. Whatever identity you identify as, they’ll have an opportunity for something.”

However, a common recommendation made was to have specific LGBTQ+ services, which suggests that either those participants were unaware of such services at their college or their college did not have LGBTQ+-specific student services. As Alex suggested, “Give a space for students to come to that’s not the library. There are so many other little programs… at community college, so I would just recommend that making an LGBTQIA+ center as popular and as normal as these other programs, as accessible.” Alex further recommended events and advertising, “…just really, really focused on reminding students in this 16 or 18-week semester or courses… like, ‘There are resources for you. Don’t forget about us even if you’re caught up in the daily grind of your classes.’” Morgan made a similar recommendation about CRC and including LGBTQ+ community resources on campus like the Sacramento Gender Health Center.

Theme 3: Sense of Safety—Policing and Restrooms

This theme captured the sense of safety LGBTQ+ students have on campus in relation to campus police/security and the college's restroom facilities.

Campus Police

The presence of campus police or security varies across California Community Colleges; some have their own sworn campus police officers who are college/district employees, while some other colleges/districts contract their campus police or security with local city police or county sheriff departments. The colleges with contracted policing services typically do not have direct authority over the individual officers. Some colleges/districts may have a private for-profit-company that provides security in addition to their own police force or contracted police services. This wide variability in police and security could influence perspectives in addition to personal experiences with various police entities on and off campus.

The interview protocol asked the participants specifically about their thoughts and/or feelings about their campus police/security as well as the way the campus police/security might be able to improve their perceptions in the participants' eyes. The impressions of the campus police fell into three categories: 1) indifferent or no contact; 2) positive & supportive, or 3) abolish or dissolve.

When asked about the campus police, River shared, "I don't know if I have any thoughts or feelings about them whether negative or positive. I don't know. No, I don't think so." Similarly, Alex stated, "Luckily, I've never had any run-ins with them. I have only seen some folks patrolling before for the parking permits, but I've never had any contact, any conversation, or anything positive or negative. No feelings really. I'm neutral." Charlie could not recall ever

seeing any police officers but did note they had a building on campus and that, “I know that if you had a night class, you could call on them to walk you to your car.”

In contrast, Dakota, Justice, and Bellamy spoke of specific personal instances that they witnessed on campus that involved campus police or security. When asked about their thoughts about the campus police, Dakota said, “My experience with them has been pretty positive. I also haven’t ever gotten a parking ticket from them. Some of my friends that have gotten parking tickets from them aren’t happy with them, but they’re the ones that parked in the staff spots, not me.” Dakota shared further, “Oh, they’re pretty cool. I’ve met a couple because they helped jump my car in the parking lot. They have the emergency boxes in the parking lots… they were pretty useful… They’re just really nice.” Bellamy recalled a time when they witnessed a campus police or security officer try to deescalate a situation between two other students on campus; Bellamy was not involved in the situation personally, but had rather positive views of the police given their interest as a criminal justice major. As a student employee, Justice expressed, “I’m glad they’re there, particularly in the counseling department we have had some issues where we had to call security, and usually they are there pretty quickly. That’s about it. … they’re nice, and they do their job.”

In contrast to all the other interviewees, Morgan’s views of campus police were rather divergent, and can be categorized as in favor of abolishing the campus police. When asked about the campus police, they stated:

> I definitely think there should be no police on campus at all. That makes it a very unsafe environment, particularly for the students and faculty, staff and management, people of color, and that ups the ante when those people of color are also queer, trans, LGBTQ+. I think White LGBTQ+ people may experience slightly elevated levels of policing and

> unsafeness with police, but I think it's mostly people of color that are targeted by this. I don't think police should be on campus at all… I think that they probably cause more harm than good. I've never had a positive police interaction. I haven't had very many police interactions, but I've never had a positive one, and I think that that is most people's experience.

Morgan elaborated further that if some minimal level of security is required, "I don't think that they should have any kind of weapons on them at all. No weapons whatsoever, not even a baton or whatever. No weapons." In addition, consistent with Morgan's view, in response to the gender-neutral restroom accessibility and availability survey question, one survey participant who was not interviewed did indicate that "… the presence of police on my campus makes me fear for my life." Morgan recommended further, "I think there are definitely alternatives to policing that can improve safety on campus. I don't know any off the top of my head, but they're definitely out there, and if campus [leadership] is really dedicated to making campus feel safe and secure, they can look into those options."

Restrooms

Table 6 presents the data from the pre-interview survey that the 7 interview participants provided to question 23 regarding campus gender-inclusive restroom facilities. It also notes the participant's college. The participants were allowed to provide their own response to this question as well as select one of the predetermined options.

Table 7

Restrooms

Bellamy	Santa Rosa	Type Own Response
Morgan	Cosumnes River	Available but not Accessible
Charlie	Gavilan	Neither Available nor Accessible
Dakota	Butte	Somewhat Available & Accessible
River	Sierra	I don't know
Alex	Napa Valley	Type Own Response
Justice	Sierra	Somewhat Available & Accessible

Bellamy typed in their response as, "From what I have seen, they are easy to access but all of my classes the past two semesters have been online—so I've never had the opportunity to use the bathrooms on campus." Further, Alex typed in, "There are only two inclusive restrooms I have seen and there are on the far edge of campus. It is not easy to access as you need to walk completely away from most of the main classroom buildings." In addition to indicating "Available but not Accessible" on the survey, Morgan also indicated, "There were very few if any [gender-inclusive restrooms] and not in areas where I ever went."

While the interview protocol did not ask about restrooms explicitly, Dakota, Morgan, and Justice commented on them. Dakota explained, "They have bathrooms everywhere, but just the gender-neutral ones are few and hard to reach sometimes." Morgan explained that the colleges could "… provide more gender-neutral and single-stall restrooms. I don't know of any accessible ones at CRC. I know that there were some, I don't know of any that were accessible to me. One

was on the top floor of a math building that's by some faculty-like offices, and I would not say that as accessible." Justice echoed the call for more gender-neutral and single-stall restroom facilities. Based upon the pre-interview survey data and the interviewees' responses, available and accessible gender-neutral or single-stall private restroom facilities are important to LGBTQ+ students. Granted that the pandemic may have affected this part of the study's results, it still appears to be a prominent factor that influences these students' sense of safety and belonging on campus.

