Bible Belt LGBTQ Allies In Their Own Words:

An Investigation of Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

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Multiculturalism encourages psychologists to act as scholar-activists, who consider social justice at the heart of outreach, training, and clinical work. Promotion of social change addressing the ongoing negative effects of heterosexism benefits from unified efforts of the LGBTQ community and their allies. Scholars posit that the psychological detriments of heterosexism are more pronounced in cultures defined by conservative politics and “traditional” values. The “Bible Belt” is region of the United States where these ideals are reinforced by fundamentalist Christianity and woven into the practices of business, education, and daily community interaction. Scholars have examined the emotional and interpersonal experiences of LGBTQ people in the Bible Belt and similar cultural environments. Using consensual qualitative research (CQR), the current study highlights the psychological process of LGBTQ identity development, cognitive processes involved with advocacy work, and the behavioral interventions chosen by straight and cisgender identifying LGBTQ allies to counteract prejudice within the Bible Belt. 12 cisgender women, in various Bible Belt towns, were nominated by LGBTQ identifying individuals from the region, and participated in this study. In-person, semi-structured interviews, were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using CQR methods. The results help define current Bible Belt culture, and provide an illustration of the Bible Belt ally, their developmental process, and how they approach advocacy efforts. Results indicated cultural consistencies across the Bible Belt, including: the pervasive nature of Christianity, “traditional” and conservative values, and social norms dictated by a desire to present the façade of harmony. Within their developmental process, participants highlighted the need to engage in critical
Participants reported partaking in a wide range of advocacy work, with the bulk of their efforts representing relatively subtle and commonplace everyday acts of activism. These daily interventions are presented in categories and illuminated with direct quotes. Recommendations for research, education and training are provided.
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As I reflect on the journey that culminated in this study, I am overwhelmed with gratitude to the great many people whose contributions were essential to the work, and to those whose support was essential to my own process – these two roles often one in the same.

For this study, I travelled the region that raised me. On some of these road trips, I was accompanied also by people who raised me, my mother Deb / little Debbie and my father Jim / James / Skip / Landreth. Both, originally transplants to the Bible Belt, have lived in the region for over twenty years. The Bible Belt is their home, and yet they also have the unique perspectives of “outsiders”. Along our travels, we discussed our own experiences related to my topic, explained ourselves to strangers who were curious about the father-daughter traveling pair, or the one-day road trip my mother and I took all the way from Dallas to Houston and back, and confronted our own decision-making processes about how to discuss the work.

On a quick stop to visit with my mother’s elderly uncle and his more conservative family, she wondered aloud if we should really delve into topics of “advocacy” and “equality”. After all she thought: “We haven’t seen them in years”; “What if it becomes tense?”; and, “I don’t even know if they know your sister is gay, and I would be so upset with them if they were disapproving.” Of course, when we stumbled into the nearly forgotten, but oh so familiar, kitchen, far later in the evening then we had intended, they asked. After all, why on earth were we driving three hours both directions in one day? I looked at my mother, my instinct is perhaps too rarely to self-sensor, but I wanted to respect her wishes. I was relieved when she answered for us. Her small stature suddenly seemed bigger, bolder, as she sat up tall, and spoke clearly and proudly, explaining both – my study and the incredible advocacy work that my sister, her daughter, Shannon, who yes, is gay, has devoted her career to. I have always been proud to be
my mother’s daughter, and this moment was one of many reminders why. Her own subtle, everyday activism here was warmly received by inquisitive family members, reassuring us that the perceived risk is often exaggerated in our minds. Similarly, my father, who makes up for occasional naiveté with his brilliant and warm enthusiasm, boasted about my research to anyone who would listen, collecting fellow allies and LGBTQ individuals from Tennessee to Louisiana whose excitement about the topic fueled us along long stretches of driving leading into the Christmas holiday. These two humans, above all else, taught me and my sister the immense value of kindness, generosity of spirit, acceptance, and patience. As a family, we continue to educate ourselves and grow in our own allied identities, and for that, as well as so many other things, I am eternally grateful to my mother and my father.

As a theatre kid, and more briefly, a cheerleader, my social circle growing up was sprinkled with so many sparkly people, many of which would come to identify as LGBTQ. And after years of explorative discussions, circling around a truth clouded only by fear, following her freshman year of college, my sister and I were sitting in a car at a red light, just the two of us. With a sheepish grin, she said “… so, I’m gay.” I cannot remember what I said, I am fairly certain it was something as unremarkable as, “well, yes that seems about right,” but I will never forget how I felt. In that moment, I thought my heart could explode with joy and pride. I had watched her journey of discovery for so long, and I knew just how much she had faced to get to this moment. Her simple statement was really a declaration of self-love and self-acceptance – a person I love most in the world getting ready to make her mark, and make her mark she has.

Coming to own one’s truth should not be such a painful journey, and I must admit I hold Bible Belt culture accountable. Therefore, this manuscript may at times read as a critique. I hope that readers will see that this study is also a love letter. This is my love letter to the
LGBTQ people in my life who have made my life so much better. Having the privilege of a network that includes so many LGBTQ people challenges me to question heterosexism in ways I may otherwise miss, and helps me to open my mind to a realm of possibilities that I may never have considered otherwise. This manuscript is also a love letter to the people in the Bible Belt who are brave enough to question the “norms” and confront injustice, and patient enough with themselves and others to continually develop within their allied identities. I want to thank all of the people who took interest in this study, spoke to me about nominating an ally, and especially the nominees who took the time to sit down with me and share their stories.

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Sawyer, Jessica Esposito, Amber Proctor-Reyes, Angela Gwak, Carrie Muchow, and Veronica Johnson. I found a home with my research team when I truly needed one, thank you to Luisa Bonifacio, Amelia Walker, Laura Diamond, and especially Jung Kim, for a friendship that has felt nothing less than kismet, and Kim Hinman, my rock, a true partner in life, whose endless support, and countless brainstorming meetings and peer edits played an integral role in the creation of this project. I have found the most beautiful friendships and support systems in my clinical experiences -- my Brooklyn College work wife, Nancy Adler, my 9/11 clinic crew, Ming Tu, Elaine Nabel, and Jackson Taylor, my family practicum teams, and my internship cohort, Will Lamson, Rebecca Stevenson, Mellissa Hillebrecht, Elaine Lavin, and Adam Clark.

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To stand back and take this all in, takes my breath away.
DEDICATION

For my family, and especially my person – my sister, Shannon Nicole Beveridge.
LGBTQ Bible Belt Allies In Their Own Words:  
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CHAPTER I  

Introduction  

The United States promotes values of egalitarianism and justice. Overt forms of prejudice increasingly receive public ridicule, as they undermine these cultural ideals (Pearson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2009; Herek, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008, Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010; Nadal, 2013). However, systems of oppression continue to exist. Minority groups have been disenfranchised in various ways and several social justice movements have grown out of this oppression. Some of the most notable being the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s for racial equality, the fight for women’s rights with monumental moments such as the Seneca Falls Convention as early as 1848, and recent efforts for equal rights for the LGBTQ1 (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community.  

In a speech made for International Women’s Day, 2016, first lady Michelle Obama celebrated the progress made while, challenging society not to take rights for granted. She highlights the need for allies within in the fight for civil rights, reminding us that protection of women’s rights requires ongoing support and activism from all people:  

“…today, it is so easy to take for granted all of the progress we’ve made on these kinds of issues, but the fact is that right now, today, so many of these rights are under threat from all sides, always at risk of being rolled back if we let our guard down for a single minute. These issues aren’t settled. These freedoms that we take for granted aren’t guaranteed in stone, and they certainly didn’t just come down to us as a gift from the heavens. No, these rights were secured through long, hard battles waged by women and men who marched, and protested, and made their voices heard in courtrooms and boardrooms and voting booths and the halls of Congress.”

1 LGBTQ and LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) will be used throughout this document. While this particular study is interested in the larger LGBTQ community, LGB may be seen when the literature referenced pertains only to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
Obama speaks to the ongoing nature of social justice efforts and the value of a united effort between marginalized groups and their allies.

**LGBTQ Allies**

Indeed, allies from the dominant group play important roles in social justice movements (Goldstein, 2017; Hall, Witkemper, Rodgers, Waters & Smith, 2018; LeMaire, 2017). This study aims not to celebrate the influence of allies, but rather to better understand individuals who identify as allies, specifically within the current movement for LGBTQ equality. National trends indicate that American citizens are reporting increasingly affirmative LGBTQ attitudes (Adam, 1995; Loftus, 2001; In Depth, n.d.; Stone, 2012). However, as the movement is successful in obtaining progressive legislative and policy changes in line with their efforts, there has arguably been significant backlash that undermines the movement’s progress. Further, some warn that progress related to the recognition of same-sex marriage may ultimately lead to the retirement of many activists within LGBTQ communities and their allies, and that as those who are able assimilate into a more heteronormative lifestyle, energies put towards broader social justice concerns impacting the LGBTQ community, particularly for transgender individuals, people of color, and individuals with lower SES, may lessen and leave individuals from more marginalized identities forgotten (Bernstein, 2018; Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Duggan, 2002; Stein, 2013; Warner, 2000). Further, we have seen many Americans respond negatively to the recognition of LGBTQ rights, becoming vocal about their opposition, refusing to observe laws, and/or organizing to pass initiatives that undermine or block LGBTQ movement victories (Bernstein, 2018; Human Rights Campaign, n.d.; Kazyak & Stange, 2018; In Depth, n.d.). It is important not to become complacent, as LGBTQ rights remain vulnerable. This study aims to build upon existing social justice allied research to better understand how one comes to see themselves as an
LGBTQ ally and the developmental process they undergo within this identity. Further, once an individual has come to identify as an ally, this study sought to clarify the allied behaviors they engage in within their community.

**Consideration of Cultural Context**

Since the 1970s, psychology has seen a postmodernist shift, a radical reappraisal of previous theories, as the field moves towards multiculturalism, which embraces a viewpoint consistent with social constructionism. Social constructionism theories posit that we live in a world of multiple realities, due to the ongoing exchange between social environment and the individual (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bandura, 1978). Psychologists have increasingly embraced this perception, which holds that historical, cultural, and social experiences influence individual psychology, and further, one can be best understood when contextual factors are considered (Sue et al., 1998). Cohen (2009) urges psychologists to consider a broader range of cultural contexts within multicultural research, to include different regions within a country, as a means of deepening understandings of cultural specificity and universality and the various dimensions of cultural impact on psychological processes.

In line with Cohen’s (2009) recommendation, some research has examined how cultural context impacts LGBTQ-attitudes, and psychological outcomes for LGBTQ people. For example, researchers have long suggested that the behavioral and emotional experience of LGBTQ people living in rural environments is significantly different from those living in urban areas (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Fingerhut, 2011; Woodford, Silverschanz, Swank, Scherrer, & Raiz, 2012). Recent allied development studies have suggested that cultural context may also impact allies (Barton, 2011; Borgman, 2009). Indeed, social context has been shown to predict attitudes and expressions of prejudice (Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009).
**Bible Belt Culture**

More specifically, Barton (2010, 2011) presents evidence for unique contextual experiences of LGB individuals living within the Bible Belt region. The Bible Belt spans across the West South Central, or the South and Midwest of the United States (Barton, 2010, 2011; Heatwole, 1978; Tweedie, 1978). The area is characterized by pervasive Christian fundamentalism (Barton, 2010, 2011; Heatwole, 1978; Newport, 2009; Tweedie, 1978) and political conservativism (Jones, 2016; Political Issues of 2016, n.d.). Barton (2010, 2011) argues that Christian values and beliefs are promoted in secular spaces, and that to live in the region is to be reminded daily of the dominant nature of these cultural norms. While Barton (2010, 2011) focuses on LGB experience in the Bible Belt, her findings suggest that the cultural context of the region results in a unique experience for LGB allies also.

**The Current Study**

The current study relied on interviews with allies from the Bible Belt, a specific cultural context, in order to further understand how cultural and social experiences may influence the allied development process, both in terms of internal experience, and advocacy behaviors. If LGB individuals are more inclined to remain in the “toxic closet” in the Bible Belt as Barton (2010) suggests, are allies also more inclined to be particularly careful about how they present their allied identity? Do they experience social conflicts, and corresponding internal struggles related to their allied identity? How do they assert themselves as allies and what social justice interventions do they find to be most effective within their communities?

Multicultural psychological research has turned attention to how systems of oppression manifest within modern culture (Herek, 2000; Nadal, 2013; Nadal, Rivera & Corpus, 2010; Pearson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2009; Sue, Arrendondo, McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1998; Sue &
Sue, 2008). A great body of literature addresses the negative impact of discrimination on LGBTQ individuals (Barton, 2010, 2011; Be´rube’, 1990; Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994; Herek, 1992; Herek, Cogan, Gillis & Glunt, 1998; Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 1999; Lock, 1998; Meyer & Dean, 1998; Meyer, 2003). Since the conception of this study, researchers have begun to more closely investigate the role of members of the dominant group in the fight for LGBTQ equality (Dessel, Goodman & Woodford, 2017; Goldstein, 2017; Hall et al., 2018; Katz, Federici & Ramos-Dries, 2017; LeMaire, 2017; Toomey & McGeorge, 2018). Findings from this study add to a body of research designed to inform social justice movements, and education and training initiatives for clinicians, educators and aspiring allies.

Qualitative methods are recommended for relatively unexamined phenomenon, as they allow for researchers to uncover data of great depth and richness (Hill, Thompson & Nutt-Williams, 1997). Consensual qualitative research (CQR) has been shown to be a viable method of evaluation for studying internal experiences (Hill et al., 2005). The postpositivist leaning of CQR makes the method an obvious choice for psychology, which has traditionally relied more exclusively on quantitative research (Ponterotto, 2010). Further, the constructivist components of CQR are congruent with the underlying assumptions inherent in multiculturalism (Ponterotto, 2010; Sue et al., 1998). By this rationale, this study used a qualitative design, interviewing LGBTQ allies living in the Bible Belt to better understand their experience and their developmental process. A CQR method was used to analyze the data and establish a rich description of the impact social context has on LGBTQ allies.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The success of progressive social movements relies on burgeoning support from within the “oppressed” group, as well as from members of the “oppressive” group (Tarrow, 1989). To attract the attention of members of the dominant group and gain supporters, activists must communicate their platform through visible, effective protests and campaigns. However, supporters can remain passive, merely believing the movement to be just, right and deserving of realizing their initiatives, without vocalizing their support, or participating in any sort of activism. Visible, accessible, active organizations are needed within a community to encourage supporters to engage with the movement and propel it forward. Social justice movements’ influence is reliant upon a combination of diffusion of visibility and simultaneous increase in the density of active organizations (Minkoff, 1997).

Klandermans & Oegema (1987) posit that the limits of success for social justice campaigns are dependent upon the mobilization potential of a social movement. The mobilization potential of a movement refers to the number of people in a society who hold positive attitudes towards the movement and/or the goals of movement. This group of people may consist of those who benefit directly from the campaign but is not necessarily exclusive to this group. Progressive social movements that persist over long periods of time benefit when there are favorable attitudinal changes within society. Campaigns supporting the cause can have a cumulative effect, changing social norms and gaining appeal with younger generations who have been exposed to the more progressive messages throughout their lives.

Research suggests that people are more inclined to support a movement or cause when they perceive the popular opinion to be congruent with this stance (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz,
Linkenbach & Stark, 2003). This tendency for people to go with the masses, at face value, is a positive indicator for progressive social movements pursuing civil rights for disenfranchised groups. Indeed, overt forms of prejudice have decreased in many modern western cultures as prejudice has become increasingly recognized as inappropriate (Son, Hing, Chung-Yan, Hamilton & Zanna, 2008; Hodson, Hooper, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; as cited by Pearson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2009). The United States in particular, is a country founded upon principles of liberty and justice, and contemporary norms have generally suggested a culture of egalitarianism (Pearson, et al., 2009). In 2009, Pearson and colleagues noted that values of equality were becoming increasingly popular, and as clear instances of discrimination had been receiving mounting criticism, they proposed that support for progressive social movements in turn would likely see continued gains. Researchers note that progress is not linear. Progressive change is often met with cultural backlash, however, scholars note that the media attention garnered in acts of resistance can be capitalized upon by activists to facilitate mass mobilization for the social justice movement in question (Bernstein, 2018; Bernstein, Marshall & Barclay, 2009; Kazyak & Stange, 2018; McCann, 1998; Rosenberg, 1991).

Progressive changes in favor of social justice are fought for by members of disenfranchised groups and their supporters, often referred to as “allies”. Washington and Evans’ define allies as: “a person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or majority group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed” (1991, p. 195). Given that members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, White people, heterosexually identifying individuals) benefit from greater access to healthcare, job training, education, employment, housing and higher wages (Dovidio, Penner,
Albrecht, Norton, Gaertner, & Shelton, 2008; Elvira & Zatzick, 2002; Geiger, 2003; Rosenfeld, 1998; Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003; Smelser, Wilson, & Mitchell, 2001), as well as many other more subtle unearned privileges (McIntosh, 1988), it is not surprising that they tend to be overrepresented in positions of power and authority (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). From this vantage point, social justice allies can often be particularly effective in promoting social change. Further, some research indicates that confrontation of heterosexism may be better received when delivered by allies as compared to individuals from the target group (Gulker et al. 2013; LeMaire, 2017; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Members of the target group may be more likely to be dismissed as “complainers” or as being hypersensitive (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Kaiser and Miller, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2013). Further, onlookers tend to take notice when a non-target ally confronts prejudice and respond to the confrontation with a greater sense of guilt (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). This response may be desired as a motivator for change, as negative emotions related to discrimination and heterosexism, including guilt, have been found to be common amongst emerging allies (Dillon et al., 2004; Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt, 2010). Finally, research suggests that onlookers view an argument as more valid when they perceive the argument to be made in the interest of others (Eagly, Wood & Chaiken, 1978; Petty, Fleming, Priester & Feinstein, 2001; Walster, Aronson, Abrahamson & Rottman, 1966). These findings help to illuminate the value of allies in social justice movements.

Members of the dominant group are often passive supporters, as opposed to active allies, even when they believe in the cause (McAdam, 1986). Scholars highlight several explanations for this reticence amongst the dominant group. Social justice efforts inherently challenge the longevity and stability of the unearned privileges aspiring allies have undoubtedly benefited from, contributing to often-unconscious conflicts within aspiring allies (Edwards, 2006;
McIntosh, 1988). By dismantling systemic oppression, allies from dominant groups forfeit unfair advantages they currently have access to. Therefore, well-meaning aspiring allies, who genuinely hold egalitarian values, are at risk of “perpetuating the very system of oppression they seek to change” (Edwards, 2006, p. 2006), especially when they deny the existence of these privileges (Katz, Federici & Ramos-Dries, 2019; McIntosh, 1988; Pearson et al., 2009).

**Role of Effective Allies**

While allies are needed in any social justice movement, scholars also caution against overemphasizing the role of allies (Reed, 2005). Social justice allies should remain cognizant of their role as supporting players. To be most effective in allied work, allies should work with members of disadvantaged groups, rather than for or over them (Edwards, 2006). Kivel (2002) proposes that it is important as an ally to stay aware of the shifting priorities of the movement. As is true with any social group, members of disenfranchised groups are incredibly diverse, hold varying perceptions and priorities, and may differ greatly in regard to personal experience and opinions related to the social justice movement. Considering in-group differences, and ever-changing cultural climates, aspiring allies face challenges in their efforts to remain relevant, consistent and effective as agents of social change (Edwards, 2006).

Edwards (2006) proposes a developmental model of allied identity that suggests that allies are most effective when they recognize how a system of oppression is harmful, although unequally so, to all members of a society. Consistent with Freire (1972/2000), Edwards suggests the most effective social justice allies recognize that in order to liberate oneself and fully connect with one’s own humanity, they must actively seek to free the oppressed. Seeing a social justice movement as beneficial to all of society is a sustainable long-term motivation, and encourages aspiring allies to be more consistent and collaborative in their efforts.
Progressive Social Justice Movements in the United States

Academics often cite the African American Civil Rights Movement lead by the Black community in the 1950s and 1960s as the model for progressive social movements (McCann, 1998; Reed, 2005; Rosenberg, 2991; Neal, 1996). Understanding the successes and challenges of this movement can provide insight and guidance for modern social causes. Reed (2005) argues that the efforts of the movement are often misunderstood in popular culture as having been propelled mostly by national leadership and centralized organizations, and in turn, offers an alternative interpretation of the key tactics and features of the movement. While central organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, founded in 1909) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC, found in 1957) were effective in providing an overarching network of activists within the movement in the 1950s and 1960s, Reed (2005) points to vast regional differences in regards to goals, challenges and strategies utilized. Racism and discrimination remained pervasive in the North, as well as in the South, but took on different forms. In order to be successful, organizers and activists had to be creative and specific in their approaches. Reed (2005) draws attention to the local, grassroots nature of the civil rights movement Martin Luther King, Jr. helped bring national attention to (as opposed to having started), noting that locally run grassroots organizations tended to be most effective in addressing community-level concerns. Modern organizers are wise to refer to lessons learned by successes and failures of this movement.

Historians and activists have often compared modern efforts for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) equality to the Civil Rights Movement for racial equality. While same-sex affections and gender non-conforming behaviors have suffered a long history of discrimination in the United States, many argue that organized and collective resistance and
corresponding campaigns for liberty and equality for the LGBTQ community is relatively new, developing towards the end of the 1960s and gaining visibility with legislative changes over the past two decades (discussed further below) (Neal, 1996). Efforts for LGBTQ equality in the United States resembles the better-known Civil Rights Movement for racial equality in a number of ways.

It is worth noting that this comparison has been met with resistance from many people within the Black community. While several of these critiques are credible, they are outside of the scope of this particular document (see instead Neal, 1996). I rely on this comparison as an example of two separate movements in the United States that have benefitted from collective efforts between overarching national groups and concurrent local, grassroots organizations, struggling with regional disparities and requiring allies to intervene both politically and within their personal and professional lives. Further, the large body of research pertaining to the history of the Civil Rights Movement, and related psychological concepts regarding racism, ongoing or modern forms of racism, racial identity development, and anti-racist or social justice allied identity development and intervention, inspired much of the research discussed in this literature review and greatly informed our broader understanding of social movements, prejudice and discrimination, social identities, and the efforts of groups and their allies to combat various forms of prejudice and discrimination.

When discussing American culture, one would be remiss to exclude discussion of the role of Christianity. Christianity has been pervasive throughout America since European colonization, and the religion’s influence is interwoven into the United States’ governmental structure, legislation and overarching cultural norms (Hatch, 1989). Greenberg & Bystryn (1982) trace the harsh repression of homosexuality within Christian faith characteristic of
modern history to the Middle Ages. Scholars from various fields discuss the role Christianity plays in American views on sexuality and gender identity, and the heterosexist norms widely endorsed throughout American institutions and communities (Carmichael, 1998; Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982; Locke, 2005; Wood, 1999). This pervasive repression and oppression of homosexuality and gender identity diversity in the larger culture gave way for the emergence of vibrant, albeit vulnerable, LGBTQ subcultures in urban cities (Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982). New York City was home to one such underground community.

On the tails of the Civil Rights Movement, the LGBTQ community in New York City was growing tired of weathering discrimination. The “Stonewall Rebellion” is argued to be the beginning of organized collective resistance by the LGBTQ community (Neal, 1996). One night in 1969, police raided Stonewall, a small Greenwich Village gay bar. This practice to raid establishments known to be meeting places for the LGBTQ community was common at the time in New York City. On this particular night, however, guests of the bar did not respond by quietly dispersing, but rather resisted the police. A riot persisted for several days, and inspired a new collective resistance (Neal, 1996).

Since the beginning of this movement, goals have been wide ranging, but Egan and Sherrill (2005) note a general shift in focus over time from the pursuit of liberty to be one’s self without risk, to one of equality, particularly with respect to equal rights of citizenship. Egan and Sherrill (2005) present generational differences amongst LGBTQ individuals regarding preferred priorities of the movement, particularly the pursuit of equal marriage rights, as evidence of this shift. The demand of young LGBTQ people to be treated equally is indicative of many of the successes of the Stonewall generations’ efforts to create a more accepting culture. “Forms of oppression and discrimination that were once tolerable have become targets for new generations,
who… prefer to think of themselves as equal, not separate” (Egan & Sherrill, 2005, p. 232). The pursuit of equal rights may seem like a more obvious goal to younger allies, as this is more consistent with the cultural norms of their lifetime. Given the generational discrepancies within the LGBTQ community, similar trends may also exist within the allied community. As the LGBTQ movement shifts to become increasingly and inspiring unapologetic in the demand for equal rights, older allies will need to stay informed and may be called to question their previous criterion of success.

Current LGBTQ Social Justice Culture

Legislative

Research supports Egan and Sherrill’s (2005) interpretation that younger generations are coming of age in a society that is becoming increasingly LGBTQ affirmative. National findings suggest Americans are becoming more supportive of civil liberties for LGB individuals (Loftus, 2001) and more positive in general attitudes towards the community (Adam, 1995). These findings have also been replicated with university students (Balanko, 1998; Schellenberg, Hirt & Sears, 1999; Simon, 1995; Simoni, 1996; Waldo & Kemp, 1997; as cited by Walls, 2008).

Gallup Polls also tend to reflect growing support for gay and lesbian rights (In Depth, n.d.). For example, in 2012, 61% of people polled believed that gay and lesbian individuals should be able to legally adopt children, 77% believed that health insurance and other employee benefits for gay and lesbian domestic partners or spouses should be supported, and 78% agreed that inheritance rights for gay and lesbian domestic partners or spouses should exist (In Depth, n.d.). Further, Gallup Polls also suggest that much of the United States is moving towards more affirmative LGB attitudes, with 36% of people in 2013 reporting that their “attitudes towards gays and lesbians” have changed to be more accepting (In Depth, n.d.). On the other hand, as LGBTQ
attitudes have generally shifted in a more affirmative direction, the minority in opposition to LGBTQ rights have become increasingly vocal, protesting against same-sex marriage, benefits for health care, and rights as co-parents or the power to adopt as a same-sex couple (Bernstein, 2018; Human Rights Campaign, n.d.; Kazyak & Stange, 2018; In Depth, n.d.).

Congruent with general trends in shifting attitudes, the movement has seen great legislative successes of late, but with vast regional differences both in regard to efforts for legislative changes, and the reactions from the community to more progressive decisions. Some areas have clearly lagged behind others with regard to legal action protecting the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals. On April 26, 2000, Vermont became the first state in the United States to legalize same-sex unions, and in 2004, Massachusetts was the first state to legalize gay marriage, finding prohibition of gay marriage to be unconstitutional. Prior to the monumental Supreme Court decision protecting same-sex marriage, on June 26, 2015, thirty-seven states had legalized same-sex marriage through court decision (twenty-six states), by state legislature (eight states), or by popular vote (three states) (State-by-state, n.d.). However, the right to same-sex marriage was ignored or undermined in many areas, and thirteen states actually banned same-sex marriage between 2000 and 2015 (Nadal, Rivera & Corpus, 2010; Stone, 2012; Worthington, Dillon & Becker-Schutte, 2005).

As Michelle Obama noted, rights can be overturned or ignored outright. Indeed, in response to the Supreme Court ruling protecting same-sex marriage, over 100 anti-LGBT bills were filed in twenty-nine states across the country during the 2015 state legislative sessions (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). These anti-LGBT bills included, but are not limited to, statewide “Religious Freedom Restoration Acts” which allow people to cite their religion as a defense for challenging or ignoring state and local laws, such as those that protect LGBT
individuals, bills that limit marriage equality and bills that narrow access to adoption (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). Due to vague wording, many of these initiatives could also be used to justify prejudice based on religious beliefs and ethnicity in addition to sexual orientation. In addition to anti-LGBTQ legislation that has been proposed, there are also many protections that are noticeably missing in various states (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Some researchers have even noted a rise in violence towards LGBTQ individuals as public positions towards the LGBTQ community have shifted away from explicit messages of hate (Lacayo, 1998). Instances of this type of legislative discrimination are more prevalent within politically conservative areas, and regional trends are notable (Political Issues of 2016, n.d.).

The campaign for equal rights for the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community has seen many successes in recent years, as well as many setbacks. Straight allies have helped support changes at community, city, state and national levels. Organizations such as PFLAG (a group with many chapters across the United States dedicated to uniting LGBTQ individuals with straight family members, friends and other allies) and the Human Rights Campaign have been instrumental in advocacy work, educating community members, appealing to representatives for change, and organizing events nationwide (“About PFLAG”, n.d.; Human Rights Campaign, 2015). Much like the ongoing battle for racial equality, successes may provide a false sense of security, when this battle is ongoing due to both intentional resistance and unintentional setbacks. Similar to activism in the 1960s and 1970s, local activism, with consideration of unique regional characteristics, is needed to combat discrimination based in sexual orientation and gender identity.
Interpersonal and Community-Based

Scholars have also demonstrated the power LGBTQ allies have to significantly impact their community on a personal level. Various studies have pointed to the positive psychological impact support from heterosexual allies can have with friends and family, and how their visible presence can influence community (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Goldstein, 2017; Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer, 2006; Gulker et al., 2013; Kaiser and Miller, 2001; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Shilo & Savaya; Luhtanen, 2002; Sue & Sue, 2013; Whitman, Horn, Boyd, 2007).

In a review of the existing research findings, Meyer (2003) found that LGB individuals have a significantly higher prevalence of mental health disorders compared to heterosexuals. However, Meyer (2003) also highlights inconsistencies in findings, notes the potential for marginalized identities to encourage greater resiliency, and warns readers against assumptions of universality amongst the LGB community, as the group remains heterogeneous across many factors. Most relevant to this particular study, Meyer (2003) challenges the potential perception that an LGB identity is somehow inherently related to mental health concerns by proposing a conceptual framework of minority stress. Meyer (2003) posits that excess stress caused by stigma, prejudice and discrimination within one’s cultural environment, leaves minority group members more vulnerable to mental health problems. Depending on the social climate of one’s environment(s) (e.g. region, neighborhood, workplace, school, etc.), an LGBTQ person may be exposed to more or less stress inducing stigma, prejudice and discrimination. LGBTQ allies impact this social climate by making themselves and their support for LGBTQ individuals visible in a variety of ways.
Community allies may be especially influential with youth populations (Birkett, Espelage & Koenig, 2009; Whitman, Horn & Boyd, 2007). Perhaps due in part to a still emerging sense of self and lacking control over one’s environment, research indicates that LGBTQ youth may be particularly vulnerable to mental health concerns (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004; Rivers, 2000; Rivers, 2004; D’Augelli, 2002; Elliot & Kilpatrick, 1994; Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995; Orenstein, 2001; Rosario et al., 1997; Meyer, 2003). Birkett, Espelage and Koenig (2009) found school environment to be a significant moderator of negative outcomes, such as truancy, homophobic victimization and bullying, depression and suicidality, and alcohol and drug use, amongst LGB youth in their study of 7,376 seventh and eighth grade students in a large Midwestern county. These findings support the importance of initiatives to create more affirmative social climates.

Several studies corroborate this finding, pointing to the protective factor of visible allies and positive school climate for LGB youth. Encouraging teachers, counselors, administration and students to engage in LGBTQ affirmative training programs has been argued to improve school climate (Hall et al., 2018; Whitman, Horn & Boyd, 2007). Others point to the positive impact of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), which are student-led groups that provide support and advocacy for LGBTQ students; GSAs typically include LGBTQ students, questioning students, those who have LGBTQ family members and LGBTQ allied students (Blumenfeld, 1994; Evans, 2002; Fetner & Elafros, 2015; Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer, 2006; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Marx & Kettrey, 2016; Murphy, 2012; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008; Walls, Wisneski, & Kane, 2013). Public high schools with GSAs were found to have significantly lower rates of dating violence, truancy triggered by fears of victimization, and reports of threat or injury at school amongst LGB
students, compared to schools without GSAs (Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer, 2006; Marx & Kettrey, 2016).

Other studies point to the importance of allies on a personal level (Shilo & Savaya, 2011; Luhtanen, 2002). Shilo and Savaya (2011) surveyed LGB youth in Israel, ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-three years. Results indicated that perception of friend and family support was positively correlated with well-being and perceived family support was negatively correlated with mental distress. Family support and acceptance was the strongest predictor of LGB youth’s self-acceptance of their sexual orientation, while perceived friend support and acceptance was the strongest predictor of disclosure of sexual orientation. Luhtanen (2002) had similar findings with older individuals as well. In a survey of LGB men and women nineteen to seventy-three years old, Luhtanen (2002) found acceptance of family members to be positively correlated with well-being. This body of research highlights the importance of allies on an individual level, as well as within the larger social and political climate.

**Psychology**

The perception of mental health workers as social justice agents, and the role of activism within psychological research, is an emerging concept reflected in shifts towards a more multicultural perspective (Sue, 1981; Sue, Arredondo, McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2012; Vera & Speight, 2003). Since the 1970s the field of psychology has increasingly turned attention to the role of culture in clinical work and related research (Sue et al., 1992). *Multiculturalism*: “accepts the existence of multiple worldviews”; “embodies social constructionism, meaning that people construct their worlds through social processes (historical, cultural, and social experiences)”; “is contextualist in that behavior can only be understood within the context of its occurrence”; “offers a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’ view of the world” meaning that even
“diametrically opposed” worldviews simply capture “different” but “valid” views; and “extols a relational view of language rather than a representational one” that “allows for realities and truths beyond Western scientific tradition” (Sue et al., 1998). Vera & Speight (2003) posit that, “social justice is at the heart of multiculturalism” (p. 254). While efforts to promote a higher level of cultural competency in the field have focused mostly on counseling theory and practice, Vera and Speight (2003) call on psychologists to go beyond their efforts in the counseling room to “foster social change”, by “engaging in advocacy, prevention, and outreach”, and “grounding teaching and research in collaborative and social action processes” (p. 253).

Traditional psychological theory and research has been reflective of the value systems of dominant groups (e.g. White heterosexual men), and unfortunately has promoted the notion that minorities are “more inherently pathological” (Sue et al., 1992). Historically, the field of psychology has been guilty of legitimizing discrimination against individuals based on sexual orientation. In its infancy, the American psychoanalytic community promoted the belief that heterosexual behavior was “natural” and therefore, “homosexuality represent[ed] a phobic response to the opposite sex” (Herek, 2010, p. 694). In the 1930s, homosexuality was formally defined as a psychopathic personality disorder, and the psychiatric and psychological community continued to consider homosexuality a mental disorder until 1974. This classification legitimized horrendous atrocities enacted upon individuals with attractions to same-sex individuals, as well as people who broke from traditional gender norms. For example, many were committed to asylums without opportunity for proper evaluation of potential harm to self or others for indefinite periods of time (Chauncey, 1993; Freedman, 1989). Conversion therapies were developed to “cure homosexuality” and many were exposed to these therapies against their will; further, some were administered more drastic treatments such as aversive conditioning,
lobotomy, electroshock, and castration (e.g., Feldman, 1966; Max, 1935; Thompson, 1949; see American Psychological Association, 2009; Katz, 1976, as cited in Herek, 2010).

Notably, psychological researchers challenged the categorization of homosexuality as a mental illness in the 1940s and 1950s. Findings from Alfred Kinsey’s 18,000 interviews with individuals regarding their sexual behaviors indicated that same-sex experiences were actually quite common with more than 1/3 of men reported that they had engaged in same-sex sexual acts at least once in their life (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Ford and Beach (1951) conducted a study revealing that same-sex sexual behavior is acceptable in many societies. Further, Evelyn Hooker (1958) challenged pathology of homosexuality by showing that sexual orientation is not reliably identified through projective psychological assessments. However, the official stance of the psychiatric and psychological community, perceiving homosexuality as indicative of psychopathology, remained consistent for many years despite these, and other, challenges from scholars (Herek, 2010).

Today “the American Psychological Association has, in numerous policy statements, repeatedly stated its commitment to equal rights and to the ending of discrimination against lesbians and gay men”, (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004, p. 2). The organization’s about-face is commendable, but unfortunately, the various forms of discrimination encouraged by their previous stance and the original DSM categorization of homosexuality, have been instituted in policy both formally and informally, and therefore continue to deleteriously impact our community today. The field has a responsibility to the community to work to better understand discrimination, and to uncover strategies to effectively combat the continuation of prejudice and the negative impact it has on individuals.
Counseling psychology programs, and to a lesser but mounting extent, clinical psychology programs, continue to improve their multicultural training efforts (Vera & Speight, 2003). Within this context, trainees are made aware of overt and covert means of continuing systemic discrimination. They are encouraged to engage in self-exploration activities, and ultimately gain deeper awareness of their assumptions, biases, and personal experience. These training efforts foster consideration of systems of oppression and holistic views of client experience, including the interaction between the individual and their environment, within clinical conceptualization and intervention. Multiculturally sensitive training programs take a social justice approach to therapy, reduce the prevalence of discriminatory treatment models, and protect against the risk for minorities to be inappropriately pathologized (Sue & Sue, 2012, p. 66-77). Efforts to foster greater multicultural competency amongst mental health providers are imperative, but as Vera and Speight (2003) argue, psychologists can go further to promote social justice.