Theme 4: Validation by Using Proper Pronouns & Preferred Names

The pre-interview survey asked whether the college allowed students to indicate their pronouns and/or preferred name through a standardized process. However, the interview protocol did not solicit pronoun and preferred name data specifically. Given that Morgan and Charlie identify as Trans, they did share their perspectives on pronouns and preferred names. Morgan summarized pronouns by saying:

> …if you ask for pronouns, you have to use them. For whatever reason, sometimes people will ask for pronouns and then not use them or ask for gender and then not use it. I think I saw a TikTok [video] where someone, they were going to get gender-related healthcare and they were filling out this form and it asked, 'What gender do you have?' and they have a ton of different gender options that we don't see very often… they obviously did some research to get as many gender options as possible, and then asked your pronouns and asked your sexual orientation and all that stuff… Then, when the person actually calls them, they use the wrong name, the wrong pronouns, the wrong gender… That's the thing, if you are going to ask for the pronouns, you have to use them. You have to use them. It's just insult to injury if you ask them and then don't use them… I think it's

always just, give people the option, make it feel normal. Normalize giving the pronouns because the people that you're normalizing it for… Actually, I think it started on social media, just putting your pronouns in your bio to make it so that if I put he/him in my bio, you don't automatically know that I'm trans and harass me for it, because some of the people that have pronouns in their bio are cis. It was always supposed to be a protective function.

Similarly, Charlie shared:

… there's debates about whether when you introduce yourself if you should be expected to list your pronouns because some people don't want to, but I probably like doing that. If you're going to have students introduce themselves like name and then pronouns if they feel comfortable sharing…, so my preferred name is displayed on the Zoom thing. Sometimes my pronouns are even displayed on there…, but then also you couldn't change your name on Canvas… a lot of colleges use Canvas. That's one thing, you should be able to change your name on that [Canvas].

Justice is a student employee at Sierra, and their supervisor reached out to them about the proper use of pronouns in the office because of a new hire. Justice recalled, "She just basically wanted help with how to handle the transition of using they/them pronouns in the office because she wasn't used to that. It was one of those moments where I'm like, 'Yes, it's okay to talk about it,' but at the same time, I just don't want to cause any problems..."

Theme 5: Supporting Trans Outness

As stated in the literature review, very little research has been conducted on students in higher education in general who identify as Trans, not to mention research on Trans students at California Community Colleges. Of the twenty-eight survey participants, only five identified as

Trans, and none used Trans in isolation to describe their LGBTQ+ identity. Two of these five Trans participants were interviewed: Charlie and Morgan. Charlie identifies as a Bisexual Trans male, while Morgan identifies as Queer and Trans non-binary masc. A further complication of the Trans data are their intersection with the gender data. Twelve of the twenty-eight survey participants identified with the traditional male female gender binary construct; hence, most of the survey participants identified with a gender identity definition on broader continuum. To understand these student identity groups better, this study explored college restroom facilities given their traditional gender binary construct; however, there are more factors to be examined to determine the way these students experience community college. This theme focused on Charlie and Morgan's experiences specifically.

Morgan elaborated on their queer and trans identities and shared:

> I definitely feel like trans is a lot more important to me as my identity [than Queer]. I think queer is a lot more political for me. Yes, I'm not straight, but I don't know, that itself doesn't feel like a huge defining factor in how people view me and how I view myself compared to trans. I identify as queer, one, because my actual orientation is very messy, and two, because of the significance that it holds in the community and historically, but trans is a lot, it's definitely a lot more personal and therefore more vulnerable.

Unlike Morgan, Charlie did not elaborate on their trans identity to a great extent during the interview. However, they did share that they felt more comfortable about being Trans toward the end of their community college experience. Charlie shared, "Once COVID started, I did start using my preferred name and pronouns." Charlie also noted that Counseling and Tutoring were key student services that used their preferred name and pronouns. When asked about sharing

their BI and Trans identities with faculty, they stated, "I'm pretty comfortable, it was a pretty accepting campus… If I told them my preferred name, they would use it, and my preferred pronouns. I came out as bi earlier than I came out as Trans, and if I told the professor I was bi, there's not really much that they have to do in response to that. They just stay cool." Charlie did not elaborate greatly on coming out as bi first other than noting that it was "easier that way." Charlie's use of bi may be similar to Morgan's use of queer in conjunction with their Trans identities.

> When asked about being out, Morgan elaborated on the Trans-out continuum and said: I guess it depends how you're defining out because when you're trans, there's two kinds of out and two kinds of not out, so there's you're not out and you're not, people don't know your real gender. They think you're your birth gender. Then there's the you're not out, and people assume the correct gender or close enough to the correct gender, but they don't know that you're trans, which is where I usually fall. My not out usually means they don't know that I'm Trans, but they do know the gender or close enough to it, they do assume my gender correctly and I don't say anything about that."

Morgan is alluding to the concept of "passing" in the Trans Community where one presents outwardly as their gender and others do not suspect them to be Trans. After showing Morgan their quote during a member check, they asked to discuss this further and confirmed my assertion about "passing."

Morgan noted that they chose to attend community college before UC Davis because of the housing situation, and shared that they decided not to take a swimming class because of their Trans identity. They stated, "… our bodies don't look the way that people expect them to, and so it's swimming and it's just very vulnerable. It can accentuate parts of your body that you're

dysphoric about. It can be hard to find swimsuits. Swimming binders are very difficult to find, they're expensive…" Morgan expressed anxiety related to others' perception of their identity, which is rooted in feelings of safety and fear.

Finally, both Morgan and Charlie recommended having trans-specific counseling available on campus, as well as better connections to community resources that support LGBTQ+ students. In addition, both recommended that colleges find better ways for students to report issues, incidents, and interactions to be able to seek positive resolutions. Both Charlie and Morgan's experiences on campus are related to a sense of safety before a sense of belonging.

Summary of the Key Findings

This chapter discussed the diverse experiences of the participants who identify with the LGBTQ+ community and attend a California Community College; these experiences were synthesized through their student identity, which includes many intersecting facets, including gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity/culture, and experiences associated with their identity. In addition, these experiences were specific to the context of the college the student attended. A total of 4 of the 7 interviewees were enrolled currently at a California Community College for the Fall 2021 Semester during which the interviews were conducted, while three were enrolled within the past 1 to 2-years at a California Community College. The colleges represented in this study are Butte, Cosumnes River, Gavilan, Napa Valley, Santa Rosa, and Sierra colleges.

There were 5 emergent themes: 1) Importance of Faculty Interactions and Support; 2) Importance of Student Services; 3) Sense of Safety—Policing and Restrooms; 4) Validation by Using Proper Pronouns and Preferred Names, and 5) Supporting Trans Outness. The importance of faculty interactions involved positive affirming and negative invalidating experiences. The negative faculty interactions revealed issues related to reporting such experiences and faculty

accountability. The importance of student services was revealed in many areas, including financial aid, disability services, counseling, and tutoring, which culminated in students either finding community through LGBTQ+ student services or wanting to find community because of the lack of such services on their campus. Validation, sense of belonging, and outness were key threads that ran through all 5 themes.

Chapter 7. Discussion and Conclusion

California Community Colleges are one of the largest and most diverse systems of public higher education in the world (cccco.edu, 2020), and can now have a disproportionate impact on LGBT students through the Student Equity Plan process. Student Equity Plans use a quantitative analysis methodology to determine disproportionate impact, which cannot explain these students' experiences except to identify negative effects that stem from a policy or practice. To explore the environment that these students experience better, qualitative methods are the most appropriate to interpret the quantitative data in the equity plans further. The data obtained in this study are intended to help community colleges develop a more accepting and inclusive campus climate. While similar studies have been conducted at four-year undergraduate institutions, research at community colleges has been very limited. Further, California Community College students have unique academic motivations, commitments, and challenges. Although higher education is the source of much LGBTQ+ research, it has remained substantially untouched by the LGBTQ+ Pride equality movement (Renn, 2010). Higher education is aware of LGBTQ+ inequities and systemic heteronormativity, but the institution itself has been unable to implement inclusive practices that address these pervasive issues in our society. This study's goal was to advance the research conducted previously and encourage the queering of California Community Colleges by analyzing the college experiences of LGBTQ+ students to address the research question: What are the experiences of LGBTQ+ California Community College students that they feel contributed to their success?

Summary of the Study

This study used a pre-interview survey followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews. The survey, which included both bounded and open-ended free-response questions was

distributed to students enrolled currently or recently at a California Community College who self-identified as LGBTQ+. The participants in the survey were solicited via email by community college faculty, LGBTQ+-related programs and services at California Community Colleges as well as through the University of California, Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center and the California State University, Sacramento Pride Center. The survey included three sections: Student Profile, Student Identity Profile, and LGBTQ+ Student Experiences.

Students could opt to participate in a semi-structured in-depth interview on the pre-interview survey. All who opted for the interview were offered the opportunity to be interviewed, but not all were because they did not respond to communications to schedule the interview. The Interview Protocol in Appendix B probed deeper into the students' identity, motivations for attending their college, interactions with faculty, and experiences with student support services. The survey tool and interview protocol were derived from the Pride Index's survey. The Pride Index is a national LGBTQ+ campus climate survey of higher education institutions.

The setting for this research was 6 of the California Community Colleges: Butte, Cosumnes River, Gavilan, Napa Valley, Santa Rosa, and Sierra. LGBTQ+ demographic data are not yet publicly available through the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) Datamart public reporting database (CCCCO Datamart, 2022). Each college publishes its Student Equity Plan on its website, but there are inconsistencies between these reports in the LGBT demographic data, and each college has a distinct student population.

Of the 7 students interviewed for this study, 4 were enrolled currently at a California Community College during the Fall 2021 semester in which the interviews were conducted while 3 students were recently enrolled at a California Community College—2 of these recent students completed their program of study in Spring 2021 and the third finished in Spring 2020, so all 3

former students were enrolled at a California Community College within the past 1 to 2 years. The participants were a diverse group with many facets to their student identity across many areas, including gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity/culture, and experiences associated with their identity.

Discussion

As indicated previously, there are very few public data on LGBTQ+ students at California Community Colleges. The California Community Colleges Datamart includes no publicly available reports on LGBTQ+ students, but nonbinary gender data are available in most reports (CCCCO Datamart, 2022). In fact, the 2019-22 Student Equity Plans are the only publicly available reports that include LGBT California Community College students. As such, not much is known about LGBTQ+ students' experiences at California Community Colleges. As Sanlo (1998) stressed, the limited institutional support and opportunities to engage with other LGBTQ+ students, as well as faculty and staff who may have unsupportive interactions with sexual minority students, affect their persistence adversely.

LGBTQ+ identities are unique, in that unlike other demographic characteristic, such as gender or race, the individual must reveal them (Villicana et al., 2016; Rankin, 2003; & Rankin et al., 2010). LGBTQ+ students decide intentionally if and/or when to disclose their identity to faculty and staff—the process of coming out or being out. A component of this process is evaluating whether it is safe and accepting (Villicana et al., 2016; Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). As each of the 7 students in the study described, outness is a continuum that can depend on the situation, individuals involved, and contextual environment. Further, they reported that their identity shaped some of their interactions with the college. However, it did not affect their

decision about which community college to attend, although some opted for community college over a 4-year university because of their identity.

At the core of many of these students' community college experiences were the concepts of validation and a sense of belonging. Consistent with Rendon's (1994) validation theory, the 7 interviewees all described in- and out-of-class experiences that validated their LGBTQ+ identity. In-class validation derived from positive and affirming faculty and peer interactions, while out-of-class validation included faculty and staff who identified openly as members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as Pride/Queer Resource Centers, and events/activities on campus. Another key finding on validating experiences in and out of the classroom involved proper pronoun and preferred name use. Each of these validating elements contributed to a campus climate where the students felt safe and accepted to be out about their LGBTQ+ identity.

Similarly, as noted in the data analysis and findings about restroom facilities, as students were absent from campus or may never have used a restroom on campus, COVID-19 affected that aspect of the study.

However, this study revealed experiences that constituted the antithesis of validation through negative interactions. It is important to note that students' successful integration into the social system is associated with their academic experience (Pascarella, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). Bean (1980) and Pascarella (1985) identified student background as a variable that could influence students' interactions with institutional members and have social and academic effects. Further, in these models, peer groups had a greater influence on student integration into academic and social systems. Many of the participants expressed the way invalidating experiences affected them, from closeting themselves to thoughts of dropping classes or

dropping out. Student experiences were diverse because this study included students from multiple colleges.

There were 5 emergent themes: 1) Importance of Faculty Interactions and Support; 2) Importance of Student Services; 3) Sense of Safety—Policing and Restrooms
4) Validations through the use of Pronouns and Preferred Names, and 5) Supporting Trans Outness. The importance of faculty interactions was explored along the outness continuum. The importance of student services was revealed in many areas, including financial aid, disability services, counseling, and tutoring, and it culminated in students either finding community through LGBTQ+ student services or wanting to find community because of the lack of such services on their campus.

Theme 1: Importance of Faculty Interactions and Support

Faculty clearly have power and control in their classroom as the authority figure, but the way they use their power can have profound effects on students (Chang, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007). Faculty interactions generally can be positive or negative (Chang, 2005). This theme examined the way positive faculty interactions validated and supported LGBTQ+ students in being out in college, while negative faculty interactions led to invalidation and thoughts of dropping classes. This theme highlighted outness and the closet in the college and family contexts. The findings supported the existing literature that positive interactions with faculty provide validating experiences for college students and are a contributing factor to their success overall (Chang, 2005; Garvey et al., 2015; Rendón, 1994; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2007; Tinto, 1993). The interviews investigated student-faculty interactions directly and indirectly to acquire specific examples of the interactions, but because this was reflective,

many generalities were shared. Overall, the interview participants had largely positive feelings about their college experiences.

Other than general positive feelings about faculty, specific positive faculty interactions were presented in two forms: 1) personal relationships with faculty, and 2) support for academic and professional goals. Personal interactions included conversations between faculty and students about topics outside the college, such as family, home life, hobbies, and recreational activities. Although personal relationships are valuable to foster validation and belonging for the students, the need for professional separation remains because of the authority faculty have over their students (Chang, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Supporting academic and professional goals does not carry the same risks as personal interactions; the professional distance is more or less assumed, but still validates the student's aspirations beyond the class at hand whether it is pursuing more education or a career. Supporting students' academic and professional goals can come in many forms, from advice and mentorship to letters of recommendation (Chang, 2005; Tinto, 1993). One factor that undergirds both positive faculty interactions is recognizing and supporting the student's identity (Garvey et al., 2015; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Renn, 2010; Rhoads, 1994).