Vera and Speight (2003) suggest that mental health professionals, and the counseling psychology field at large, should continue to enhance social justice initiatives. They argue that professionals should consider a social justice perspective in outreach work, consultation, policy formation and community advocacy. Further, they suggest that mental health providers should more commonly act as a conduit to social services, especially during crisis intervention. Cultural considerations may indicate alternative interventions to be superior to traditional psychotherapy, and therefore mental health providers may better serve said clients by activating indigenous support, and/or acting as an advocate or psychoeducator (Vera & Speight, 2003).

Mental health professionals face the same challenges allies contend with to remain relevant, consistent and effective. Allies vary in regard to their effectiveness, and their
development is not stagnant but can oscillate over time (Edwards, 2006). Further research into the motives to act as allies and the developmental process of allied identity is indicated. Also, given regional disparities made apparent by recent polls and political and legislative inconsistencies (In depth, n.d.; Jones, 2016; Newport, 2009, and reflected in psychological research (Cohen, 2009), allies are likely to be most effective in their efforts when they are tailored to the relevant social context. Reed (2005) suggests that grassroots efforts with local leaders are likely to be most successful on a community level. However, given the covert nature of modern discrimination (Pearson et al., 2009; Herek, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008; Nadal et al., 2010; Nadal, 2013), people may be especially blind to the ways in which prejudice is promoted within their own community. Before considering how systemic oppression may manifest within a particular culture, I discuss theories of modern prejudice and discrimination.

Modern Expressions of Discrimination

Relationship to psychological research pertaining to racism, racial identity and anti-racism. During the Depression era, some American psychologists began challenging a long history of previously championed scientific racism, through research that promoted an anti-racism perspective (Holliday & Holmes, 2003). As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, the field of psychology was also turning increasing attention to racism (Hall, C. C. I., 2014; Holliday & Holmes, 2003). During this period, people of color in psychology helped to establish the scholar-activist role that multicultural psychology continues to promote today (Holliday, 1999). This body of research, primarily focused on racism towards the African-American community, laid the foundation for a multicultural approach to mental health and the psychological investigation of the negative effects of all forms of prejudice, identity development processes and benefits of allied work. It is important to note that while much of the
research regarding homophobia, heterosexism, LGBTQ and allied identity development and LGBTQ related activism borrow directly from this body of research, these experiences are not universally similar. Racism against Black people in the United States has deep and painful roots, marked by a shameful national history of slavery. Historical treatment of LGBTQ individuals is also bleak but has some notable differences. Consider, for example, the fact that all racial, ethnic, social class, and religious groups include LGBTQ individuals. Thus, people from all cultural groups are equally likely to be an LGBTQ person or have someone close to them who identifies with this community, and therefore equally likely to have experiences that precipitate examination of their beliefs and attitudes regarding sexuality and gender. Given the unofficial ongoing segregation that continues to exist within American culture, to varying degrees across the United States’ cities, regions, and institutions, these calls to exploration may not be as common for all Americans – especially White Americans, who are often unaware of the many unearned advantages and benefits they experience in current American culture (McIntosh, 1988; Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013).

**Homophobia, sexual stigma, heterosexism and internalized homophobia / heterosexism.** Shifts to more subtle forms of discrimination towards LGBTQ people mimic trends observed with racism and sexism. Since the 1970s, scholars have developed several theories to conceptualize modern prejudice, originally focusing on racism (Walls, 2008). Theories of modern racism include aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), which will be considered further below, as well as symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & McConahay, 1973), modern racism (McConahay & Hough, 1976), and subtle racism (Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Each of these terms represents unique theories of the driving features of current manifestations of more subtle and nuanced forms of racism. A
similar discussion evolved pertaining to modern sexism, and now scholars reflect on these theories as they consider modern forms of prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Walls, 2008).

Publicly, American society has become increasingly condemning of overt forms of anti-LGB discrimination (Herek, 2000). Unfortunately, as public displays of discrimination and prejudice towards the LGBTQ community become less obvious, continued sexual orientation prejudice may be overlooked (Sue & Sue, 2008; Nadal et al., 2010; Nadal, 2013). More subtle forms of prejudice towards the LGBTQ community may involve: assumptions of a universal LGBTQ experience; traditional gender role stereotyping, prejudice against non-conformity, or expecting same-sex couples to mimic traditional expectations of one masculine and one feminine partner; use of discriminatory language, such as the use of the word “gay” to imply negative judgment of something; denial of societal prejudice; or, assumptions that LGBT identity is abnormal or immoral (Nadal, et al., 2010).

Herek (2004) presents a comprehensive review of constructs pertaining to LGBTQ prejudice. He highlights the political nature of the terms homophobia, sexual stigma, heterosexism and internalized homophobia, and tracks the evolution of this language and theory. Herek (2004) credits Weinberg with coining the term homophobia, which Weinberg described in an interview with Herek as: “fear of homosexuals which seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for – home and family… it had led to great brutality as fear always does” (Herek, 2004, p. 7). With this term Weinberg, a psychoanalytically trained cisgender male heterosexual psychologist, challenged the contemporary assumption in the field of clinical psychology and psychiatry that homosexuality represented a pathology responsible for the problems of the “afflicted”. Herek (2004) proposes
that this term “crystallized the experiences of rejection, hostility, and invisibility that homosexual men and women in mid-20th century North America had experienced”, framed a social problem, and gave language to a phenomenon, and in turn gave researchers a foundation to begin investigating the concept further (p. 8). While homophobia continues to be researched, the nomenclature has expanded to more accurately reflect current culture.

Nadal, et al. (2010) propose that the term “sexual prejudice” is preferential to “homophobia” today. Herek (2000) defines sexual prejudice as “all negative attitudes based on sexual orientation, whether the target is homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual” (p. 19), and “the shared knowledge of society’s negative regard for any non-heterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (2004, p. 6). Sexual stigma perpetuates a social hierarchy with disproportionate power and status awarded to heterosexuality over homosexuality. Herek (2004) argues that heterosexism refers to the underlying social and political systems that promote gender dichotomies and opposite-sex relationships as the norm.

Walls (2008) made a small addition to Herek’s (1992) definition of heterosexism, proposing the term to refer to: “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, stigmatizes [or segregates] any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (pp. 26-27). The addition of “or segregates” is intended to expand the conceptualization of heterosexism to include positive stereotypes and paternalistic heterosexism also (Walls, 2008). Cultural heterosexism refers to the societal customs and institutions that perpetuate heterosexism, such as those found within religion, legal theory, the mental health field, and mass media. Psychological heterosexism refers to the individual attitudes and behaviors that encourage heterosexism within society (Herek, 1992). Some ways that heterosexism is promoted include: beliefs that discrimination is fabricated or exaggerated and that the LGBTQ civil rights
movement has been too aggressive in requesting “privileges” to which they may or may not be warranted; proposals of “reverse discrimination”; endorsing a “live and let live” attitude but also expressing “concern” over having a child who identifies as LGBTQ; or promoting albeit positive stereotypes about the LGBTQ community or LGBTQ individuals which confine individuals to rigid expectations and often reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g. these stereotypes tend to be gender-nonconforming, such as the belief that gay men are more compassionate and caring than heterosexual men) (Walls, 2008).

Research investigating how people are individually and psychologically affected by internalization of a system of oppression, such as heterosexism, has typically focused on members of the oppressed group, in this case LGB individuals. Internalized homophobia refers broadly to the negative feelings one holds towards their own homosexuality (Weinberg, 1972), however, the conceptualization, and operationalization of this concept has varied greatly within the scholarship (Herek, Cogan, Gillis & Glunt, 1998; Shidlo, 1994). Herek (2004) notes that regardless of personal group membership, everyone in a heterosexist society (including heterosexually identifying individuals) internalizes the sexual stigma promoted by this kind of system, meaning, “they comprehend the roles of the stigmatized and the “normal” whether or not they personally endorse the stratification associated with those roles” (p. 20). Internalized heterosexism would refer to the extent to which the tenants of heterosexism have become ingrained into one’s ideological system. The long history of prejudice against the LGBTQ community in the United States leaves American citizens notably vulnerable to internalizing messages of prejudice of a heterosexist nature (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Costs of heterosexism. All individuals, including those who identify as heterosexual, share in the cost of homophobia and heterosexism. Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia
(2002) argue that a culture of heterosexism is one that encourages traditional gender norms that are constricting and encourage prejudice against both men and women. Further, they present the concern that there exists “persistent double standards regarding sexual behavior for males and females [that] ultimately shape and confine sexual identity development and result in harsh judgments against both males and females when conformity is not adopted” (p.504-505). While both men and women are presented with limited perceptions of “appropriate” and “acceptable” sexual behavior in the current heterosexist social climate, the impact varies by gender. These differences in socialization provide relevant context for findings related to varied experiences of LGBTQ allies across gender.

For women, socialization of sexual identity development entails messages “that they are responded to as sexual, but they are not to act sexual” (Weskott, 1986, as cited in Gilbert and Scher, 1999, p. 92). Given the confusing and conflicting social messages, socialization may actually indirectly promote greater exploration of sexual identity in young women. Indeed, Eliason (1995) found that amongst college students, women were more likely to engage in exploration of their sexual identity than men, which has been linked to more accepting attitudes towards sexual exploration and LGBTQ identities (Worthington et al., 2005; Worthington, Navarro, Bielstein Savoy & Hampton, 2008).

In an attempt to prove heterosexuality to oneself and/or others, men may be influenced by heterosexism and homophobia to engage in frequent and/or premature heterosexual contact as a demonstration of masculinity; frequency of sexual contact is likely to come at the expense of intimacy and attachment (Blumenfeld, 1992; O’Neil, 1981; Stevens, 2001). This behavior ultimately runs the risk of increasing chances for unplanned pregnancies, and the spread of sexual transmitted diseases (Blumenfeld, 1992). Further, heterosexism and homophobia may
contribute to pressure that some men (and women) feel to marry before they are ready in order to confirm their heterosexuality and conform to gender norms (Blumenfeld, 1992).

The cost of heterosexism on men has been noted to have severe negative consequences. There is great pressure on men to achieve, with status seeking behaviors rewarded (Good & Sherrod, 2001). Further, physical aggression and toughness are consistently encouraged (Good & Sherrod, 2001). For example, research suggests that organized sports, such as football, promote hypermasculinity, serve to stratify gender roles, and encourage heteronormative and homophobic attitudes (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Eder & Parker, 1987; Foley, 1990). Mahalik (2001) notes that expression of dependence on others is often shamed, and male socialization discourages men from initiating emotional and/or physical contact with other men, which may contribute to difficulties developing intimate relationships with other men. Socialization also discourages behaviors and characteristics stereotypically associated with femininity or homosexuality, which can lead to feelings of hypervigilance when engaging in such behaviors (Mahalik, 2001). In its most extreme and concerning outcomes, male socialization may lead to alexithymia, which is the complete avoidance or denial of emotional experience, or involvement in violent hate crimes based on homophobia and heterosexism (Mahalik, 2001).

Heterosexism acts to legitimize sexist ideals and confines men and women based on traditional gendered norms. “Knight on a white horse” fantasies hold men to unreasonable expectations of strength and impermeability, encouraging them to hold back vulnerable emotions in favor of portraying a calm, steady and stern nature (Brown, 2012). Although women in romantic relationships with men often complain that their partners are not as open or vulnerable with them, they often respond negatively to their partners’ expressions of fear, sadness and insecurity (Brown, 2012). Creating a cultural context with greater gender fluidity, in regards to
norms as well as gender expression, would benefit heterosexual, cisgender (a person whose
gender identity corresponds to that person’s biological sex assigned at birth) individuals by
allowing men to express a greater range of emotion, and in turn facilitating more intimacy in
opposite-sex relationships. Further, without role models to establish “normative relationship
dynamics”, same-sex couples may be more likely to establish relationship structures that veer
from stereotypic heterosexual models (Cardell, Finn & Marecek, 1981; MacDonald, 1998; as
cited in Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). These traditional heterosexual models have arguably
become outdated as sex-roles continue to become more flexible. For example, women continue
to gain greater access to the workforce, and men are increasingly encouraged to be active as
parents. As same-sex couples gain visibility in communities, they may offer alternative
templates for romantic relationships, with greater equality of division of labor, child-rearing
responsibilities, and flexibility in financial contribution that heterosexual couples can borrow
from. When you consider the sexist ideals legitimized by a heterosexist social climate, it is clear
that all members of the community are negatively impacted by prejudice against the LGBTQ
community.

**Aversive racism applied to heterosexist expression.** Racism, like heterosexism, refers
to an overarching social system of oppression. Aversive racism attempts to describe how
attitudes reflective of this system may manifest on an individual level. Specifically, aversive
racism refers to “biases of those who are politically liberal and openly endorse non-prejudiced
views, but whose unconscious negative feelings and beliefs get expressed in subtle, indirect, and
often rationalizable ways” (Pearson et al., 2009, p. 4; see also, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000, 2004;
that people may struggle with internal conflicts between egalitarian principles and a non-
prejudiced self-image, and unconscious negative feelings and beliefs towards any historically disadvantaged group, presumably including LGBTQ individuals. They theorize that contemporary egalitarian norms, and social condemnation of overt forms of prejudice, typical within the United States, has led to this type of unconscious or subconscious form of prejudice. Aversive racism is conceptualized to occur in people who genuinely aspire to be non-prejudiced. This particular form of prejudice is believed to be common amongst liberal, well-educated Whites (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). The motivation to see oneself as non-prejudiced can act as a deterrent in recognition of the social biases one has internalized. Unfortunately, this lack of awareness of personal prejudice means that well-meaning, well-educated people are likely to continue to operate in ways that promote systems of privilege and oppression. Aversive racism trends have been supported in various experimental studies, emerging in employment selection and college admission, interpersonal judgments, policy and legal decisions, and within emergency and nonemergency helping behavior (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Behaviors appear to be significantly impacted by social context (Dovidio & Gaerner, 2000; Pearson et al., 2009).

People are motivated to maintain consistency between beliefs, opinions, knowledge of the environment, and knowledge of one’s own actions and feelings (Festinger, 1962). Therefore, it is not surprising that people who view themselves as non-prejudiced are unlikely to exhibit bias “in situations with strong social norms”, “when discrimination would be obvious to others and themselves”, or “when they are presented with a situation in which the normative response is clear” (Pearson, et al., 2009, p. 5). However, “in situations in which normative structure is weak, when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are unclear, when the basis for social judgment is vague, or when one’s actions can be justified or rationalized on the basis of some factor other than race” unconscious prejudice is more likely to emerge (Pearson et al., 2009, p. 5). Therefore
if we borrow from this body of research that has examined racial prejudice, we predict that within environments characterized by less affirmative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, where support for equal rights for LGBTQ people is less prominent, even those who perceive themselves as LGBTQ-affirmative may be more likely to act in prejudicial ways. In such social contexts, aspiring allies may have to confront and combat particularly ingrained heterosexist ideology within themselves, as well as within the environment they seek to change. The Bible Belt refers to a particular region of the United States characteristic of conservative politics and fundamental Christian values which are generally poor indicators of LGBTQ affirmative attitudes.

**Bible Belt**

Triandis (1996) suggested, “almost all researchers agree that culture is reflected in shared cognitions, standard operating procedures, and unexamined assumptions” (p. 407). More specifically, Foucault (1978) argued, “cultures are specific to locations in time and place, making human sexuality as much a social construction as any other aspect of human functioning” (as cited in Worthington et al., 2002, p. 506). This study is particularly interested in how the cultural influence of the Bible Belt may affect the attitudes, belief and knowledge about the LGBTQ community amongst its dwellers, the process of coming to identify as an ally to this community, and the manner in which one asserts, or does not assert, this identity through action.

**Geography.** First, it is important to attempt to define the Bible Belt as concretely as possible: a region of the United States along the West South Central, or the South and Midwest, that is characterized by a predominance of Christian fundamentalism. The term was originally coined by journalist H.L. Mencken in the mid-1920’s (Barton, 2010; Tweedie, 1978). According to Tweedie (1978), Mencken originally meant for the term to be derogatory in nature. However,
over time, the term gained popular usage and at times has even been a term of endearment spoken with pride by those who consider themselves to be a part of the Bible Belt. While the term may have a negative connotation depending on the setting and the manner in which it is used, the “Bible Belt” has been widely accepted as a geographic region of the country that operates under certain social standards and cultural norms, and exhibits recognizable universal characteristics. The clearest commonality and easiest trait to identify is religious fundamentalism. Therefore, this trait has often been used to try to further define the geography of the region.

In 1978, Heatwole and his team published perhaps the most ambitious and scientific attempt at identifying geographic bounds of the region. Heatwole argues the importance of this attempt by explaining that “[a]lthough regions are abstract entities based on arbitrarily defined characteristics, they nonetheless help the student appreciate real phenomena existing in real places” (Heatwole, 1978, p. 50). Unfortunately, as Heatwole notes, the “regional term…is so loosely defined as to connote different locations and conditions to different users” (1978). Therefore, Heatwole attempted to map the region by examining the census *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1971*. Heatwole and team, began by identifying “church bodies that profess literal interpretation of the Bible” (1978, p. 51). In order to create a map of the Bible Belt, Heatwole determined class intervals. A county with less than 25% of the total inhabitants belonging to a church that claimed literal interpretation of the Bible was not considered part of the Bible Belt. Counties with 25-49.9% of the total inhabitants with membership at such churches were identified and labeled as potentially representative of the Bible Belt. Finally, counties with 50% or more of the population belonging to churches with literal interpretation of the Bible were considered the third class and most likely to represent the
Bible Belt. Twenty-five states contained counties with the top two classes (50% and higher, and 25-49.9%); however, “the vast majority of these counties are arranged in a large swath extending from the Atlantic coast of the southern states, westward through the Deep South and border states to eastern New Mexico” (Heatwole, 1978, p. 53). That said, Heatwole found that the area making up the Bible Belt is actually sprinkled with non-Bible Belt counties, based on the church membership definition Heatwole used. Heatwole’s study suffers from statistical challenges, a single characteristic used to define Bible Belt vs. Non-Bible Belt counties (i.e. population proportion belonging to churches with literal interpretation of the Bible), and possible shortcomings in defining “literal interpretation” and assumptions of “fundamentalism” based on this finding. Heatwole also noted that counties can change quickly and the data he used may have already been outdated in some cases by the time of the study. Brunn, Webster and Archer replicated his effort in 2011, adding in cartographic and statistical analyses from 1980, 1990 and 2000. (See Appendix C for year 2000 graphs – Percent Bible Belt Population by County, and Top 200 and Bottom 200 Counties by Bible Belt Percentage of the Population).