However, one participant expressed indifference to faculty interactions. While this indifference could not be investigated more deeply given the protocol and the participant's lack of responsiveness, it is noteworthy that this sense of indifference to faculty interactions may have contributed to this student's persistence trajectory and success in college. Although indifference is technically neither positive nor negative, this feeling should be treated as a negative interaction because although it may not necessarily be invalidating per se, the outcomes may be the same (Chang, 2005; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1993).

The converse of positive validating student-faculty interactions are negative invalidating interactions, which can come in many forms (Chang, 2005; Rendón, 1994). The interview protocol yielded substantial data from nearly all interview participants on negative faculty interactions. Some interviewees gave generalized descriptions of negative faculty interactions, while others gave very detailed and specific accounts. Again, the generalizations were a result of the retrospective nature of this study and a natural byproduct of the passage of time (Merriam, 1998). Depending upon the extent of the negative invalidating interaction, it has the potential to diminish or eliminate the effects of positive validating interactions completely; the opposite is not necessarily the case for validation based upon these participants' accounts (Chang, 2005; Rendón, 1994). It could not be determined whether those positive validating experiences overcame the negative, but the effects of negative invalidating experiences led these students to thoughts and actions of dropping classes and/or dropping out. Thoughts of dropping classes or dropping out were not always acted upon, and thus validation may have been a subtle factor in those decisions, although the participants did not indicate that explicitly (Bailey et al., 2006; Craig & Ward, 2008; Friedman & Mandel, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Among those who gave specific accounts of negative faculty interactions, all were related to their LGBTQ+ identity in some way; some students felt that these encounters were personal attacks on them on the part of a faculty member. Questioning a student's identity will most likely constitute a negative interaction that leads to invalidation (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Rhoads, 1994). As much as intentionally possible, faculty should recognize a student's identity as the student presents it to them and hold that revelation of their identity in confidence (Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Rhoads, 1994).

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, some faculty interactions can strike at the core of a student's identity (Chang, 2005; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Vaccaro, 2012). Many in this study generally described the added stress of faculty reactions and interactions related to their student identity. The stress and anxiety that these LGBTQ+ students revealed can explain the varying degrees of outness we see on campus and at home (Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Rhoads, 1994). Students may feel more comfortable being out with certain faculty or staff than others, and the reason a student may choose to closet themselves can be situational and/or environmental (Rankin et al., 2010; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016). Being in the closet and out is a continuum of active and passive interactions that reveal or conceal a truer, more authentic representation of one's LGBTQ+ identity; this continuum is rooted in the senses of safety and fear (Garvey et al., 2015; Sadowski, 2016; Rankin et al., 2010; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016).

Faculty support can shape whether a student who identifies with the LGBTQ+ community feels safe to be out in the college setting (Rankin et al., 2010; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016). Many in this study described themselves as "out" to some degree in the college context, and they attributed that outness to many faculty and staff interactions. Identifying with those around you builds a sense of belonging (Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993). Validation can support that sense of belonging as well by recognizing the experiences and identities of those present (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994). Faculty can cultivate validation further by fostering peer support, so while not all faculty may identify personally with an individual student's identity, they can use their power to support their identity through peer relationships (Chang, 2005; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rhoads, 1944; Tinto, 1993). For

some, their outness is contextual to the way they perceive the relevance of their identity to the situation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Rhoads, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Validation can be used to help students see their identity's relevance to what is occurring or being discussed (Chang, 2005; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1993; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016). Therefore, fostering community fosters a sense of belonging (Evans et al., 2010; Tinto, 1993). Generally, validation can lead to trust and thus make a student feel sufficiently safe to come out (Rankin et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016). Validation and a sense of belonging are powerful supports for LGBTQ+ students' sense of outness at a community college (Garvey et. al, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016).

While many were "out" in the college context in this study, the same was not true for the home or family context. Given community colleges' proximity, there is a higher potential for students to live with family, and as such, there is a much stronger interplay between community colleges and the home/family unit (Chang, 2005; Garvey et al., 2015). Faculty should be cognizant that simply because a student has revealed their LGBTQ+ identity to them, it does not mean that the student has revealed it to others at the college or particularly to those outside the college context (Garvey et al. 2015; Renn, 2010; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016)). There are factors at play beyond the college that affect a student's outness at home and college (Garvey et al. 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016). Outing a student who identifies with the LGBTQ+ community can be seriously invalidating and have profound ramifications for the student (Evans et al., 2010; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Rhoads, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016).

Students' perceptions of the college derive by and large from faculty interactions, particularly as that is the primary way they engage with the college, but there are other college institutional interactions that can be just as profound as faculty interactions (Chang, 2005; Garvey et al., 2015; Tinto, 1993). The way a dean or college leader intervenes in student-faculty interactions is critical and could reinforce any negative experiences and make the student feel even more powerless as reported by some in this study. The resolution of faculty-student conflicts will shape the student's perceptions and college experience overall (Rankin & Reason, 2008; Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Suárez-Orozcoet al., 2015). Some of the interviewees in this study discussed issues associated with reporting negative faculty interactions. The interview protocol did not ask specifically about reporting faculty behavior or evaluations. However, colleges should find ways to resolve student-faculty conflicts and negative experiences so that they do not invalidate the student. Faculty academic freedoms and possible collective bargaining rights affect accountability for faculty conduct, but nonetheless, it is a viable tool with which to validate students' experiences with faculty. Addressing faculty conduct and minimizing invalidation are important to support LGBTQ+ California Community College students (Evans et al., 2010; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016). Not all invalidating faculty interactions are related to the student's identity, but still have profound effects on their college experience. For example, faculty bias and prejudice have the potential to have lasting effects on students in general (Rankin & Reason, 2008; Sorey & Duggan, 2008; Suárez-Orozcoet al., 2015).

Theme 2: Importance of Student Services

This theme examined the important effects that student services have on the LGBTQ+ student experience at a California Community College. The interviewees provided insights into

several student services: financial aid; disability services; counseling; tutoring, and LGBTQ+ supportive programing. Inclusive practices were a common thread that ran through this theme, and accordingly, the students expressed strong feelings of belonging associated with various student services. Several participants mentioned that various college staff contacted them to check-in on how they were doing in and out of class; many of these check-ins resulted in additional forms of support, such as mental health, tutoring, food, and referrals to community resources outside the college (Bailey et al., 2006; Craig & Ward, 2008; Friedman & Mandel, 2011; Tinto, 1993, 2006).

Like many students who qualify for financial aid programs, LGBTQ+ students feel the financial pressures associated with college because of the direct and indirect costs of attendance. Many of the interviewees referred to the cost of attending college like tuition and books or mentioned tangential costs associated with basic needs such as housing or food. Financial aid programs can cover both direct and indirect costs associated with attending college. The students recognized financial aid's importance in supporting their college success, but the sentiment was more an end to a means in comparison to the way they perceived other student service areas, such as counseling or disability services. The interviewees did not elaborate to a great extent other than the costs of college and the way financial aid covered those costs. However, some indicated that they stayed in classes because of financial aid pressures and continued to endure negative invalidating faculty interactions (Hossler, 2006 ; Tinto, 1993, 2016). This backstop pressure is not necessarily unique to LGBTQ+ students, but the negative experiences associated with their identity are (Trevor Project, 2020; di Giacomo et al., 2018; (Stewart, 2015; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Quaye & Harper, 2015). Financial aid could compound invalidation because of the pressures against dropping classes that

these students felt; finances were a factor in these students' persistence, but to what degree varied for each student (Astin, 1993; Fike & Fike, 2009; Hossler, 2006; Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 1993, 1999, 2006).

Housing insecurity was referenced with respect to financial aid, and this issue is associated with the LGBTQ+ identity and financial aid through the student's outness in the family context (Stewart, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Villicana et al., 2016) As discussed previously, some LGBTQ+ students are not out to their parents, but are required to submit parental financial and tax information to qualify for financial aid. If these students' LGBTQ+ identity was revealed to their parents, it could jeopardize their financial aid and possible housing situation if they were living with family (Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Villicana et al., 2016). Ensuring first that the interplay between college and family does not lead to being outed at home but validating college experiences as well could help students seek resources, financial or otherwise, in the event that they feel they need additional support to continue in college (Guiffrida, 2006; Hossler, 2006; Stewart, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Renn, 2010; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Villicana et al., 2016).

By design, disability services uses Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory in its service delivery model. Those in this study who used the services expressed a strong sense of trust and safety with disability services. Given the inherent medical and mental health care the Trans community requires, there is a clear intersection between the Trans identity and student disability services (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvvey et al., 2015; Renn, 2010). The other LGBQ+ identities may not have such a strong relation with disability services as do Trans students; with that said, this study did not probe specifically into mental health or medical care for LGBTQ+ students. While LGBTQ+ students' experience with disability services is not necessarily unique to them,

other student services could be modeled similarly to take advantage of validation to achieve a greater sense of belonging and support LGBTQ+ students better, particularly along the continuum of being "out" on campus (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Renn 2010; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 2016; Villicana et al., 2016).

Finding community and seeking a sense of belonging emerged with respect to student services, including LGBTQ+-specific support such as counseling and mental health services. From the interviews, it was clear that Butte, Sierra, Santa Rosa, and Gavilan Colleges all have student services specific to LGBTQ+ students. These assertions were validated by reviewing each college's website on which all of these colleges list services specific to some degree to the LGBTQ+ student community. A physical space for students to build community appeared to be prominent, as well as supporting training for students, faculty, and staff on inclusive practices. Clothing closets where students who may be transitioning genders could obtain clothing that affirmed their gender identity better were also described. However, a common recommendation many of the participants made was to have LGBTQ+-specific services, so either those participants were unaware of such services at their college, or their college did not have them. Several interviewees recommended allowing LGBTQ+ community services to come to campus. It is very clear that these students want the college to support them based upon their LGBTQ+ identity (Dugan et al. 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Renn, 2010; Villicana et al., 2016). The University of California and California State University campuses have had LGBTQ+ centers, services, and programs for many years, and California Community Colleges should examine their successes and failures to see the way they could be adapted to support LGBTQ+ California Community Colleges.

Theme 3: Sense of Safety—Policing and Restrooms

This theme explored the sense of safety LGBTQ+ students have on campus in relation to campus police/security and the college's restroom facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic and online learning affected the data pertaining to this theme, in that many participants noted that they had not been on campus recently, and one participant stated that they had never been on campus.

First, it is important to understand that the presence of campus police or security varies across California Community Colleges; some have their own sworn campus police officers who are college/district employees, while other colleges/districts contract their campus police or security with local city police or county sheriff departments. The colleges with contracted policing services typically do not have direct authority over the individual officers. Some colleges/districts may have a private for-profit-company that provides security in addition to their own police force or contracted police services. This wide variability in police and security could affect perspectives in addition to personal experiences on and off campus with various police entities (Garvey et al., 2015; Sadowski, 2016). The impressions of the campus police can be placed into three categories: 1) indifferent or no contact; 2) positive & supportive, or 3) abolish or dissolve. The general consensus from the interview participants was indifference or positive feelings about the campus police/security. Only one interviewee supported abolishing/dissolving the campus police/security with the added support from one participant in the pre-interview survey only who expressed safety concerns about campus police but did not indicate that policing should be abolished.

Several participants noted additional services that campus police/security provided at their college in addition to general policing and security functions. One noted that they could ask

the campus police for an escort to their car in the evening, and another recalled calling campus police when they were experiencing car troubles. Our society is grappling with police and public safety issues at the national, state, and local levels, and there have been notable incidents at our educational institutions in addition to other public spaces. These discussions about policing should include education leaders from K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities. Our society is making public policy decisions related to policing and our colleges will feel the effects of those decisions as well (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Guiffrida, 2006; Hossler, 2006; Sadowski, 2016; Quaye & Harper, 2015).

A related issue associated with a sense of safety is the availability and accessibility of gender-inclusive restroom facilities (Dugan et al., 2012; Sadowski, 2016; Renn, 2010). Most participants noted that their campus had restroom facilities that were not assigned to any particular gender and were designed typically to serve one person at a time, but the larger issue was these restrooms' accessibility and prevalence. Many noted that these restrooms were not located conveniently for them to use regularly. It is logical to infer that the reasons for this inclusive restroom availability and inaccessibility issue is attributable to their cost and budget/finance constraints because some participants noted that the inclusive restrooms were in newer buildings on campus, so it stands to reason those older buildings may not have inclusive restrooms. All participants noted the need and desire for more gender-inclusive restroom facilities on their campuses. Given the complexity and cost associated with community college building construction, the California Legislature and Governor will have to act for this issue to improve drastically, although that is not to say that local college leaders cannot act, and they are likely to be addressing this issue as they are able to within the confines of their capital facilities' planning and budgeting procedures. Significant financial resources are required to improve

facilities, and the legislature and governor control the state budget (Hossler, 2006; Garvey et al. 2015; Quaye & Harper, 2015).