Various attempts have been made at defining the Bible Belt region. A 1952 survey inferred the term “fundamentalists” to mean: individuals who read the Bible. Using this definition, a survey of 3000 people found the Bible Belt to best refer to the West South Central, East South Central, and South Atlantic Census regions (Thomas, 1963, p. 126 as cited in Tweedie, 1978). Brunn, Webster and Archer (2011) argue that “the Bible Belt region today stretches from northern Texas to western North Carolina, and from Mississippi north to Kentucky”, and the core, or “buckle”, appears to have shifted to north central Texas and southwest Oklahoma from the eastern Tennessee region named in the 1970s (p. 513). A general social survey question revealed much higher percentages of people self-identifying as
“fundamentalist” in three census regions than any others (Barton, 2010). These regions included: “the West South Central (Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana), East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama), and South Atlantic (West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida) Census regions in the United States”. However, “typically, the southern tip of Florida and the states of Delaware and Maryland are not considered part of the Bible Belt” (Barton, 2010, p. 470 and p. 481). Interviews conducted by Gallup in 2008 found the ten states most commonly associated with the Bible Belt (Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Texas) to be the top ten most religious states based on the question, “Is religion an important part of your daily life?” (Newport, 2009). Therefore, while social scientists commonly note difficulty in using scientific measures to geographically define this region, there appears to be relative agreement about where the Bible Belt lies, not only across various studies but over several decades.

**Bible Belt Culture**

Barton (2011) reminds us that exceptions should be considered and assumptions should be avoided, as the Bible Belt is widely diverse region: the region consists of large cities, small towns and rural areas; it is characterized by great racial and ethnic diversity; and many religious denominations are represented within the Bible Belt. Brunn, Webster, and Archer (2011) identify several demographics that tend to exist amongst Bible Belt counties, including: lower population densities, higher percentages of White people and lower mean percentages of foreign born and Latino populations, older populations, lower rates of mean education, higher employment rates within agriculture, mining and forestry, and higher rates of conservative voters. However, Protestant Christian Fundamentalism remains the most prominent religion in
the region, both in terms of numbers and political power (Gray, 2009; Barton, 2011). Indeed, Brunn, Webster, Archer (2011) argue that religion plays a key role in the economic, political, and cultural South today, in both cities and suburbs.

It is also worth noting that some Christian churches have adopted more affirming attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, and even amongst congregations that collectively denounce homosexuality, there exists great diversity of perspective on an individual level. This study aims to better understand the complexities of the impact of social context on individual’s attitudes and actions, rather than further support oversimplified correlational findings of religiosity and homophobia (Herek, 1987; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005; Olsen, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006).

Southern states have been characterized by negative attitudes towards LGBTQ people and LGBTQ rights, limited resources and smaller communities available to LGBTQ individuals, and indications of minority stress effects as measured by higher rates of mental health concerns for the LGBTQ community (Barefoot, Rickard, Smalley, Warren, 2015; Boulden, 2001; Hall, Witkemper, Rodgers, Waters, & Smith, 2018; Kazyak, 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Wienke & Hall, 2013). Barton (2011) argues that the cultural environment of the Bible Belt is unique from other heterosexist regions of the country, due in large part, to widespread influence of Christian fundamentalism. Barton notes that within the “region, Christianity is not confined to Sunday worship. Christian crosses, messages, paraphernalia, music, news and attitudes permeate everyday settings” (2010, p. 466). Barton (2011) draws on ethnographic fieldwork and excerpts from interviews with lesbians and gay men from the area to depict how Christianity is interwoven in the overarching culture of the Bible Belt. Barton (2011) suggests that a type of
“social surveillance” exists in the Bible Belt which “makes at least the presentation of complicity with Christian fundamentalist attitudes compulsory for most in the region” (p. 88).

Barton (2011) presents observations of her surroundings in the Bible Belt to depict the prevalence of visible Christian symbols. She notes various reminders of the Christian faith in secular spaces within her small Bible Belt town: the one public library contains a Christian book section of exceptional size, in Barton’s physical therapist’s office one would observe a “Bible and a few old magazines” as reading material as well as a donation jar for a Christian ministry at the checkout counter, there is a wide variety of Christian t-shirts at the local Goody’s clothing store, an ice-cream truck attracts young people with the Christian hymn “I Know My Redeemer Liveth” and the message, “We thank you for your business. Jesus is Lord. May God Bless You.”, is printed at the bottom of all of the local auto-repair shop’s invoices (Barton, 2011, p. 81). Barton (2011) also notes frequently receiving flyers and pamphlets on her front porch or in the mail that many of the churches use to advertise their services and encourage community members to join. She cites fifty-two churches operating in her town of 16,500 people (Barton, 2011, p. 81). Other researchers have also noted religious and conservative signs to be distinguishing feature along Bible Belt roads, with message such as, “Get Right With God” or “Save the Date! Return of Christ May 21, 2011” (Brunn & Appleton, 1999; Brunn, Webster, and Archer, 2011).

Reminders of the dominance of the Christian faith also extend into personal interactions within the Bible Belt. The act of professing one’s Christian beliefs and spreading the word of Christ is known as “witnessing”. Barton (2011) explains, “witnessing is premised on the belief that the faithful are charged to seize every opportunity to introduce God into an unbeliever’s life and let the power of the Lord work on changing her or his heart” (p. 78). Efforts to spread the
Christian faith are therefore observed in places of work, “school, daycare centers, doctor’s offices, and libraries” as well as various other environments, and questions of faith or church membership may be as common as those about hometown or workplace (Barton, 2011, p. 86). In the Bible Belt, the Christian signs and symbols that are on display in professional offices, neighborhood stores and restaurants, on bumper stickers, yard signs, billboards and bulletin boards, combined with frequent social interactions promoting Christian faith, serve to “continually remind residents that they live within a social landscape controlled by fundamentalist Christians” (Barton, 2011, p. 80).

Visitors to the Bible Belt are likely to note the friendly nature of the people there (Gray, 2009). Barton (2011) borrows the term “personalism” from essayist Loyal Jones (1997) to further describe the social norms for the area. As it pertains to the Bible Belt, Barton (2011) defines “personalism” as “the desire to fit in, to get along with one’s neighbors, to not offend, to present the social façade of harmony and good humor” (p. 84). Acceptance of the prevalence of personalism in the Bible Belt helps to explain why so many individuals in the area self-identify as Christian regardless of actual church attendance, as this allows individuals to “fit in” and avoid confrontation (Barton, 2011). Barton (2011) further suggests that personalism may be responsible for promoting the impression that so many individuals in the region hold negative attitudes towards homosexuality or LGBTQ individuals. Instead, she hypothesizes that many are merely uncomfortable expressing views that may be perceived as conflicting with the “norm”. Borgman’s (2009) research similarly suggests that those with LGB-affirmative attitudes may be less inclined to be “out” as allies in the Bible Belt compared to their behavior in other regions. Further research is needed to more fully investigate this proposed phenomenon of allied behavior in the Bible Belt region.
Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, and Schwartz (1996) used a comprehensive experimental design that highlights regional cultural differences in cognitive and emotional experience. Specifically, Cohen and colleagues (1996) compared the reactions of students who grew up in the North or South to being bumped into and called an “asshole”. They evaluated participant responses through observations of emotional reaction, and measurement of cortisol and testosterone levels following the interaction. While northerners were relatively unaffected by the insult, southerners were observed to be more likely to respond with anger than amusement to the insult, and experienced spikes in cortisol and testosterone, indicating a significant stress response and priming for future aggression. These results provide support to theories that posit cultural norms inherent to the area in which we are raised/live influence our cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological constructions of reality (Cohen, 2009), such as those related to the allied developmental process and allied efforts.

Conservative politics. The Bible Belt region is also known for its conservative political values, particularly in regard to social policy, which are most commonly represented by the Republican Party platform. Gallup polls tracking of political party affiliation by state show states within the Bible Belt region to include those that are “solidly Republican”, “lean Republican” and are “competitive” in 2015, with no states in the area representing Democratic leanings or consistent Democratic votes (Jones, 2016). In 2012, an online quiz on the website iSideWith.com was launched with the aim of helping voters become more informed regarding candidate positions across issues related to foreign and domestic policy, economy, environment, science, education, healthcare, immigration policies, the electoral process, and general social policies (About iSideWith.com, n.d.). Founders, Taylor Peck and Nick Boutelier, who report holding “very different views of politics” between them, set out to create a nonpartisan quiz that
utilizes a sophisticated candidate match algorithm to help users gain insight into how their views align with particular political candidates. So far, nearly forty million users have taken the iSideWith quiz. For each issue (or quiz item), the site generates public opinion polls with a results map and state-by-state results charts that “reflect a three-month trailing average of users who have taken the quiz” (Frequently Asked, n.d.). Results maps indicate clear patterns of socially conservative leanings, consistent with Republican Party platforms, across the Bible Belt region. For example, this region was among the least supportive of the legalization of same-sex marriage, efforts to add “gender identity to anti-discrimination laws”, and LGBT adoption rights (Political Issues of 2016, n.d.). Further, those living in the Bible Belt region were most likely to support the Religious Freedom Act, which allows businesses to deny service to any customer, should the request conflict with the owner’s religious beliefs. Others have documented similar conservative stances regarding school prayer, alcohol availability, evolution and gay rights as well (Colon, 1981; Fleischmann & Hardmann, 2004; Schwartz & Lindley, 2005).

**LGBTQ Bible Belt Allies**

Research examining the experience of LGB people in the Bible Belt suggests that culturally ingrained religious values underlie pervasive heterosexism characteristic of the region (Barefoot, Rickard, Smalley, & Warren, 2015; Barton, 2010; Barton, 2011; Bell & Valentine, 1995; Bishop, 2011; Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006; Gray, 2009; Hall, et al., 2018; Herek, 20002; Laythe, Finkle, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; McCarthy, 2000; Snively, Kreuger, Stretch, & Chadha, 2004), and that the “negative social attitudes about homosexuality caused a range of harmful consequences in their lives including fear of going to hell, depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of worthlessness” (Barton, 2010). Barton (2011) suggests that LGB individuals often struggle with reconciling Christian and non-heterosexual identities. Borgman (2009)
explores the struggles, and reconciliation of conflicts, experienced by individuals who hold Christian and LGB allied identities. An anecdote from one participant reveals the location of the study to be within the Bible Belt. While Borgman (2009) notes the significance of the social context of geographical areas as influential factor in the identity development of allies, discussion of this theme is brief. Understanding better how heterosexual individuals come to hold LGBTQ affirmative attitudes and behave as allies to their community is an important step in encouraging further progress towards a more equal society and accepting, supportive social climate. Research indicates the importance of cultural context on individual psychology and development. Further, given the lag in progress towards equal rights for LGBTQ people in the Bible Belt, the deeply rooted heterosexism in the region, and hypotheses presented in the work of Barton (2010, 2011) and Borgman (2009), the process of allied development and assertion of allied behaviors in the Bible Belt deserve greater attention. Presented below is an overview of the existing literature specifically pertaining to LGBTQ allies.

**Overview of Existing Ally Literature**

Psychology has a tendency to focus on how systems of oppression impact the “oppressed”. Historically, traditional psychological theory has often assumed White, heterosexual culture be representative of the “normative” experience (Sue et al., 1992). In regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, straight, cisgender individuals have been largely excluded from identity models (Worthington et al., 2002), and assumed to be consistent in their presentation, and sexual and gender identity developmental processes (Fassinger, 2000). This may be to the detriment of potential allied impact within the LGBTQ social justice movement, as cultural competency is reliant upon awareness of one’s own cultural and social identities, including those of privilege (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482). Indeed, having considered the role of
heterosexism within one’s own personal life has been shown to be an important precedent to effective LGBTQ allied work (Edwards, 2006). Further research, is needed to provide deeper insight into how heterosexism impacts heterosexual individuals, the psychological manifestation of this imbedded ideology, and the process of overcoming internalized heterosexism to develop an allied identity, especially within social contexts known for “traditional” values and heterosexist norms. Existing literature regarding social justice allies generally, LGB allies and LGBTQ allies specifically inform this study.

Empirical research investigating LGBTQ allies has covered the following domains: predictors of allied identity, motivations of LGBTQ allies, the developmental process of forming an allied identity, advocacy work, barriers to identity development and “outness” as an ally, and reported benefits and rewards to engaging in LGB advocacy work. This particular framework was proposed by Washington and Evans (1991) in their discussion of heterosexual allies. As this study aims to expand upon the literature in these specific areas, Washington and Evans’ (1991) model is reviewed below and filled out with more current literature.

Empirical evidence identifying demographic predictors and personal traits characteristic of allies relies primarily on correlational data (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Avery et al., 2007; Batson, et al., 1985, 1986; Batson & Ventis, 1982; Brewer, 2003; Fingerhut, 2011; Gallup Poll, 2016; Grapes, 2006; Haberberle, 1999; Herek, 1988, 2000, 2002; LaMar and Kite, 1998; Ohlander, Batalova, Treas, 2005; Olsen et al., 2006; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994; Ratcliff et al., 2006; Whitley, 2001; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005; Woodford, Silverschanz, Swank, Scherrer & Raizm, 2012). The remaining domains were primarily investigated using qualitative methods (Borgman, 2009; Brodio, 2000; Dillon et al., 2004; DiStefano, Croteau, Anderson, Kampa-Kokesch & Bullard, 2000; Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray
& Wimsatt, 2010; Russell, 2011). Hubbard, Snipes, Perrin & Morgan (2013) use an
experimental method in their study of heterosexual responses to observed expressions of LGB
prejudice. Fairly consistent across studies is an overrepresentation of White, highly educated
individuals. Participants are also predominantly female across studies, with one notable
exception being Dillon et al.’s (2004) study examining the impact of an LGB affirming
counselor training program. This particular study had eight male participants in a sample of ten.

**Predicting Affirmative Attitudes—Demographics and other Characteristics**

Existing research has explored various traits associated with positive and negative
attitudes towards the LGBT community. Correlations have been found to be fairly consistent
along several variables, although in-group differences and exceptions are always present.
Ongoing research continues to tease apart the underlying psychological complexities regarding
individuals’ attitudes towards sexuality, sexual orientation and gender presentation.

Herek initially proposed an interpersonal *contact theory* of sexual prejudice in 1988,
suggesting that interaction and relationships with openly LGB identifying individuals
encouraged greater likelihood of heterosexually identifying people to develop positive attitudes
towards the community (1988, 2000, 2002). Subsequent studies have replicated this finding,
providing support that close relationships with an LGB identifying person are indeed a predictor
of more positive attitudes, and that many self-identified allies have been inspired to see
themselves as such since the coming out of a close friend or family member (Duigg et al., 2010;
Woodford et al., 2012; Fingerhut, 2011). Recent gallup polls suggest that an increasing number
of people report knowing individuals in their own personal lives who openly identify as LGB
(“In Depth”, n.d.). In 2013, 75% of people polled reported that they had “friends or relatives or
coworkers who have told you, personally, that they are gay or lesbian”, compared to only 24% in
1985, and as low as 58% in 2009, suggesting that the gay and lesbian community is becoming more visible not only in media but also within our communities and on a personal level ("In Depth", n.d.). Congruent with Herek’s contact theory, as visibility of the LGB community has increased, national attitudes have become increasingly positive ("In Depth", n.d.).

Education has also been associated with more positive LGBTQ attitudes (Ohlander et al., 2005; Fingerhut, 2011; Grapes, 2006). Ohlander, Batalova and Treas (2005) use data from the General Social Survey (GSS) collected by the NORC from 1988-1994 to suggest that that the cognitive sophistication and complex reasoning encouraged by education help to explain this correlation. Further, they propose that university and college courses tend to support civil liberties, encouraging attendees to more highly value equal rights. Values of justice and equality are frequently cited as predictors of LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes (Duhigg et al., 2010; Russell, 2011).

Endorsement of liberal political ideology has also been found to be positively correlated with positive attitudes, while opposition to gay rights is generally associated with the conservative political groups (Woodford et al., 2012; Haberberle, 1999; Pratto et al., 1994). Liberal political ideology has also been linked to endorsement of employment discrimination protections for gay men and lesbian women (Brewer, 2003). Whereas, conservative political ideology has been linked to higher incidences of prejudice (Leiber, Woodrick & Roudebush, 1995; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Peck, 2003; Stone, 2000 as cited in Walls, 2008), and conservatism has specifically been linked with greater likelihood of anti-gay prejudice (Estrada & Weiss, 1999; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Victor, 1996 as cited in Walls, 2008). Perhaps in part due to a higher likelihood of holding conservative political orientations, older Americans tend to be less supportive of gay rights (Avery et al., 2007).
Two social psychology concepts have been linked to conservative political values and Republican political party leanings: social dominance orientation and authoritarianism. Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth and Malle (1994) define social dominance orientation (SDO) as “the extent to which one desires that one’s in-group dominate and be superior to out-groups”; those high in SDO prefer hierarchy-enhancing systems, ideologies and policies, as opposed to people low in SDO, who favor hierarchy-attenuating systems, ideologies and policies (p. 742). Social dominance orientation has been shown to be negatively correlated with empathy, tolerance, communality and altruism, and positively correlated with prejudice and negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Pratto et al., 1994; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000).

Similarly, to individuals scoring high in SDO, individuals who endorse views consistent with authoritarianism (sometimes referred to as authoritarians) tend to hold worldviews focused on in-groups and out-groups. People who highly endorse authoritarianism have been defined as exhibiting “high degrees of deference to established authority, aggression towards outgroups when authorities permit that aggression, and support for traditional values when those values are endorsed by authorities” (Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000, p. 949). Authoritarians’ tendency to separate people in terms of in-groups and out-groups leads to prejudice against out-groups, as they are perceived to threaten traditional values (Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Therefore, people scoring high on measures of authoritarianism would be particularly likely to exhibit aggression towards LGBT individuals when they presume authorities are endorsing such behavior. Barton (2011) suggests that the negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals expressed by politicians and clergy in the Bible Belt region not only encourages homophobia, but also discourages those who hold more affirmative views from voicing them.
Research indicates that holding a marginalized identity of some kind (e.g. racial, ethnic, gender, etc.) may be a predictor of LGBT-affirmative attitudes (Duhigg et al., 2010). For example, women are consistently found to be more likely to hold positive LGBTQ attitudes, while men consistently report more negative views of both gay men and lesbians (Fingerhut, 2011; Whitley, 2001; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000; Herek, 2000; Ratcliff et al., 2006; LaMar and Kite, 1998).