Theme 4: Validation by Using Proper Pronouns & Preferred Names

Validation by using proper pronouns and preferred names is twofold; one entails collecting this information and the second, using it (Dugan et al. 2012; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010). Many California Community Colleges have begun to ask students for their pronouns and preferred names in addition to their legal names (Garvey et al., 2015). The heteronormativity present in our society forces us as individuals to use bias and prejudice to form assumptions about others' gender pronouns rather than using the neutral/inclusive "they/them/their" (Dugan et al. 2012; Renn, 2010; Villicana et al., 2016). Some will even go as far as to assert that "they/them" are always plural in the English language conventions in an effort to perpetuate this heteronormativity (Renn, 2010). It is debatable whether it is necessary for a person to provide their pronouns when they introduce themselves to others, but the norm should be the use of "they/them" and other gender-inclusive terms such as "you all" rather than "you guys", as not everyone identifies as a "guy." Several participants in this study noted that their college collects pronoun information, but there were significant issues with incorrect pronouns being used. Pronouns strike at the core of one's gender identity, so it is an invalidating experience to be misgendered, particularly by someone in authority like faculty (Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Renn, 2010; Quaye & Harper, 2015; Villicana et al., 2016).

Like pronouns is preferred name use, and many California Community Colleges have allowed students to use their preferred name with the college in specific instances (Garvey et al, 2015; Renn, 2010). Several interviewees in this study noted the challenges related to legal name changes; the keys are having the money and time to complete the name change process.

However, participants noted that faculty are being provided both legal and preferred names, which causes confusion on their part and an invalidating experience for the student when their preferred name is not used. Colleges should default to preferred name use, and only use the legal name when the student has not provided a preferred name or when the legal name is necessary for a particular reason, such as issuing a bank check or a financial aid transaction. Clearly, pronouns and preferred names are more relevant to students who identify as Trans or those with gender identities beyond the heteronormative gender male female binary construct (Dugan et al., 2012; Renn, 2007, 2010). These inclusive practices have the potential to validate other identities as well (Rankin et al, 2010; Renn, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Villicana et al., 2016).

Theme 5: Supporting Trans Outness

As stated in the literature review, very little research has been conducted in general on students in higher education who identify as Trans, and there is even less on Trans students at California Community Colleges (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Renn, 2010). None of the participants in this study used Trans in isolation to describe their LGBTQ+ identity, which refers back to the previous discussion about being "out." Students who may identify as Trans may use another identity along the outness continuum as a shield, which is rooted in safety and fear (Dugan et al., 2012; Renn, 2010; Villicana et al., 2016). This study explored experiences with college restroom facilities, proper pronouns, and preferred name use intentionally to examine the way Trans students perceived their college environment. Three components emerged from this theme that were related to the other themes: proper pronoun use, preferred name use, and being "out" as Trans.

Being "out" as Trans is more complex than some of the other LGBTQ+ identities because there is being "out" as Trans specifically and there is presenting as the other gender (Duganet al.,

2012; Renn, 2010). For example, if one is cis-male or male at birth and they transition to female and present as female, they are "out" as female, but they might not be "out" as Trans-female intentionally (Renn, 2010). When one is transitioning between genders, it may not be as easy to conceal being Trans, but later they may be able to conceal the Trans-specific aspect of their identity (Renn, 2010). Faculty may find it difficult to support students who identify as Trans because of their own bias and prejudice, and this is where supporting the faculty to help them support students better through validating experiences is pivotal (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Renn, 2010; Villicana et al., 2016). In addition, colleges should find better ways for students to report issues, incidents, and interactions to be able to achieve positive resolutions; interacting with faculty is important to validation and supporting a sense of belonging at California Community Colleges (Astin, 1993; Chang, 2005; Garvey et al., 2015; Guiffrida, 2006; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1993, 2006). Finally, it is recommended to have Trans-specific counseling available on campus as well as better access to community resources that support LGBTQ+ students; these services can also help the faculty support these students better as well (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin et al. 2010; Renn, 2010; Villicana et al., 2016; Wimberly, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on understanding the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ California Community College students at their primary or home college. The purpose of this study was to understand their lived experiences to inform educators and policymakers about the way these students view their identity in relation to being a student. While the students who participated in the study self-identified as members of the larger LGBTQ+ community, some possessed a variety of individual identities within that larger status label. In addition, the students came from

a variety of racial, ethnic, cultural, family education, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Not all identity intersections were represented in this study given opt-in bias—students self-selected to participate. Each interview participant's identity demographic profile from the pre-interview survey was noted in the data collection, analysis, and results.

One of the challenges in this study is that the students were responding with respect to past experiences and decisions, which made it difficult to isolate specific factors attributable to specific inequities or systemic issues pervading the institution. To address this challenge, the students were asked to offer recommendations on ways the institution could improve their student experience as well as why/how those recommendations would support them better in college.

Some of the limitations of this study were attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 and continued throughout this study. Most California Community Colleges shifted abruptly to remote operations and online instruction in March 2020 (mid-Spring 2020 Semester) and continued to do so during this study. In the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters, very limited in-person instruction was permitted for courses that were difficult or impossible to convert to the online format. Less than 1% of courses were in-person during these semesters, while most courses were in-person before the abrupt transition to 100% online learning in the Spring 2020 semester, with some variability from college to college (CCCCO Datamart, 2020). Some colleges/districts increased in-person course offerings in Fall 2021, but not at the same levels as before Spring 2020 (CCCCO Datamart, 2021). If the limitation is related to the pandemic, I have noted how explicitly, but it is possible that there were other limitations related to this unique period of which I am unaware.

As noted previously, COVID-19 affected the data collection methods of this study as well to ensure both the researcher and participants' safety. Further, the data analysis was affected as well. The qualitative observation method was omitted intentionally because of video conferencing limitations and the fact that there are video inconsistencies between the devices used to connect with the researcher (i.e., laptop, phone, tablet, etc.), internet connection and data bandwidth issues, and internet access problems. Zoom was selected because it is familiar to California Community College students, as instruction and services are provided with it, and individuals can connect to Zoom via a traditional phone call without video. Further, the California Community College Chancellor's Office General Counsel advised against mandatory video for instruction or services (LeForestier, 2020). Hence, verbal data the interviewees provided could not be validated with the researcher's observations of body language and other interpersonal social cues. However, triangulation occurred been the pre-interview survey and interview data points.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study revealed systemic issues that LGBTQ+ students at California's Community Colleges face. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office needs to collect better disaggregated student demographic data on LGBTQ+ students; specifically, data should be broken down by each individual identity (i.e., Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other identities). This study allowed the participants to provide free responses with respect to their demographic identity for gender, LGBTQ+, and race/ethnicity/culture—guiding examples were provided; the LGBTQ+ research literature supported this practice, and thus it should be used more widely to allow students the ability to express their identity freely. Further, just as with other student demographic data, the CCCCO

should construct deidentified demographic data on LGBTQ+ students through the publicly available CCCCO Datamart Database. The CCCCO should allow the colleges/districts the ability to support future research on their LGBTQ+ students as well, so we can understand these students' experiences at our colleges better.

Future research has the potential to help faculty support LGBTQ+ students better by validating them and cultivating their sense of belonging. Faculty need institutional support to form validating relationships with their students in and out of the classroom; this faculty support can be through professional development specific to inclusive curriculum pedagogy, LGBTQ+ identity development, supporting student identity intersectionality, proper pronoun/preferred name usage, and implicit bias as well as this support can incentivize faculty to contribute to the campus community beyond the classroom through events and awards. Given the nature of community college in California, validating experiences outside of the classroom will be challenging, but nonetheless are very valuable, as they help students feel connected to the college.

In the same vein, colleges need to develop ways to resolve negative invalidating student-faculty interactions. Under federal and state laws, there are established reporting procedures for various issues depending upon the nature of the complaint, but there are issues that arise that may not fit neatly into those established legal procedures that can lead to students' invalidation. Validation should be a component of all student-faculty conflict resolutions. Granted there are a number of legal elements and possible faculty collective bargaining rights to be considered as well, but there still should be validation, so the student still feels that they are a part of the college community. Further, this study revealed that while there may be established ways to report faculty conduct, information on the way to do so is not known widely among LGBTQ+

students, and thus, on-going dissemination of the way to report various conduct or other issues on campus should be developed. Fostering a sense of belonging is an on-going interactive process between the student and the college.

The chief recommendation from the students in this study related to the development and expansion of LGBTQ+ student support services. The students who attended colleges with such resources emphasized the value of having dedicated physical space and support programs. Those students who attended colleges without such resources designed specifically for LGBTQ+ student were emphatic in their request to have a physical location on campus where they felt safe and welcomed. One student went as far as to recommend that the college work collaboratively with local LGBTQ+ community resources to bring those services on campus. These services can range from mental health and counseling to a clothing exchange closet for Trans students to obtain clothes that affirm their identity. Further, these services can provide support by helping students, faculty, and staff be out about their LGBTQ+ identity, which also fosters a sense of belonging through validation.

The final two recommendations were related to creating a sense of safety on campus, but are broad in scope: campus police and gender-inclusive restroom facilities. As a society, we are having wide reaching discussions around policing in general and educational leaders need to participate in those conversations. All should feel welcome and safe at our California Community Colleges. Further, the availability and accessibility of gender-inclusive restrooms that are not designated based upon the heteronormative male female gender binary help foster a sense of safety as well as belonging for Trans and other gender identities on campus. This study showed that colleges have indeed built gender-inclusive restrooms, but they are not always accessible or available to students when needed. Because of the significant budget implications

of improving restroom accessibility and availability, the California State Legislature and Governor will need to take action through targeted funding to increase the number of gender-inclusive restroom facilities at California Community Colleges.

Future Research Recommendations

There are several ways that future researchers can advance and build upon this study to explore the LGBTQ+ California Community College Student experience further. Generally, future studies should focus more on specific student identities, issues, or themes identified in this study, and/or on a single college or district. Because of access issues on the part of the California Community College Chancellor's Office, this study changed from a localized study to one that included recently enrolled students and expanded as well to all California Community Colleges. A study focused on a single college or district may yield more useful data pertinent to that campus's climate.

Focusing on a specific student identity, such as Trans or gender identities, would explore areas this study was able to touch upon only briefly. As stated in the literature review, there is very little research on Trans students in higher education, not to mention in California Community Colleges; these students' stories are invaluable to expanding inclusive practices and pedagogy. Further, other identities, such as Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer, Questioning, and the remainder of the + in LGBTQ+ may yield interesting findings along the outness continuum. Intersecting and multiple LGBTQ+ identities, such as Queer/Trans or Bi/Trans may tell more about the how and why of their identity as it relates to being out in college compared to at home. This study noted each participant's race/ethnicity/culture, but did not examine the interplay of these identities with the students' LGBTQ+ identities in-depth, so focusing on the interactions with race/ethnicity/culture would be prudent as well.

Policing in general has received much attention by the public and policymakers in recent years, particularly with respect to racism and mental health, and LGBTQ+ identities should be included in such research. Research on policing at California Community Colleges that examines the intersection of a student's multiple identities of race/ethnicity and LGBTQ+ could highlight the campus climate beyond faculty interactions.

Additionally, one area worth exploring is the effects of LGBTQ+ student resource centers or similar programs at California Community Colleges. These centers and programs began to be established at the University of California and California State University campuses several decades ago, but they have begun to be established at California Community Colleges only in the past few years. These centers and services' effects have been researched well at UC, CSU, and other universities, but little is known about their effects at California Community Colleges.

Lastly, while this study occurred during the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis, that was not a focus area of this study; however, the forced online learning during this period attributable to the pandemic may have affected student-faculty interactions. Other psychological and sociological research conducted during this period has explored the differences between in-person and virtual social interactions, which this study did not address or explore, so future research could focus on these aspects relating to the experiences of LGBTQ+ students at California Community Colleges.

Conclusion

My primary motivation for conducting this research was to shine light on a group of students who I felt were being closeted by their own college system. As a student services professional at Cosumnes River College in the Los Rios Community College District, I participated in the Student Equity Plan development process, and was very vocal about the issues

I saw in the LGBT student data and the methods being used; my concerns were ignored because the college had to follow the direction from a higher authority—the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. When I began my doctoral journey at UC Davis, I had other research plans for my dissertation, but I knew I had to use my power to effect change for a student group with which I identify personally.

Like many of the students in this study, my own outness is situational and contextual. I first came out as bisexual to a few close friends and teachers during my senior year in high school. Bisexual felt somehow safer than saying I was gay at the time, so I understand the fear and anxiety of coming out completely. Later, when I entered college, I used that as an opportunity to be true to myself, and I was openly gay to those I met; they only knew me as gay and not as a seemingly straight cis male. I recognize that I had the privilege to go away to college and start anew, while many of those who attend community college may not have that same sense of starting anew given the college's proximity to their home. The students in this study taught me more about myself as they were teaching me about themselves.

For my undergraduate degrees, I attended UC Davis's younger sibling campus—UC Merced. At the time I was at UC Merced, the surrounding greater Merced Community was not as tolerant as the community in Sacramento from which I came. My second year at Merced was during the 2008 election, the election that sent Barack Obama to the White House also made same-sex marriage illegal in California. The UC Merced Community was very much against the Proposition 8 same-sex marriage ban, but the surrounding Merced communities were very much in support of it. As UC Merced grew and developed, I advocated for LGBTQ+ student-centric services and programing. I was honored as the President of the UC Merced Alumni Association

to be invited to the first UC Merced Lavender Commencement, and I continue to advocate and support these issues in my professional workspaces as well.

In my professional work, I strive to provide the support, validation, and sense of belonging that I received at UC Merced. By the very nature of my role, I am not in the classroom with students, so I work to provide the valuable validation students seek and need from outside the classroom by establishing relationships with students and helping faculty do so better as well.

Previously, when students knew I was gay, they asked me why our college or community colleges in general did not have LGBTQ+ student centers like UC Davis and Sacramento State, and I never had a good answer for those questions. Thus, it was gratifying to see the first Pride and Queer resource centers established at California Community Colleges, after seeing our colleges ignore LGBTQ+ students largely. Many positive changes were made at California Community Colleges during my early career as a student services professional.