An important quality among allies is the willingness to question previously accepted norms and to engage in self-exploration regarding one’s values and beliefs (Borgman, 2009; Dillon et al., 2004; Duhigg et al., 2010). Similarly, Batson (et al., 1985, 1986; Batson & Ventis, 1982) defined religious “questing” as an orientation to religion in which one continues to search for answers to existential questions. A “questing” orientation, across all religious and non-religious orientations, has been linked to lower levels of prejudice (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992).

The relationship between religiosity and LGBTQ allies appears to be complex and research findings may seem contradictory at surface value. As noted in Russell’s (2011) research, many allies cite their religious beliefs as a source of inspiration for their LGBTQ affirming attitudes, and social justice efforts. However, at face value, individuals scoring higher on measures of religiosity have been found to be more likely to hold negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women generally, and also more likely to endorse negative attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Herek, 1987; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005; Olsen et al., 2006). One of the shortcomings of this body of research is related to inconsistencies in the definition of “religiosity”. Researchers are generally reliant upon self-report. In communities where Christianity is the norm, many research participants may be inclined to exaggerate their
religiosity (Barton, 2011). Concerns related to defining this term may broaden the inconsistencies amongst the personal beliefs and values of those who consider themselves to be religious.

Closer examination of this correlation indicates that religious fundamentalism is a better indicator of prejudice. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) define fundamentalism as “the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity” (p. 118). In a study examining religious beliefs and prejudice among college students and their parents, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) found religious fundamentalism to be highly correlated with negative attitudes towards homosexual individuals. Although they found variation in scores of religious fundamentalism across denominations, scores were highest for individuals identifying as Baptist, a Jehova’s witness, Salvation Army, Evangelical, and Pentecostal (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). This study expanded on McFarland’s (1989) findings that religious fundamentalism is more highly correlated with discrimination towards Black people, women, Communists, and homosexual individuals.

While research findings may support the notion that religiosity, especially religious fundamentalism is correlated with greater bias and a higher likelihood of discrimination, it is important not to assume this correlation to be universally true. Borgman (2009) highlights the need for consideration of Christian LGBT allies in her qualitative study (described in further detail within the “developmental process” section of this document). Holding these dual
identities may present allies with unique challenges, but identifying as religious, even from a more fundamentalist denomination, does not preclude one from identifying and working as an LGBT ally.

Whitley’s (2001) meta-analysis reflected a consistent positive correlational relationship between traditional gender-role beliefs and negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. Whitley & Egisdottir (2000) suggest that individuals may rely on traditional gender-role beliefs in order to justify and legitimize prejudice against the LGBTQ community. Traditional, or “old-fashioned”, sexism has been said to be reflective of these beliefs in traditional gender stereotypes and beliefs that men and women should adhere to traditional gender roles (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995).

Modern sexism has been said to be more subtle (Whitley, 2001). Swim & Cohen (1997) note that modern sexism is not as closely linked to gender-role beliefs as traditional sexism. Rather, they define modern sexism as tendencies to “(a) deny the existence of discrimination against women, (b) resent complaints about discrimination [towards women], and (c) resent special ‘favors’ for women” (Swim & Cohen, 1997, p. 105). While Whitley’s (2001) review of the research found traditional sexism to be a stronger predictor of prejudice towards the LGBTQ community than modern sexism, modern sexism was also a reliable predictor of negative attitudes. Benevolent sexism, conceptualized by Glick and Fiske (1996) as a view of women based in a patriarchal worldview, restricts women to stereotypical and restricted roles, and characterizes women as delicate creatures with little power. Along with traditional and modern sexism, benevolent sexism was found to be a predictor of negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Whitley, 2001). Finally, hypermasculinity, a personality trait reflecting extreme
attachment to the traditional male gender role, was found to be a predictor of both negative attitudes towards homosexuality and antigay behaviors (Whitley, 2001).

These findings merely help us to predict who may be likely to hold LGBTQ affirmative and discriminatory attitudes, but we know that within group differences are always present. Further, any person, with any number of incongruent traits, can be compelled to act as an ally given the right motivation. Several scholars have sought to identify and understand the motivations of allies.

**Motives.** Washington and Evans (1991) used Kohlberg’s (1984) and Gilligan’s (1982) theories of moral development and moral decision making to propose various motivations for becoming an LGB ally. Using Kohlberg’s (1984) theory, Washington and Evans (1991) suggest that someone may be motivated to support LGB rights (a) to protect personal interests or to obtain personal rewards (e.g., approval from a superior), (b) to support a close friend or family member, or to uphold norms of a group to which one belongs, (c) because they believe that supporting civil rights for the LGB community is morally just, “the right thing to do” (p. 197-198). Gilligan (1982) also proposed three levels of moral reasoning, but rather based on these on the principle of care: (1) care for oneself, (2) care for others, (3) positions that consider care for self and others simultaneously. Based on Gilligan’s (1982) theory, Washington and Evans (1991) proposed that one might become involved in gay rights advocacy in order to: (1) promote their own self-image, (2) to “take care of” individuals who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, (3) create a more fair and just society for all (p. 198).

Each of these proposed models suggest levels of development, with the third stage representing the most “enlightened” perspective. However, Washington and Evans (1991) caution that Kohlberg’s (1972) research indicated that involvement in advocacy can act as a
catalyst for moral development. Further, Kohlberg’s (1984) stages may not be mutually exclusive but rather an individual could be acting based on any combination of his proposed motivations.

More specifically, Russell (2011) conducted a qualitative study investigating the motives of heterosexually identified individuals in their work towards social and political equality across sexual orientation and gender identity. Over a period of seventeen years, Russell worked with a team of graduate students and psychology professionals to analyze one hundred and twenty-seven interviews of heterosexual allies (2011). They identified several reported motives and categorized these across two overarching themes of “fundamental principles” held by allies and “motives based on personal roles, relationships, or experiences” (Russell, 2011, p. 383). Motives based on fundamental principles included: a commitment to justice, investment in civil rights, a strong sense of patriotism, religious beliefs, moral principles and a sense that one has a responsibility to use their privilege as a heterosexual person to work towards equality. Motives based on personal roles, relationships, or experiences included: introduction to the LGBTQ community through one’s professional role (e.g. attorneys, educators, researchers, members of the clergy, psychologists, and others), having a close friend or family member who identifies as LGBTQ, a belief that marriage is a positive experience that should be available to all, inspiration from past experiences on a personal or collective level, a desire to resolve a sense of guilt for a past deed or omission of support related to prejudice, and a sense of anger at existing inequality (p. 383).

Some allies also cite their religious beliefs as a source of inspiration for their LGBTQ affirming attitudes and social justice efforts in qualitative studies (Russell, 2011; Duhigg, et al., 2010). In a qualitative study interviewing heterosexual LGBT rights activists, one participant
reported: “…as a Christian, I have two obligations. One is to love and serve God and one is to love and serve his creation, which includes everybody. And love, for me, love is a call to action…” (Duhigg, et al., 2010, p. 9). All twelve of the participants reported that their allied beliefs and actions were driven by their values of equality, and for three participants, these values had roots in religious or spiritual beliefs (Duhigg, et al., 2010). These findings bring to light the complexities underlying findings of a correlational relationship between religiosity and prejudice towards the LGBTQ community (Herek, 1987; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005; Olsen et al., 2006; Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992; McFarland, 1989).

Edwards (2006) suggests that the underlying motivation for allied behavior may not matter as long as the allied work is beneficial. However, the motivation may indicate how consistent an ally is likely to be, and therefore the effectiveness of an ally’s efforts. Edwards (2006) argues that a combined selfishness (“I do this for us”) motivation is superior to selfish (“I do this for the people I know and care about”) or other (“I do this for them”) motivations (p. 46). Edwards (2006) presents an optimistic viewpoint however, noting that allies undergo their own developmental process and can move towards a combined selfishness motivation over time.

Several models of identity development are presented below.

**Developmental process.** Certain traits may predict more affirmative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, and various motives have been noted that call these individuals to action, but less is known about the process of development of an LGBTQ allied identity. Better understanding this process is important in clinical and advocacy work, in order to facilitate the developmental process for more individuals who would like to achieve greater congruence between their LGBTQ affirmative beliefs and their allied behaviors. Washington and Evans (1991) propose four levels of LGB allied development, which I have amended slightly for
broader LGBTQ inclusion: (1) awareness – becoming aware of self, (2) knowledge/education – acquiring knowledge about sexual orientation [and gender identity], LGBTQ people and experience, and broader systems of prejudice and privilege, (3) skills – skill building through workshops, role playing, support connections and practicing interventions or awareness raising, so as to communicate knowledge learned, (4) action – deemed the most important level (p. 220).

One of the elements allies frequently note as having been incredibly important to their developmental process and generally for multicultural training was access to a “safe” setting to discuss their experiences, personal beliefs, attitudes, backgrounds and biases without the fear of judgment (Brodio, 2000; Dillon et al., 2004). These environments provide opportunities for individuals to challenge norms and associations, often grounded in heterosexism or even homophobia, which they have come to accept. These opportunities to discuss concerns related to the LGBT community continue to be important even in later stages of allied development, as many allies have noted the value of positive support from family and friends in ongoing allied work (Duhigg et al., 2010).

In one of the most commonly cited studies of allied development, Brodio (2000) examines six undergraduate, heterosexual, White students’ (three female and three male) process of coming to act as social justice allies on their college campus. The study highlights critical processes of the students as they transition from holding egalitarian values to more actively engaging in opportunities to act as allies. This study did not specifically examine LGBT allies, but rather looked more inclusively at allied work in areas of racism, heterosexism, and for the three men also in sexism. Each of the participants noted the importance of learning more information regarding social justice issues within three overarching categories: “(a) how the system of oppression operates and continues, (b) the impact of oppression on target group
members, and (c) oppression in general” (p. 8). Participants reported learning about social justice issues from various sources including coursework, interaction with minority group members and with dominant group peers, residence life, travel, and independent reading, but noted that education about LGB issues was particularly likely to happen outside of the classroom through interpersonal contact with LGB people (Brodio, 2000).

Learning about oppression and social justice concerns laid a foundation for students to solidify identities as allies, but gaining the knowledge was not sufficient. The participants interviewed by Brodio (2000) explained that they then had to engage in what Brodio termed, “meaning-making” (p. 10). As participants gained information, they simultaneously participated in and instigated discussions about what they were learning, pondered the information and engaged in self-reflection, and used this knowledge to try to take on the perspective of oppressed individuals. Through meaning-making, the participants were able to translate learned information into a foundation of knowledge. Participants reported that this knowledge was crucial in creating a sense of self-confidence that encouraged them to articulate and endorse their socially just beliefs, and to act as social justice allies. Brodio (2000) defined “self-confidence” in this context as, “comfort with one’s identity and internal loci of worth and approval” (p. 12). Regarding the role of confidence, one participant noted that when it comes to speaking out against prejudice, “…it’s hard to feel empowered enough…” (p. 12). A strong foundation of knowledge, understanding, and experience discussing issues related to social justice helped the young allies in Brodio’s (2000) study to feel empowered to speak up and act against discrimination, oppression and injustice. Indeed, research has consistently pointed to the importance of gaining information, self-reflection and engaging in thought provoking
discussions as one develops cultural awareness and develops an allied identity (Dillon et al., 2004; Borgman, 2009; Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2012).

Dillon et al. (2004) developed an LGB-affirmative counselor training program for mental health counseling graduate students and used CQR methods to examine participants’ experiences of group and individual developmental processes throughout the training. Participants included ten heterosexually identifying training clinicians who joined the program with the goal to become more culturally competent as clinicians working with members of the LGB community. The program consisted of a full academic year of weekly meetings including seminars and group discussions. Members reflected on their process and their narratives were analyzed in a CQR method to identify themes related the allied development process. Participants discussed affective, behavioral and cognitive changes regarding their perceptions of sexual orientation, identity and development. Several participants noted critical events, or experiences (e.g. being moved by an assigned reading, writing a personally reflective essay, realizations of assumptions, etc.), that shifted their perceptions. Following changes in perceptions, participants noted feeling more inclined to act in more socially just ways, and finally, gained greater commitment to the process of continued self-exploration (Dillon, et al., 2004).

Dillon, et al. (2004) described the affective, behavioral and cognitive experiences noted by participants as falling under six domains: (a) reflections on sexual self-identity, (b) insight oriented learning, (c) affective experience, (d) reflections on one’s own LGB-affirmativeness, (e) sociopolitical awareness, (f) professional development. The importance of gaining knowledge and making meaning of this information through self-reflection is consistent with elements of social justice allied development noted in Brodio’s (2000) research.
In order to better understand their LGB clients, participants noted that they needed to reflect on their own sexual identity. One participant noted, “Like many group members, this would be the first time I gave much thought to how I became heterosexual”; another described this identity as one that is “…based on and maintained by external sources and societal expectations”; this participant further noted that through the training program they had “grown in awareness of my own feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and meaning as a heterosexual in today’s society” (Dillon, et al., 2004, p. 171). A later study, relying on correlational findings between an early version of the Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment (MoSIEC) scale and the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Knowledge and Attitudes Scale for Heterosexuals (LGB-KASH) Worthington, Dillon and Becker-Schutte (2005) found a positive correlation between exploration of one’s sexual identity and LGB-affirmative attitudes (i.e. endorsement of LGB civil rights, knowledge of issues and concerns relating to the LGB community and an internalized sense of affirmativeness towards LGB individuals and the community). Exploration was negatively correlated with factors relating to homonegativity (i.e. religiously based conflict with non-heterosexual identities and hate towards LGB individuals and the community) (Worthington et al., 2005). Qualitative research has also suggested that exploration of one’s own sexual identity is related to and a catalyst for more affirmative attitudes towards the LGBT community (Eliason, 1995) which is consistent with Worthington et al.’s (2002) heterosexual identity development model.

In Dillon et al.’s (2004) LGB-affirmative counselor training program, *insight-oriented learning* was noted to facilitate growth: “I was able to truly deal with and explore [my] negative attitudes. As a consequence, I have been able to let go of a significant part of them and that has created a certain amount of peace in me.” Another member explained that the training model
encouraged them to “question, learn and re-decide” throughout the year (Dillon, et al. 2004, p. 170-171). Intense affective experiences in response to statements made by fellow members of the training program, and in response realizations of one’s own beliefs were commonly noted as a part of the development process. As participants engaged in on-going self-reflection, they also noted that they began to reflect more thoughtfully on their own LGB-affirmativeness, “Finally, I started to ask myself… “Am I as sexually affirmative as I claim to be?...” I decided that I may not be as far…as I would like to be, but being part of this research team helped me to understand what I want to work towards” (p. 171-172). As members gained awareness of their own beliefs and biases, as well as knowledge about the sociopolitical issues related to the LGB community, they reported feeling better prepared to work with LGB individuals in a more professional, culturally sensitive and inclusive manner.

In a phenomenological, qualitative study, Borgman (2009) interviewed eleven (eight women and three men) doctoral-level counseling and clinical counseling professionals who self-identified as both Christian and LGB allies. In order to participate in the study, participants had to report having experienced a sense of conflict as a result of holding these two identities. Participants were living in the midwestern United States, and while Borgman does not identify the area further, one participant explicitly referred to the region as the “Bible Belt” during the interview (p. 516). Participants described their developmental process as they overcame internal and external conflicts related to religion and their beliefs about sexuality in order to more fully embody LGB allied identities.

Borgman (2009) analyzed themes that emerged from the two in-depth interviews with each participant. If a theme was present in at least three protocols, it was integrated into the final collective narrative. Participants noted certain characteristics they held independently of their
views and beliefs that likely influenced them to become Christian LGB allies (Borgman, 2009, p. 514). These characteristics included a questioning mind, meaning that they had never been likely to accept what they were taught at face value but instead were inclined to challenge the status quo. Several participants also noted a motivation to be congruent in their attitudes and accuracy, a motivation to have a strong sense of integrity.

The allied development process for Christians closely resembles that of the student social justice allies studied by Brodio (2000) and the graduate student clinicians who participated in the training program offered by Dillon et al. (2004). Participants noted the importance of self-exploration and recognizing and confronting self-bias, judgment and rigid thinking (Borgman, 2009, p. 512). Much like the graduate students in Dillon et al. (2004), participants discussed critical experiences marked by intense emotional responses that inspired them to identify as an LGB ally and to express this through action (Borgman, 2009, p. 516).

Similar to the concept of self-confidence noted by students in Brodio’s (2000) study, participants in Borgman’s (2009) research indicated that finding “increased comfort with self, values, beliefs, and expression of these [values and beliefs]” was an integral part of gaining the self-acceptance needed to fully accept LGB individuals. One participant stated, “…There was a point where I did accept [God’s] love for me, and that was the turning point, really… You can’t be an ally for others until you can be your own ally.” (Borgman, 2009, p. 512).

Further supporting Worthington, Dillon and Becker-Schutte’s (2005) theory that exploration of personal sexual identity contributes to more affirmative LGB attitudes, participants noted that reflecting upon their own sexuality or sexual orientation helped them to develop more flexible thinking and in turn more fully adopt an allied identity. Further, participants also noted the importance of gaining more knowledge about sexual orientation in
general, similar to social justice allies in other studies (Borgman, 2009; Brodio, 2000, Dillon et al., 2004). Reading, course work, seminars, training and other educational experiences were influential in this learning process. Relationships with LGB individuals and Christian LGB allied mentors were also incredibly influential in participants’ developmental process (Borgman, 2009, p. 515).

However, Borgman’s (2009) participants did describe some unique challenges they faced in the allied development process related to their Christian faith. Given the inherent conflict between literal interpretation of biblical messages and same-sex relationships, participants discussed needing to explore their Christian-based beliefs more fully. Resolving conflicts between Christian-based beliefs and their affirmative attitudes towards the LGB community, participants approached their Christian beliefs with a certain level of flexibility, often interpreting the Bible more holistically, focusing on core messages rather than specific passages, and considering the Bible in a historical and cultural context. In a rejection of the judgment and exclusion that churches struggle with, participants chose to identify more closely with what they believed to be the essential notions of Christianity. One participant stated, “God is bigger than the church identifies” (Borgman, 2009, p. 513). This often involved creating new understandings of the meaning of Christianity, and a focus on one’s personal relationship with God first and foremost; “In the last eight or nine years my commitment has been more to a higher power than a religious structure” (Borgman, 2009, p. 513).

Integrating Christian and LGB allied identities, as opposed to compartmentalizing these, was noted to be an ongoing process that encouraged commitment to both identities (Borgman, 2009, p. 514). Several participants noted the importance of being vocal and visible in both of
their identities, through mentoring, counseling work, and advocacy. They also discussed efforts to focus on diversity as clinicians, educators and researchers (Borgman, 2009, p. 516).