However, while it is good to see open support for LGBTQ+ students at California Community Colleges finally, I keep returning to Kristen Renn's sentiment, and as she does, I believe that the colleges have evolved seemingly to tolerate the generation of queer theory from within but have stalwartly resisted the queering of higher education itself, in part because of the heteronormativity that permeates our society. Yes, LGBTQ+centric services, Pride Centers, gender-inclusive restrooms, pronouns, and preferred names are strides of progress, but when the wrong names or pronouns are used, it invalidates the student, and a student who does not feel safe to use the restroom on campus extends far beyond invalidation. Thus, I hope we can Queer our California Community Colleges so that they are inclusive, safe, and affirming spaces for all who come to better themselves.

Appendix A: Pre-interview Survey

Qualifying Questions:

QQ1) Are you age 18 or older?

QQ2) Are you a current or former California Community College student?

QQ3) Do you identify with the LGBTQ+ Pride Community?

Student Profile

1) When did you start attending a California Community College (Semester/Year: i.e., Fall 2020)?
2) What is your community college goal? (Transfer means to transfer to a 4-Year university to earn a bachelor's degree):
    a. Associates Degree (no transfer)
    b. Associates Degree & Transfer
    c. Transfer with no Associates Degree
    d. Certificate
    e. Undecided
    f. Not listed (Other):
3) What is your academic major?
4) What California Community College do you consider your primary/home college?
5) When do you plan on graduating, transferring, and/or completing your program of study?

Student Identity Profile

6) Do you receive support services from any of the following?
    a. EOPS: Extended Opportunity Programs & Services

b. CalWORKS

c. NextUP (Former Foster Youth)

d. DSPS: Disability Services

e. Fresh Success

f. Veterans Resource Center

g. Not Listed:

7) How do you identify yourself within the LGBTQ+ Community? Examples: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, Queer, Questioning, etc.

8) What is your gender identity? Examples: Cis-Male (male at birth & currently identify as male), Cis-Female (Female at Birth & currently Identify as female), Trans-Male (Not Male at birth, currently identify as Male), Trans-Female (Not Female at birth, currently identify as Female), Trans/Transitioning (In between Male & Female, currently transitioning from one gender to the other and do not Identify as either), Trans/Transitioning (Currently transitioning and identify as both male & female), Genderfluid, Non-Binary/Gender Non-conforming, two-spirit, etc.

9) Do you go by your birth/given name in the college context or do you go by another name?

a. Birth/Given Name

b. Preferred, Chosen, or Other Name

10) Would you describe yourself as "out" about your LGBTQ+ identity in the college context? (Out meaning not closeted and not hiding your LGBTQ+ Identity)

11) Would you describe yourself as "out" about your LGBTQ+ identity in your family context? (Out meaning not closeted and not hiding your LGBTQ+ Identity)

12) What is your racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identity?

LGBTQ+ Student Experience

13) Does your primary/home college ask you for your preferred name through a standardized process?
14) Has a college employee (faculty, staff, or management) ever addressed you by a name other than your preferred name?
15) Does your primary/home college allow you the option to self-identify your LGBTQ+ identity, in a standardized process on forms just like race and ethnicity identities?
16) Does your primary/home college allow you the option to self-identify your pronouns, in a standardized process on forms just like gender identities? (Pronouns: He/Him, She/Her, They/Them, etc.)
17) Has a college employee (faculty, staff, or management) ever referred to you by pronouns other than those with which you identify or mis-gendered you?
18) Have you ever been "outed" about your LGBTQ+ identity by a Los Rios employee (faculty, staff, or management)?
    a. If yes, can you please briefly describe the experience of being outed?
19) Have you ever felt like you have been discriminated against by your primary/home college because of your LGBTQ+ identity?
    a. If yes, can you please provide some details about that experience?
20) Have you ever felt unsafe on or near your primary/home college campus?
    a. If yes, can you please provide some details about that feeling?

LGBTQ+ Support & Institutional Commitment

21) What, if any, LGBTQ+ specific services, offices, programs or events does your primary/home college provide? (Examples: Safe Zone/Spaces, LGBTQ+, gender and sexuality education and/or support services)?
22) Have you seen college/district leadership attend campus LGBTQ+ events/activities in a visible, ongoing manner?
23) Does your primary/home college have any active LGBTQ+ student organizations?
24) How accessible and available are gender-inclusive restrooms at your primary/home college campus (defined as restrooms not segregated into men's and women's spaces and welcoming to students who identify outside of the gender binary)?

LGBTQ+ Academic Life

25) Does your primary/home college make a concerted effort to incorporate LGBTQ+ issues into existing courses and/or do faculty/deans address heteronormativity and gender normativity in the curriculum/classroom?
26) Does your primary/home college have any specific academically focused LGBTQ+ student organizations (e.g., LGBTQ+ Medical Association, oSTEM, Out Business Association, etc.)? (academically focused rather than socially focused)

Final Questions

27) What else do you think the researcher should know about attending a California Community College as a student who identifies as LGBTQ+?
28) Would you like to be interviewed by the researcher for this study?

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1) How do you identify yourself within the LGBTQ+ community?
2) How did your LGBTQ+ identity factor into your decision to attend your primary/home college?
3) How "out" are you in the college context?
4) How "out" are you in your family context?
5) How do you feel about sharing your LGBTQ+ identity with your professors?
6) How do you feel about sharing your LGBTQ+ Identity with a counselor and/or student services staff around campus? (i.e., Student Support Specialists, Success Coaches, clerks, etc.)
7) What programs and/or services do you feel support your success in college? (Tutoring, Financial Aid, Counseling, DSPS, EOPS, etc.) Please explain how and why.
8) What programs and/or services specifically support your LGBTQ+ identity? Please explain how.
9) How has your primary/home college supported your LGBTQ+ identity?
10) What challenges have you experienced as a member of the LGBTQ+ community in the college context?
11) What support services or resources should your primary/home college provide students like you, particularly given your LGBTQ+ identity?
12) How could your primary/home college be more supportive of LGBTQ+ students like you?
13) Can you please describe a time you felt "outed" by a college employee (faculty, staff, and/or management) or fellow student?

14) Have you ever felt unsafe on or near campus? If yes, can you please describe the situation and how you felt?

15) What are your thoughts and/or feelings, if any, about the college police department or campus security?

    a. What could the college police department or campus security do to improve your thoughts and/or feelings about them?

16) Can you describe a time where you had such negative experiences associated with college that you felt like you needed to drop a class or classes and/or dropout altogether for a period of time?

    a. What prevented you from dropping out?

    b. Alternatively, what could have prevented you from dropping out?

    c. Why do you continue to attend college given these negative experiences or challenges?

17) What do you think your college leadership should know about your experience as a LGBTQ+ student?

18) What advice would you give to other LGBTQ+ students if they were deciding to attend a California Community college?

19) Given your LGBTQ+ identity, what else would you like to share about your student experience at a California Community College?

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