Most theories conceptualize allied behaviors and activist work as indicative of more evolved development statuses. However, research tends to be less consistent in their definitions of allied work. Several studies suggest that there may be idiosyncratic to social context (Borgman, 2009; Barton, 2011; Pearson, et al., 2009). This particular study aims, in part, to better understand how allies assert their identities behaviorally within the Bible Belt. Below, I consider various forms of allied behavior reviewed in the research.

**Advocacy in action.** Fish, King and Almack (2018) propose that there exist two major types of activism. “Iconic activisms” pertain to action taken to disrupt prejudice and discrimination on a macro-level, within societal organizations and institutions. This category includes acts such as protests, parades, marches, and political action. “Everyday activisms”, on the other hand, are described as subtler, daily, commonplace actions aimed at promoting progressive social change (Pink, 2012). Both types of activism are intention, and impactful in important, but quite different, ways. However, as Pink (2012) points out, everyday activisms may not be given enough weight within the current literature. Indeed, evaluation of allied identity or level of activism have tended rely more heavily on measures of participation in iconic activisms (Goldstein & Davis, 2010). However, as scholars explore LGBTQ allied work, both types of activisms emerge and can be seen within the literature discussed below.

Washington and Evans (1991) suggest multiple ways in which heterosexual individuals can act as advocates for LGB people, both in interactions with gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals themselves and with other heterosexual individuals. With gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, allies can promote advocacy through acceptance (e.g. acting in a nonjudgmental
manner), support (e.g. championing the hiring of LGB people within one’s workplace and attending LGB sponsored events, providing inclusive environments), and inclusiveness (e.g. using inclusive language and rejection of assumptions of heterosexuality) (Washington & Evans, 1991, p. 198-199). Amongst other heterosexual individuals, allies might model advocacy and support through language, and inclusivity of non-heterosexual individuals. They also might confront heterosexism and prejudice as they encounter this (Washington & Evans, 1991, p. 199). Through direct confrontation of heterosexism and promotion of quality, heterosexual allies can act as spokespersons. Within university and work environments, allies can help to ensure that LGB issues are acknowledged and addressed. They can promote training and education to help ensure this, and institute policies and provisions that protect LGB people (Washington and Evans, 1991).

Professional psychologists in Borgman’s (2009) qualitative study noted “providing support, acceptance, validation, and safety” for their LGB clients. They also spoke to the importance of mentoring and training others to be LGB affirmative. As Christian allies, participants in Borgman’s (2009) study noted the particular importance of being vocal about these two identities in their work to help more Christians to develop an allied identity. As psychologists, they also had power as teachers to integrate discussion of diversity into their classes, assignments and readings, and as researchers to contribute LGB affirmative research to the existing literature (Borgman, 2009, p. 515-516).

DiStefano et al. (2000) asked heterosexual student affairs professions from the Network for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns to answer open-ended questions about their allied actions. Participant responses were organized within the following themes: participating in and providing LGB-affirmative programming/training, supporting LGB student organizations,
displaying LGB-affirmative symbols in their offices, maintaining supportive relationships with LGB students, colleagues, friends and relatives, advocating for LGB-affirmative institutional policy, and confronting homophobia/heterosexism. This final category of confronting homophobia/heterosexism, perhaps the most commonly cited form of action (Jones, Brewster & Jones, 2014), has been extrapolated within more recent research.

Hubbard et al. (2013) found that when heterosexual undergraduate students are prompted to speak out against LGBT prejudicial statements, they were likely to rely primarily on four strategies. Most commonly, participants noted their values or moral principles as the basis for denouncing prejudiced language. Secondly, participants relied upon knowledge promotion to confront prejudice, by sharing information, naming heterosexism, aiming to evoke empathy, and calling to educate others. Less frequent, but still common strategies were an attack of the statements and/or the aggressor, and personal participation (i.e. personal emotional disclosures or sharing of personal information and experiences) (Hubbard et al., 2013, p. 273-276).

As noted by Brodio (2000), acting as an advocate may require a certain level of confidence. Advocates must be well-informed to ensure that their allied work is advantageous for the LGBTQ community and congruent with the goals of the group. However, the LGBTQ community is diverse, and differences of opinion within the community are common. Heterosexuals acting as allies may be confronted with a certain level of skepticism and suspicion from the LGBT community that can be discouraging (Duhigg, et al., 2010). While many heterosexual people are moving towards more affirmative LGB attitudes (Adam, 1995; In Depth, n.d.; Loftus, 2001), fewer may have the confidence, knowledge and conviction to promote LGBTQ rights, and confront prejudice as they encounter it.
Factors Discouraging Allied Behavior

Barriers to advocacy take many forms, and within everyday settings allies are often faced with difficult instantaneous decisions about whether to act, flee, or wait for a more opportune moment (DiStefano et al., 2000). More iconic forms of activism often allow for greater anticipation and planning, and still allies must consider the potential costs, risks and benefits of their actions. Related to this phenomenon, McAdam (1986) discussed two types of activism: low-risk/cost and high-risk/cost. “Costs” represent the time, money, and energy required for participation, while “risks” refer to anticipated legal, social, physical, and financial repercussions or dangers. However, costs and risks are contextual, and the same types of activism may be deemed more “costly” or more “risky” by different individuals, and at different points across one’s lifespan. For example, McAdam (1986) discusses “biographical availability”, defining this as “employment, marriage and family responsibilities” that restrict one’s ability to participate in activism (p.70).

Many potential allies may be discouraged based on expectations or fears of discrimination being turned towards them personally. Goffman (1963) noted that people may experience stigma when they associate with an individual of a stigmatized or marginalized identity, he called this “courtesy stigma”. This may manifest in two ways (a) concerns about the well-being of a stigmatized loved one as a result of societal discrimination, and (b) real, or feared, discrimination from others in the form of shame, blame, guilt for their loved one’s marginalized status, or social exclusion and discrimination based on affiliation with loved one (Corrigan & Miller, 2004; LaSala, 2010). Research suggests that a heterosexual person who associates with an openly gay man or lesbian woman may experience courtesy stigma (Sigelman et al., 1991). The suggested underlying reason for this is that the affiliate is assumed to be
LGBTQ as well. Heterosexual allies noted that others often make assumptions about the sexual identity of those working in advocacy, and therefore, allies have suggested that part of the developmental process involves becoming more comfortable with one’s own sexual identity (Duhigg, et al., 2010). “You’re not truly being an ally if you are sitting there really worried that people are going to think you’re gay… so there’s internalized stuff that we want to definitely put aside in order for us to be truly an ally” (Duhigg, et al., 2010, p. 8).

Several cultural factors may influence the reactions to allied work. For example, the positive correlational relationship between age and heterosexism/homophobia, may contribute to older adult allies report of experiencing more negative responses to their allied work from family, friends, coworkers, and group members (Duhigg et al., 2010). Further, in a community that is not hospitable to the LGBTQ community, costs and risks may be higher, and it may be especially difficult to gain the confidence to participate in advocacy and confront prejudice. Interviewees in Borgman’s (2009) study suggested that region had a significant impact on “outness” as an ally, with people reporting that they felt much more comfortable declaring their allied identity in some areas they had lived than in their current home in the Bible Belt. Further, participants suggested that their “interactions and connections with friends, family, mentors could serve as roadblocks” in their allied work when these social connections may be jeopardized by assertion of conflicting viewpoints. As noted in the previous discussion of the Bible Belt, Barton (2011) suggests that personalism in the region may inhibit expression of controversial opinions and values. Fear of interpersonal rejection may be a more prevalent concern for Christian allies (Borgman, 2009), however, this is likely an obstacle stunting the allied development of many LGB affirming individuals regardless of religious affiliations.
Aspiring allies must develop cultural awareness, including an “understanding of their own conditioning, the conditioning of their clients, and the socio-political system of which they are both a part” in order to effectively intervene (Sue et al., 1992). As aspiring allies first begin expanding their cultural awareness, they may be fearful of making mistakes, of not being the “ideal ally”, and therefore, lack the confidence to assert allied attitudes or to confront prejudice they encounter (Edwards, 2006). They also risk suspicion of their intentions and criticism from the very group they intend to advocate for (DiStefano et al., 2000). Edwards (2006) proposes that allies are most successful when they seek critique, as opposed to fearing it. Rather, they relish in opportunities for feedback as part of their developmental process, and movement “towards ones own liberation” from the oppressive system to which they have been affected (Edwards, 2006, p. 47).

Overcoming obstacles, both real and imagined, is important in effective allied work. All allies are vulnerable to their fears of rejection, reaction or retribution, and even the most dedicated allies may succumb to these. However, it is also important to consider that inaction may also be an appropriate choice at times, representing intentionality and self-presentation to support enduring motivation and energy (DiStefano et al., 2000). DiStefano et al. (2000) quote participants as having reported not acting as an ally when they believed that “actions would be ‘futile’ or not ‘effective in the long run’”. They also suggested “pick[ing] and choo[ing] battles” or “best times” to act, may increase the likelihood of effective intervention and help protect against engagement in “no-win arguments” (p. 137). While participants were often disappointed about missing opportunities to act, they also seemed to recognize the need for self-preservation, and actively practiced self-acceptance (DiStefano et al., 2000; p. 137). When allies
and aspiring allies do overcome perceived barriers to intentionally engage in advocacy work, they report various rewarding results.

**Rewards of LGBTQ Advocacy Work**

Several rewards of LGBT advocacy work have been suggested by the literature. There are a few noted benefits related to the positive impact allies can have with LGBT individuals, such as decreasing the stigma, creating more safe and inclusive environments and becoming a source of support for LGBT loved ones (Washington & Evans, 1991); however, many rewards directly benefit allies themselves. For example, allies in the qualitative study by Duhigg, Rotosky, Gray and Wimsatt (2010) noted that their advocacy work provided them with a sense of purpose and contribution to society, and that through allied work, they had come to develop rewarding relationships with LGBT individuals (p. 10).

Further, Washington and Evans (1991) propose that through developing an allied identity, people open themselves up to more fluid gender roles. These gender constrictions, reinforced by heterosexism, have been noted to encourage prejudice against men and women regardless of sexual orientation (Worthington et al., 2002). Therefore, an allied identity may serve to expand one’s worldview, and in turn provide some relief for heterosexual individuals struggling with internalized gender restrictions.

Washington and Evans (1991) also suggest that allied development could encourage more close and loving relationships with same sex friends. This may be especially true for men, whose same-sex relationships have been burdened by socialization discouraging expression of affection and emotional closeness with other men (Mahalik, 2001). As one develops an allied identity, they must confront their own internalized homophobia. Overcoming fears of others’
assumptions about one’s sexual orientation, may allow one to more openly express care for same-sex friends (Dillon et al., 2004).

Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972/2000) speaks to the ultimate reward of allied work, the attainment of liberation for oneself by reconnecting fully with one’s humanity. While the oppressor may be anguished by their discovery of themselves as the oppressor, instincts to rationalize the experience of guilt, and/or insincere gestures of pity that do nothing to activate change, will not liberate the oppressor. Rather, Freire (1972/2000) argues that the oppressor can only truly stand in solidarity with the oppressed when she recognizes them as persons, and “fight[s] at their side to transform the objective reality” responsible for their oppression (p. 49). This, Freire (1972/2000) argues, is the path to becoming fully human again, within a system that dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor.

**Purpose of the Current Study**

Ongoing constrictions of heterosexism limit traditional gender norms and present modern men and women with various challenges in the workplace, in friendships and dating, and within young families. Standing side by side with LGBTQ individuals in efforts for equal rights, acceptance and greater flexibility in regard to sexual identity, sexual orientation and gender identity benefits heterosexual allies as well. Further, straight allies are valuable assets to civil rights campaigns, and also provide influential support for LGBTQ individuals on a personal and community level. With that said, self-proclaimed allies are often criticized in the media for being misinformed, acting with prejudice, and undermining their own efforts by choosing strategies that are inherently heterosexist. Many who hold LGBTQ affirmative attitudes may lack the confidence to refer to themselves as allies, and those who do so are accepting a role that comes with a certain responsibility.
Geographic regions of the United States are culturally diverse, and similar to countries, tribes, or other forms of community, regions in the United States represent distinct cultures. Therefore, region is a strong predictor of attitudes and values of the people who live there (Cohen, 2009). For example, apprehensions about claiming an allied identity may vary across cultures. Much as environment impacts an LGBTQ individual’s decision to “come out” (Barton, 2010; Barton, 2011), it may also influence the decision for heterosexual people to “come out” as an ally (Borgman, 2009). The influence of social context cannot be overlooked when studying the allied experience. I argue that the Bible Belt region of the United States represents a unique culture unto itself. Although the region spreads across several states, and includes people from various racial, ethnic and religious groups, there is a shared experience of those who live there.

Through interviews with allies in the Bible Belt region, this study aims to better understand the heterosexual people who are nominated as allies in the Bible Belt. Interview questions investigate the motives of LGBTQ allies in the region to act as such. Questions seek to better understand the cultural underpinnings of the Bible Belt, and how these norms may influence the allied development process. This study asked participants to reflect on their sense of self as an LGBTQ ally and their confidence within this identity. Finally, advocacy and allied behavior are broad terms. How do allies in the Bible Belt express their allied identity? What kinds of behaviors do they engage in to advocate for a more socially just society? (See Appendix B for interview protocol).

Studies of LGBT allied development generally rely on qualitative methods, and Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) has been used in two of the phenomenological studies described above (Duhigg et al., 2010; Dillon et al., 2004). Ponterotto (2004) describes CQR as “a balance between postpositivist and constructivist lenses” (p. 134) which combines various
qualitative methods, and allows for greater methodological flexibility while continuing to seek
“an explanation that leads to prediction and control of phenomena” (p. 129) stereotypical of
research in counseling psychology. Consistent with postpositivism, CQR accepts that there is no
“true” reality, however, the method seeks to condense various realities into a “consensus”, or a
consistent description of a phenomenon that can be used to create a model or theory (Hays &
Wood, 2011). This represents an advantage of CQR in the field of counseling psychology, as
theory development allows for greater applicability of counseling research within the field (Hays

For unstudied topics, qualitative methods have been suggested to be most appropriate, as
they provide rich comprehensive data (Morrow & Smith, 2000). While several studies examine
LGBTQ allies, and Barton (2010, 2011) offers insights into the influence of the Bible Belt
amongst the LGB individuals who live there, research has yet to specifically examine LGBTQ
allies within this particular social context. This study is grounded in theories of feminism and
multiculturalism. Ponterotto (2010) contends that CQR methods are congruent with these
ideologies. Given that Kline (2008) recommends using a research method compatible with the
purpose of one’s study, CQR is presumed to be appropriate for this study.

This particular study relies on CQR methods to investigate the previously stated research
questions. Interview findings may provide greater insight into the process of LGBTQ allied
development within the cultural context of the Bible Belt. Findings may have implications for
LGBTQ affirmative and sensitivity training programs, especially within cultural contexts that
have historically promoted heterosexist and/or homophobic values and beliefs. Social contexts
may be as broad as region, or as specific as a workplace or school environment.
CHAPTER III

Method

Overview of Present Study

This study aims to better understand how social context affects the individual experience of social justice advocates. A consensual qualitative research (CQR) method was used in order to gather multidimensional data examining the experience of LGBTQ allies within the Bible Belt region of the United States. Qualitative interviews focused primarily on the following dimensions: development of LGBTQ allied identity, implementation of advocacy in daily life and individual motivations to engage within one’s community as an LGBTQ ally. This particular research methodology was appropriate for this study for several reasons.

CQR holds a constructivist paradigm in the sense that CQR assumes there is no one single reality, but rather, “multiple socially constructed realities” exist (Hill, 2012, p. 24). This constructivistic approach honors the unique nature of each ally’s individual experience and helps to protect against broad generalizations regarding the individuals studied, and in this case, also the social context. This protection was of paramount importance, given current cultural tensions in the United States and long-standing regional biases held within the United States (Edgerton, 2018; Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013; Russell, 2011). Through presentation of direct quotes from interviews, CQR gives voice to individual experience, and allows for greater specificity and depth to findings that may be lost within a purely quantitative approach that is reliant upon an aggregate of responses (Hill et al., 1997, 2005). Further, the presentation of results in the form of domains and categories, and the frequency with which they emerge in the data, is also ideal for the goals of this research to highlight prevalence of particular responses, provide clear structure, and develop insight for social justice trainings and further research. Therefore, the
phenomenological approach of CQR is congruent with the goal of this research study to better understand the experience of those who hold LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes, and work to combat harmful effects of heterosexism in a conservative, religiously informed culture (Hill, 2012; Creswell, 2007).

**Participants**

Hill (2012) recommends a sample size of 12-15 participants. As illustrated in Table 1, this study includes 12 participants, all 18 years of age or older. Consistent with participation criteria, all participants most closely identified as cis-gender and heterosexual (*further discussion below in description of demographics form*). The sample ranged in age from 24-60 years, with a mean age of 36.9 years and a median age of 31 years. All participants identified as White, and as cis-women. Participant highest level of education varied from GED to Doctorate degree, with the majority of participants holding a Bachelor’s Degree: GED (*n* = 1; 8%), Associates Degree (*n* = 1; 8%), Bachelor’s Degree (*n* = 7; 58%), Master’s Degree (*n* = 2; 17%), Doctorate Degree (*n* = 1; 8%). Of note, no participant currently identified as a student in pursuit of higher education. While participants worked in variety of fields, education (*n* = 4; 33%), and the arts/media (*n* = 4; 33%) were most prevalent. It is worth noting that these variables are consistent with existing research regarding predictors of more positive LGBTQ attitudes amongst heterosexually identifying individuals, to be those who are highly educated (Duhigg et al., 2010; Fingerhut, 2011; Grapes, 2006; Ohlender et al., 2005; Russell, 2011), cisgender women (Fingerhut, 2011; Whitley, 2001; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000; Herek, 2000; Ratcliff et al., 2006; LaMar and Kite, 1998). Regarding social class, participants identified as middle class (*n* = 8; 67%), upper middle class (*n* = 3; 25%), and upper class (*n* = 1; 8%).

Participant religious affiliations were more consistent with expectations of the Bible Belt
(Barton, 2011), than correlational research suggesting that LGBTQ allies may be more likely to be non-religious. Participant report of religious identity was limited to Christian ($n = 8; 67\%$), with 3 participants (25\%) specifying “Catholic” as their denomination affiliation (one of these participants specifically wrote “disgruntled Catholic” on the demographics form); “spiritual” or “agnostic” ($n = 3; 25\%$); and “non-religious” ($n = 1; 8\%$). Regarding participant relationship to the Bible Belt, most grew up within the Bible Belt ($n = 10; 83\%$), and even more had lived most of their lives within the Bible Belt region of the country ($n = 11; 92\%$). Only one participant had neither grown up in or spent most of her life living in the Bible Belt. This participant reported having lived in the area for approximately two and a half years at the time of the interview.

Three additional interviews were conducted that were not included in the data analysis process. The first of the three of these was utilized for initial training efforts, as each member of the team was new to CQR. The other two interviews were excluded from analysis based on inclusion criteria. One interviewee lived near the Bible Belt but did not identify as ever having lived within the Bible Belt but rather within an urban enclave that they felt did not give them adequate exposure to the region. Another interview was excluded from analysis, as the team determined that the participant’s exposure to the Bible Belt was too limited, having only lived in the region for approximately 1 year.

**Design**

**Pilot study.** Prior to the data collection, two pilot interviews were conducted. The purpose of the pilot was to further develop the initial interview protocol, rooted in the research questions. The first pilot interview was conducted in New York, with a 30-year-old, Vietnamese-Mexican American woman who grew up in and spent most of her life living in the
Bible Belt. The woman personally identified as an LGBTQ ally, an identity that had been supported and expressed to the interviewer by the interviewee’s two lesbian sisters. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was followed by a discussion that was approximately 30 minutes long providing feedback. Prior to engaging in the interview, the woman was informed of the intention of the research study, informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of the interview and told that she could end the interview at any time. The interview and discussion were recorded, and the interview protocol was adapted based on the interviewee’s feedback.

The second pilot was conducted with a 61-year-old White woman in the Bible Belt region of the country, who had lived in the Bible Belt for over 25 years. The woman had been nominated by her daughter as an LGBTQ ally. Due to familiarity with the researcher, the interviewee would not be an appropriate participant for data collection, however, her feedback regarding the protocol was valued and influential in development of the final protocol. Just as with the initial pilot, this participant was informed of the intention of the research study, informed of the voluntary and confidential nature of the interview and told that she could end the interview at any time. The interview, approximately 60 minutes, and follow-up discussion, approximately 30 minutes, were recorded and used by the researcher in development of the final semi-structured interview protocol.

**Recruitment.** This study was designed to identify LGBTQ-affirming allies who make an active difference within the lives of LGBTQ people in their community. Much of the existing research with LGBTQ allies has relied upon self-identification and recruitment from social justice educational programs or social activism groups (Borgman, 2009; Brodio, 2000; Dillon et al., 2004; DiStefano et al., 2000; Russell, 2011). While political activism is important and
certainly an indicator of allied behavior, this is only one of many ways to promote LGBTQ-affirming attitudes on a community level. To address these concerns, this study relied on a two-step recruitment process that occurred in two waves, the first from January to February of 2018 that resulted in two interviews in February, and the second from October to December of 2018 that yielded the bulk of the interviews, which were conducted from November to December.

The initial step in the recruitment process involved reaching out to LGBTQ individuals who live in currently or previously lived within the Bible Belt region of the country and asking them to “nominate” people within their lives to be participants in the study. Nominees would need to fit the following description: “a heterosexual and cisgender person who supports equal civil rights, gender equality, LGB social movements, and challenges homophobia as it occurs. Qualified participants may or may not personally identify themselves as straight allies.” A snowball sampling approach was taken to identify members of the LGBTQ community in this region of the country, with various methods of advertisement. While the most effective strategy proved to be direct contact with personal contacts and contacts once removed from the investigator, various other methods of advertisement were employed as well. A link to a brief Qualtrics survey was advertised via social media and email, allowing LGBTQ identifying people from the Bible Belt to nominate allies. LGBTQ resource centers across the Bible Belt were also contacted, and while some expressed interest, no nominations were generated from these efforts. Over 30 LGBTQ individuals were contacted directly, yielding over 30 nominees for participation. Of note, approximately 10 of the LGBTQ individuals contacted for nominees explicitly stated that they could not identify anyone in their life who met the description of an ally provided. Many commented that while they had straight cis loved ones who showed them support and love as individuals, they were not confident that these same people would “challenge
homophobia as it occurs”. Nominating LGBTQ members of the community included lesbian, gay and transgender individuals ranging in age from early 20s to 60s, and known to represent White, Black and Middle Eastern racial/ethnic identities and potentially others as some nominators were not personally known to the researcher and demographics were not specifically collected.

The second step in the recruitment process involved contacting nominees, informing them of the research study and scheduling interviews. Nominators were asked to tell their nominees that they would be contacted. Follow-up involved a multi-step process including an email with a written description of the study, notification that they had been nominated to participate and request for participation. Researcher contact information and IRB information was included in the email. Within 1-2 days, a phone call was also made to nominees. If there was no response, a voicemail and a follow up text were also sent.

Ultimately, over 30 individuals were nominated to participate in the study, with several nominators nominating multiple “allies”. It is worth noting that several nominees, some who agreed to participate and some who declined to be interviewed, noted feeling that they did not adequately meet the description of an ally, were not doing enough or were somehow “underqualified”. Pre-interview phone calls discussing the purpose of research were noted to be important in helping nominees determine whether or not they would like to participate in the study. Nominees often replied favorably to the request to be interviewed but then discontinued communication when asked to schedule an interview, or during the logistical portion of scheduling closer to the interview date. 16 nominees scheduled interviews and remained in communication through the interview date. One interview was cancelled due to a scheduling conflict communicated by the interviewee, and was not able to be rescheduled due to the
interviewer’s scheduling restrictions.

Data Collection

Participants were asked to participate in a face-to-face interview with the primary researcher. To collect data, the primary researcher made multiple trips to the Bible Belt region of the country, including one road trip throughout the region of the country. Interviews were conducted in various cities and states across the Bible Belt including: multiple towns within the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex; suburban/rural communities outside of Houston, TX; Nashville, TN; and rural Louisiana. Three interviews were conducted in NY and NJ, two with participants who were traveling and requested to be interviewed while in the area, and one with a participant who had recently relocated to NY from the Bible Belt. Interviews took place in participant’s homes and offices, or in a private room in a library convenient to the participant. The primary researcher deferred to participant preference for setting and took on responsibility of locating local libraries and reserving space for the interviews.

Prior to the interview, all participants completed a demographic survey. Interviews lasted an average of 72 minutes (range = 54-94 minutes). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed with participant consent. An automatic transcription software program called Happy Scribe, was used to facilitate the transcription process. All members of the research team reviewed transcriptions, making edits and identifying speakers.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Prior to beginning the interview, participants were informed of the nature and purposes of the study and assured their confidentiality. Their rights as participants were reviewed, including their right to discontinue the interview at any time should they become uncomfortable. They were made aware of the potential risks and benefits of participation and provided with a copy of
the informed consent, including contact information for the primary researcher. Consent for participation and recording was obtained both verbally and in writing.

**Instruments**

**Demographic survey.** A demographic form (Appendix A) was administered prior to the interview. Participants were asked to identify their age, race, gender, level of education, profession, social class and religious identity. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked whether they “identify predominantly as straight/heterosexual”. Some of the younger participants commented on the fluidity of their own sexual attraction and orientation. However, each confirmed that their sexual and romantic relationships have largely been with opposite sex partners, and that they benefit from the privileges held by straight individuals on a daily basis. Given the contextual nature of the research questions – examining impact of cultural influence of the Bible Belt – participants were asked to confirm that they were born in the United States, with the assumption that an American identity encourages likelihood of an appreciation for regional cultural differences within the country. To assess exposure to Bible Belt culture, participants were also asked to identify the city, state of their current primary residence, and the city, state they primarily grew up in. Participants were also asked to specify whether or not they consider these places to be within the Bible Belt. The option “I do not know what the Bible Belt is” was provided as an option to further control for familiarity with the region and the culture. Only one participant asked for clarification as to the definition of the Bible Belt. This participant was one of the three that was excluded from the data analysis.

**Interview protocol.** Consistent with Hill et al.’s (2005) recommendation, this study relied upon a semi-structured interview protocol including only a limited number of scripted questions and several predetermined potential probes. The brief protocol allowed for flexibility
in discussion, overlap of ideas and extensive probing through both the pre-identified prompts and spontaneous probes. Hill et al. (2005) suggest that this open-ended approach is effective in gathering in-depth, elaborate data providing insight into relatively unexplored research questions.

Hill et al. (1997) suggest that review of the research can provide insight into which questions have yet to be explored. This protocol was informed by two separate bodies of research examining LGBTQ and social justice allies, and the Bible Belt region. Feedback from the pilot studies was influential in refinement of the final questions and probes included in the interview protocol. The scripted questions inquire about cultural norms the participant has observed in the Bible Belt, observations of homophobia or heterosexism, reactions to observations of such prejudice, reactions to being nominated as an LGBTQ ally and ways in which the participant believes they embody this identity. There were also several pre-determined probes anticipated based on existing literature and the pilot interviews. The term, “Bible Belt” was purposely excluded from scripted questions to help avoid priming effects (notably unavoidable with the demographics questionnaire). However, the term was occasionally referenced explicitly within the interviewer’s follow-up probes, typically following the participant’s use of the term. The protocol also included questions regarding religious identity and experience, and personal relationships with LGBTQ individuals should these not emerge organically within the interview. However, the interviewer did not notice these follow up questions to be necessary, as the topics emerged within responses to the four overarching questions and corresponding probes during each interview.

Data Analysis

Methodology

Four major steps of CQR are proposed to encourage merit and replicability: “(a)
collecting data in an open-ended way; (b) sorting data into broad categories, called domains; (c) creating summaries, called core ideas, ... (d) looking for themes or patterns across participants’ responses within each domain, called cross-analysis” (Hill et al., 1997; Hill, 2012, p. 25).

Another core component of this inductive research process is the use of a research team made up of three to five researchers. In accordance with recommendations, this study included a team of three researchers, who initially acknowledged their independent backgrounds and biases, and relied on open conversation and debate to establish a set of mutually agreed upon commonalities, or themes, amongst the “multiple realities” presented by participants (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005; Hill, 2012). An auditor was consulted for additional feedback on the analysis at various points throughout the data analysis process. Additionally, a CQR expert was consulted at the start of each new phase of analysis for training purposes and confirmation of appropriate administration of the previous phase.

Research Team

The research team consisted of a primary researcher, two team members and one auditor who hold a range of identities and backgrounds. This diversity allowed for a wider perspective and likely facilitated deeper insights (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997).

Team members. The primary researcher identifies as a White, American, cisgender woman and is an advanced doctoral candidate in counseling psychology. Similar to some of the younger participants in this study, the primary researcher believes in a more fluid definition of sexual orientation, however, also recognizes holding “straight” privilege in her daily life. The primary researcher grew up primarily in the Bible Belt region, currently holds liberal and socialist political leanings, is involved with LGBTQ activism predominately in regards to everyday promotion of LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes, political support and career pursuits, and
would consider her personal connections to the LGBTQ community to be moderately significant given her social connections and time spent in queer friendly spaces. While she has significant familiarity with LGBTQ related research, she had no previous CQR experience.

Another team member identifies as a Black, American, non-binary and transmasculine, pansexual person, and a graduate student in counseling psychology. They/he grew up in Northeast Ohio and has spent a significant portion of their life in New York State, with minimal direct exposure to the Bible Belt region. They hold far left political leanings, are involved with LGBTQ activism through community support, political actions and everyday encounters, and would consider themselves to be highly personally connected to the LGBTQ community given personal identities and social connections. At the start of this project, they rated their familiarity with LGBTQ related research to be moderately high, and had no CQR experience.

The third team member identifies as an Asian, Chinese, cisgender, straight woman and a graduate student in a communication and education program. She was born and raised in China, and moved to the United States when she was 17-years-old. She has minimal exposure to the Bible Belt region and had only vague familiarity with the term when she first joined this research team. She does not identify with American political parties, but noted socialist leanings. While this team member noted having much respect for the LGBTQ community, she noted minimal involvement in LGBTQ activism, and had little connection to the LGBTQ community prior to this study, with the exception of one of her closest friends who identifies as gay. At the start of this project, she had little familiarity with LGBTQ related research and no CQR experience.

The auditor identifies as a Middle Eastern and North African, Yemeni-American, cisgender, straight woman. Having lived in Yemen and NYC, her exposure to the Bible Belt is minimal. She identifies as a Democrat, is involved with LGBTQ activism through community
events, research and clinical work, and noted that her personal connection to the LGBTQ community is limited to friends who identify as LGBTQ. While she has extensive knowledge of research related to multiculturalism and social justice related development and work, her specific knowledge of LGBTQ related research is more limited. She has received extensive CQR training and has been the primary investigator on multiple research projects utilizing CQR. (See Table 3 for team demographics.)

**Expectations and Biases**

Team members discussed their backgrounds and express potential biases and expectations in line with recommendations from Hill (2012). Overarching team biases and independent biases were explicitly labeled and acknowledged, in order to encourage ongoing monitoring of how these may be influencing data interpretation.

As noted above, while each team member holds LGBTQ affirmative attitudes, they varied in their connections to the community, involvement in activism and knowledge of existing research. Team members held that this diversity of exposure was a strength. Where some members had less exposure, this positioned them well to provide new perspective. On the other hand, when members were more indoctrinated in LGBTQ culture, they were able to provide insight into established norms.

To ensure a baseline of background and protect against any one member being relied upon as an “educator”, the team spent several weeks prior to data analysis reviewing the literature review from this study’s proposal. The team discussed each section in detail and commented on knowledge of similar or related research. In addition to helping minimize disparities in knowledge, this exercise provided opportunities for team members to voice biases and expectations related not only to sexual orientation and gender identity, but also regarding
allies, religion, politics and the Bible Belt region.

Research team members noted varying expectations of participants’ efficacy as allies and motivations to participate in advocacy. Therefore, the team noted that they may differ in their tendency to be critical of participants’ efforts, thus impacting interpretation of participant report. Indeed, the team engaged in several lengthy discussions to help control for the influence of individual team member’s assumptions as the team worked collectively to interpret deeper meanings within participant reports.

Team members discussed their own current religious beliefs, as well as religious backgrounds. Two team members reported conflictual relationships with religion, stemming from experiences in their upbringing. Given that the majority of participants identified as religious, team members agreed to hold one another accountable for potential religious based bias within the data analysis. Further, while team member’s political leanings varied, there was considerable overlap in their ideals, and no one identified with the conservative or republican political leanings common within the region examined. Team members acknowledged expectations that participants would either identify directly with conservative politics, or report this to be true of others in their community. The team was careful not to overstate this within the findings.

Finally, there was significant discrepancy in regard to familiarity with the Bible Belt, as well as biases and expectations. As one team member was only vaguely aware of the Bible Belt as a specific region of the United States, they reported few, if any, expectations or biases regarding the culture. Another team member had little to no direct exposure to the Bible Belt, but reported a generally negative bias towards the region based in expectations of the area as racist, sexist and heterosexist. Finally, the primary investigator discussed a complex and deeply
rooted relationship with the Bible Belt. Having grown up in the region, this team member holds the region in great affection and was aware of the potential to be overly protective of the culture and the research participants interviewed for this study. On the other hand, the primary investigator also acknowledged potential risk of their ties to the community leading them to being overly critical of their hometown culture. Each of these biases and expectations were kept in close consideration as the team proceeded with data analysis in order to minimize the risk of interference.

**Consensual Qualitative Research**

All members of the team were new to CQR. Per Hill et al. (2005) recommendations, team meetings placed emphasis on training. Members studied Hill et al.’s (1997) training manual, read chapters from BOOK, and Hill et al.’s (2005) update on CQR. Dissertations and research articles utilizing a CQR method were also reviewed. The primary researcher met with a CQR expert at various points throughout the study for guidance and relayed information from these meetings to the team through a combination of written notes and verbal description. The primary researcher also consulted with several colleagues with CQR experience throughout the study as questions arose. Finally, the team transcribed and analyzed one interview prior to beginning the actual data analysis process.

**Coding data into domains.** The first step of data analysis involves coding data into domains. Hill et al. (2005) suggest that developing domains from the data is superior to beginning with a “start list” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of domains based on the protocol and previous research, as a “start list” may make domains more vulnerable to preconceived ideas.

As a training technique, the team began by each researcher reviewing the same interview transcript, independently identifying potential domains and assigning portions of the interview,
ranging from a phrase to multiple sentences, to each domain. The team then met and began arguing to consensus the best possible coding of the transcript. After consultation with a CQR expert, it was determined that the team had chosen domains that were far too specific. The team discussions and initial domains were used to create an expansive, flexible list of initial domains to consider as the team proceeded with this initial stage of analysis. However, while the interview was influential in the team’s conceptualization of domains and categories, it was not included within the final analysis.

Using the knowledge gained during the training exercise described above, the team of researchers then reviewed another interview protocol, independently reviewing the transcript and assigning portions of the transcript to proposed domains. After each had completed sectioning and coding this transcript into domains, the team argued to consensus the best possible coding of the transcript. This process was repeated with a second transcript. Consensus versions of the two transcripts were shared with the auditor. The team then considered the auditor’s feedback and agreed upon adjustments to the domains.

Each member of the team continued to domain four additional transcripts in this manner. Two transcripts were set aside for a stability check conducted later in the process (described in section below) (Hill et al., 1997). Hill et al. (2005) suggest that once the first two interview protocols have been coded into domains and domains have been argued to consensus considering auditor feedback, remaining transcripts can be done by two team members, and then reviewed by other team members and auditors. This approach was used with the final four of ten interview protocols during this phase of analysis.

Abstracting core ideas. Core ideas are summaries of the content in each domain of a given interview. These can be thought of as abstracts, which use fewer words to try to clearly
present the idea behind the interviewee’s statements. There is no interpretation, as the researchers attempt to capture the interviewee’s statement as literally and concisely as possible. Each team member determined core ideas separately. The team argued core ideas to consensus, relying on the transcript when disagreements arise. This process was completed for two interview protocols before sending to the auditor for review. The auditor’s feedback was considered, and the team discussed feedback and agreed upon any changes to the core ideas. Core ideas for the remaining eight interview protocols were completed in the same fashion.

**Cross-analysis.** During this phase of data analysis, the analysis was expanded from the individual interviews, to compare cases for similarities. Core ideas for each domain across cases were examined together. The team determined categories for the various core ideas under each domain. As with previous steps, the categories were argued to consensus. The auditor then reviewed the categories and feedback from the auditor was considered and modifications made as seen fit. This step also served as an additional check (Hill et al., 1997) to ensure that the abstracting into core ideas was clear and appropriate to the data. During cross-analysis, the researchers revised core ideas based on the corresponding interview where core ideas seem unclear. This required editing, and then arguing to consensus again with the team.

**Stability check.** The two remaining interviews were used in this final step. The two new cases are analyzed in the same manner to see if any new domains, core ideas, categories emerge or if there is a significant change to the frequency of categories. While this process helped to clarify labels and definitions of some categories, domains remained entirely consistent and frequency labels remained relatively unchanged overall. Therefore, results were considered stable.
CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter presents the eight domains that emerged from the CQR data analysis and their associated categories. Each category is designated a frequency label consistent with stipulations outlined by CQR developers (Hill, 1997; Hill, 2005; Ladany, Thompson, & Hill, 2012). Categories applying to 11 or 12 cases were labeled general, those applying to 6 to 10 cases were labeled typical, and those applying to 3 to 5 cases were labeled variant (Ladany, Thompson, & Hill, 2012). Consistent with Hill et al. (1997) recommendations, categories that applied to only one or two cases were not considered descriptive of the sample. However, rather than dismiss the data, the team considered these categories and made an effort to broaden similar categories to incorporate these rare concepts into the findings whenever possible.

In order to capture the depth and richness of the data, a combination of core ideas and quotes are used to further elaborate the meaning of categories. Further, as is typical in presentation of CQR results, a brief narrative is presented summarizing the average participant in this particular study (Hill, 1997). The narrative below does not apply to any individual case, but rather is intended to summarize the findings for the reader.

**Typical Case Narrative**

The typical participant in this study was a White, cis-gender woman who was nominated by a close friend within the LGBTQ community as an LGBTQ ally. She was born, raised, and currently resides in the Bible Belt region of the United States. However, she has also lived outside of the Bible Belt region at some point in her life. She identified as married, holds a bachelor’s degree, is currently employed, and identifies as middle class. She was raised Christian and continues to identify as a Christian.
Reflection on Religious Beliefs

As she reflected upon religiosity, she described both a critical examination of religion overall, as well as within her own belief system. Wherein, she has developed an individual approach to her faith that is separate from prescribed religious practices. She described the religious values of acceptance, love, and kindness as the core of her faith.

Personal Descriptors

She identified strongly as a person who is curious, open-minded, and committed to engaging in perspective taking. It is important to be nonjudgmental, accepting, empathetic, and kind. She reported holding liberal, justice-oriented political beliefs. She described herself as a person who is conflict avoidant and generally non-confrontational. She noted she is well connected to the LGBTQ community through both friendships and a family member who identifies as a member of the community.

Advocacy Tactics

The typical participant reported using various tactics to assert herself as an LGBTQ ally. She described attending marches, rallies, LGBTQ pride, and other LGBTQ affirming events. She reflected upon her ability to be steadfast and vocal about her connections to LGBTQ loved ones no matter the audience or setting. She reported voting and even campaigning for LGBTQ affirmative policy and politicians, and she noted making her liberal beliefs known to those around her. She indicated she takes multiple approaches to combat prejudice and educate others. Specifically, she identified that she seizes opportunities to provide education regarding injustices towards the LGBTQ community and about current LGBTQ culture and terminology. She also highlighted she corrects heteronormative assumptions she notices within her community.
She described her style as calm, gentle, and nonjudgmental. She reported often using humor when confronting others about their biases, sharing concrete information and logical arguments, and encouraging others to engage in perspective taking. Wherever she goes, she reported trying to be mindful to create safe and inclusive environments by being purposeful in her own use of language (e.g. proper use of pronouns and careful/thoughtful word choice), and by modeling LGBTQ affirmative attitudes and advocacy. Often, she noted her efforts are more specific to LGBTQ individuals within her life. As people close to her have come out, she shared she was careful to provide time and space for them to explore their identity and come out on their own terms, and once they did, she made a conscious effort to remain consistent across all aspects of their relationship and expressed her acceptance and support enthusiastically. She reflected that she accompanies LGBTQ loved ones to queer spaces. She reported being an active participant in her loved one’s identity development process by researching and discussing topics and concerns specific to the LGBTQ community alongside of them.

The average participant described considering various contextual and relational factors within her advocacy behaviors. For example, she noted she tends to consider the appropriateness her of advocacy interventions based on the setting and her relationship to those present. Additionally, she reflected she generally assesses the potential impact her interventions may have as part of a cost/benefit analysis before engaging in advocacy. Finally, she found she considers how potential conflicts, that may arise as a result of her advocacy, could disrupt her social or professional relationships. At times these considerations may result in a decision to stay silent, perhaps awaiting another opportunity in which she believes her efforts will be better received, or she may simply choose to tailor her approach to the setting/audience. This decision-making process can be quite stressful and emotionally draining, therefore, the typical participant
noted that she has created a social microcosm for herself, filled with people who share similar values and LGBTQ-affirmative beliefs. In fact, she often chooses to put distance between herself and people who hold bias towards the LGBTQ community.

**Reflection of Personal Allied Development**

The typical participant reflected thoughtfully on her own LGBTQ allied development process, her sense of self-efficacy as an ally, and her motivation to engage in advocacy efforts. In becoming a more aware and effective ally, she identified various informal educational experiences that have been meaningful to her process. She noted that she learned a lot as a result of close contact with LGBTQ individuals. Hearing LGBTQ individual’s stories, supporting loved ones through their coming out process, and observing prejudice against LGBTQ individuals first-hand were all particularly meaningful experiences. She also noted having been educated through various LGBTQ friendly materials including books, music, TV, film, plays, internet resources, and social media. Additionally, she noted discussions with peers exploring social justice related issues to be formative in her allied identity. Generally, being exposed to new and different cultures was also helpful in expanding her perspective as she learned to be a more effective ally.

Her allied identity was influenced by role models who promoted kindness, tolerance, and empathy. Generally, she was honored and proud to have been nominated as an ally for this study. She noted that her confidence as an ally increases with age, but that it is important to her to consistently evaluate her efficacy and recognize her need for ongoing education and development, as she continues to make mistakes as an imperfect ally. She reflected that she believes that she becomes a better ally through acknowledgment of, and ongoing efforts to better understand her own privilege. She described herself as motivated to continue with both her
advocacy work and her own development, as she reflected she believes that equality for LGTBQ people will ultimately strengthen the community at large and improve culture for everyone. She also noted that her advocacy work and her personal development as an ally has helped to broaden her perspective generally and opened her mind in a variety of ways. She noted she gathers inspiration to continue her allyship and advocacy from the social change and progress she observes, and the power of social justice movements.

**Personal Reflection on Bible Belt Culture**

The typical participant described the Bible Belt as politically conservative. She noted that she frequently observes examples of homophobia, transphobia, and sexism in her community—often in the form of microaggressions—in addition to prevalent racism. The typical participant commented on various social norms within the Bible Belt that are consistent with the idea of “personalism” (outlined above within the literature review) (Jones, 1997 as cited in Barton, 2011). Specifically, she commented on the tendency for people in the Bible Belt to present the social façade of harmony and good humor, generally avoiding overt conflict. Further, she noted both experiencing and observing pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and a traditional lifestyle in regard to marriage and family. She also described pervasive pressure to participate in the Christian faith. Despite her own connections to Christianity, she has been disappointed by observations of the Christian faith being used as an explanation or justification for social exclusion, prejudice, and judgment.

The typical participant noted that LGBTQ visibility is lacking within her community, but that there are various progressive “urban bubbles” within the Bible Belt that serve as safe havens for liberally minded people and LGBTQ individuals alike. Overall, she is encouraged by progressive cultural changes related to the LGBTQ community including, increased visibility in
media, social media and on the internet, as well as within her own community, and the progress made in regards to LGBTQ civil rights—noting marriage equality as having been an important step towards social justice.

**Domains and Categories**

CQR analysis of interview transcripts yielded 8 domains—or general ideas. From these domains, categories emerged providing descriptive and nuanced insight into the interview content. The domains and categories are presented below. Domains are presented in bold, and italics signify categories. Further, the categories in each domain are presented below in organized and titled groups (in italic, bold font beginning with “related to”).

Participant quotes are provided to support interpretation and provide the reader with a greater richness of data. To protect anonymity of participants, names, places, and some other specific details have been removed. At times, names held significance in participant stories; this was especially true when participants emphasized stereotypically male or female names for effect. In these cases, names were replaced, which is noted by an asterisk placed before the first letter of the name (e.g. *James).

One participant who had moved to the Bible Belt later in her life, noted being struck by the “polite” and “indirect” manner in which people speak. Indeed, the research team also commented on this trend while transcribing and analyzing the data. Intentional efforts were made to preserve the rhythm, pace, and general manner of speech within participant quotes. Hyphens were used to signify a sudden shift in direction of content or repetition of speech. However, the winding nature of responses did require editing at times. When words or phrases were omitted from original quotes, this was noted with ellipses.
Domain 1: Personal Traits, Values and Experiences

This domain captures various personal descriptors that emerged within participants’ narratives. Categories highlight trends that emerged regarding participant’s personal experiences related to exposure to other cultures and to the LGBTQ community. It is notable that all participants identified as having been raised Christian, and this domain captures the personal nature of one’s relationship to their faith. Finally, this domain outlines the various personal identities, traits, and values that participants noted holding as they reflected upon the developmental process of becoming an LGBTQ ally and their ongoing efforts to act as such.

Two categories related to participants’ exposure to other cultures emerged. In a typical category, participants reported I’ve lived outside the Bible Belt at some point during their lives. A variant category emerged in which participants stated I’m well-traveled.

Two general and three typical categories related to personal religious identity emerged. Participants generally reported I was raised religious, and I critically examine and question religion. One participant noted, “I identify as Christian, but I’ve always been a questioner.” Another participant illustrated the general theme of critical analysis of one’s own faith in the following response:

I identify as agnostic... I just remember from when I could start thinking for myself. I remember just like sitting in church and they would be telling me the stories about, you know Moses and all the animals, and I was kinda’ like ‘that don't make a lot of sense.’ I just remember, like feeling that way. And once I started getting a little bit older I just, you know, started finding other things that – other questions that I had, that I didn't feel like with all these questions I could still consider myself to be a believer. Like, you can't have all these questions and then, you know just ignore them.

Typically, participants noted I identify as Christian, and I emphasize religious values of acceptance, love, and kindness. One participant noted, “When I think of Christianity I think we're supposed to be accepting of everyone.” Another discussed how this emphasis had been
ingrained in her since childhood, stating, “In my family it was always, just be a good person… and that was kind of like the big thing for us. Everyone is a human and everyone deserves love and happiness and to be treated like you would treat other people.”

In another typical category, participants reported *I’ve negotiated and accepted a personal approach to religion, separate from prescribed religious practices.* One participant described her approach to her Christian faith in the following way:

> So, like I believe in God and I read the Bible – not as much as I feel like I should. And I pray and things like that, but I don't go to church on Sundays anymore just cause. I found myself starting to get mad at God instead of like worshipping. So, it just – I didn't want to be mad at God because it wasn't God's fault. It was more of the people and what they turned Christianity into in a way.

Another participant also described how she has developed a flexible approach to her religious practice that allows her faith to serve as a source of support and strength for her:

> I don't go to church regularly, but I think it's like a, it's still a pretty big part of my life. Like I pray a lot. I read the Bible when like I feel like I need it. But I don't go to a church regularly and I kind of just like yeah… There's no a reason I don't go. It's just kind of like I haven't ever found ones that I go to and I'm like you know this is really beneficial for me… And I haven't put a strong importance on finding a church that I like. Because I feel like I have like my connection with God and I don't really need to go to church to have that… I think the times that I turn to my faith is the times when I'm just like so lost on what to do in my life like I need, I'm craving answers and direction. And to feel like I'm not just walking aimlessly through life hoping that good things happen. It's like I'm walking with like a path where I'm setting myself up for good things to happen.

One general, one typical, and one variant category emerged related to participant’s exposure to LGBTQ community and culture. These categories were (a) a significant portion of my current social network identifies as part of the LGBTQ community, (b) I have a LGBTQ family member, and (c) I grew up around LGBTQ individuals/community, respectively.

Six categories related to personality traits and identities emerged. Typical categories included: (a) I identify as a person who is curious / open-minded / perspective taking, (b) I identify as a person who is nonjudgmental / accepting / empathetic / kind, (c) I have liberal
social-justice-oriented political beliefs, and (d) I am conflict avoidant / non-confrontational.

Less common were the variant categories: (a) I challenge the status quo, and (b) I identify as an “outsider” / someone who “lives on the fringe.” One participant spoke about her close group of friends in high school, who have mostly come out as LGBTQ since graduation, and how one of the things that brought them together was their sense of having been “outsiders” within their community:

I think there was like a part of me that always just like really... Like that just didn't identify with my hometown. Like that part of me that was like, this is just not it. Like I just felt very different and... I always felt a little bit black sheep being like I don't feel [like I fit in]. So, I think I think that's... I guess that's really the whole thing about being on the fringes, like that's probably what brought all us together. It was just that we were like, we're not, this is not a place where we knew we were not going to thrive in that environment.

Domain 2: Bible Belt Culture

As this study aimed to examine LGBTQ allied experiences as they occur within the context of the Bible Belt region of the United States, participants made many thoughtful observations of the communities that they either live in currently, or spent the majority of their lives in.

Two typical categories related to LGBTQ visibility and safe spaces included, (a) I observe lacking LGBTQ visibility within the community, and (b) I notice progressive “urban bubbles” (e.g. liberal leaning communities within a broader conservative region). Regarding visibility, one participant, who had moved to the Bible Belt after growing up in the Northeast, commented on how much less prevalent LGBTQ visibility is in the South compared to her hometown. She described her observations of people’s reactions to seeing affection between same sex couples in public spaces, noting, “People in the South... they're not used to seeing
Another participant commented on how she has observed minimal LGBTQ visibility in the South impacted people she’s known:

A lot of people grew up and they didn't know – they didn't personally know – any gay lesbian trans bi-people. They didn't know any of what that even was except what they were being told at church, which was that those were bad people.

Typically, participants described urban cities as being quite different from suburbs and small towns in regard to LGBTQ visibility. One participant commented that she experienced her current city as having some significant cultural differences compared to the smaller town she grew up in, noting, “In cities, you notice visible resistance to the homophobia that is more common in rural areas, through signage in business windows, gender-neutral bathrooms and city policies promoting gender identity inclusivity.” Another participant expanded on this notion and surmised that the migration of LGBTQ people and liberal minded people to urban cities contributes to the lacking visibility within her own Bible Belt community. She shared, “…inside the cities, things are more liberal and open, and people are more accepting, and it seems that most gay and lesbian people are drawn into the cities and out of the suburbs and smaller towns like mine.”

Categories related to prejudice varied in frequency. Generally, participants stated, I observe frequent examples of heterosexism (including homophobia, transphobia and sexism). One participant commented, “In the Bible Belt there are a lot of –ists, -obias and –isms.” Another participant shared examples of heterosexism in her church growing up, stating, “… they weren’t letting women like join certain parts of the church or like run sermons and they weren’t letting gay couples join the church.” A few participants discussed the role of heterosexist norms within heterosexual dating culture, with one participant commenting, “People believe in more like standard gender roles and that like, the man's still like, you know, do all the courting and like
be the breadwinner and all that stuff.” Another participant shared examples of sexism within the workforce, reporting, “I’ve been called ‘little girl’ at work, and had male colleagues who openly question a woman’s ability to be a mother and a professional.” Another participant commented on heterosexist male expectations and the repercussions of not upholding these expectations. She shared, “Boys and men are expected to be masculine and are vulnerable to bullying and being called “fag” when they do not present in a traditionally masculine manner.” As they reflected on daily acts of prejudice, participants also typically noted, *I observe prevalent problematic racism.* One participant noted, “I encounter more racial ignorance than gender ignorance overall.”

In a typical category, participants reported *I observe prevalent microaggressions.* Participants referenced microaggressions directly—one participant noted, “There are a lot of microaggressions against LGBTQ people here.” Participants also offered potential explanations for the prevalence of this type of offense such as, “People don’t realize that what they’re saying is offensive most of the time, because they haven’t been taught anything else”; and, “covert homophobia is more common because if you’re not outward about your prejudice than how can people judge you for it?” Finally, participants gave several examples of microaggressions they hear in the Bible Belt including, “The phrase ‘love the sinner hate the sin’ is used frequently”; “[regarding homosexuality] people will say things like, ‘it’s unnatural’”; “Some people will say things like, ‘Hey I like watching them [LGBTQ individuals] on TV but I don’t want them to be my neighbor or my friend’”; and, “‘Oh no, she can’t be gay, she’s too pretty!’

Four categories *related to religion* in the Bible Belt emerged. Generally, participants noted, *I observe people using religious explanations for acts of social exclusion, prejudice, and judgment.* Some reflections on this phenomenon include: “A lot of judgmental attitudes seem to come from organized religion”; and, “In the Bible Belt, if people think you’re doing something
wrong in God’s eyes, you are likely to be excluded.” One woman cited this tendency amongst churchgoers as her reasoning for distancing herself from organized religion. She reported, “I don’t go because I found that people act so differently within and outside of the church.”

*I notice pressure to participate in the Christian faith* emerged as a typical category. Participants often noted rigid social expectations regarding church attendance, “My whole life I spent hearing that like you gonna' burn in hell if you're not in church, every Sunday.” Another participant watched her children’s experience of this growing up in the Bible Belt, she noted, “All their friends went to church every week and Bible studies. It was a part of their social life.”

*I observe pervasive visibility of Christianity in my community* was slightly less common as a variant category. One participant noted, “There are churches on every corner.” Another participant noted how Christianity is interwoven into everyday life, stating, “It's just a mindset. God, country, and then family.” In another variant category, participants reported, *I notice people making universal assumptions of Christianity*. One participant stated, “It’s very hard to find someone who does not identify as Christian here.” Another said, “People will assume you are Christian. It’s common to ask you what church you go to when you first meet.”

Two categories *related to politics* in the Bible Belt emerged. A typical number of participants reported that *conservative political leanings are prevalent* in the region. One participant reflected on the political leanings of her peers in an academic course she took when she was younger, stating, “On the first day we took like a test where it was like you're more liberal or more conservative. And I was by far the most liberal person in the class.” Another participant shared an anecdote that implied attachments to conservative beliefs can be quite intense. She noted, “The Bible Belt is very conservative, politically and culturally… I recently put a sign in my yard to endorse a democratic candidate and it was stolen repeatedly.” Less
common was a variant category in which participants stated *regional politics are directly linked to Christianity*. One participant explicitly stated, “religion dictates politics.” Another noted that the Pastor from a prominent church in her community recently won a big political race.

Two categories emerged *related to social norms* in the Bible Belt. In a general category, each participant relied upon their own unique descriptors of *observing rampant “personalism” in my community*. Essayist Loyal Jones (1997) coined the term “personalism” to describe social norms and Barton (2011) defines “personalism” in the Bible Belt as “the desire to fit in, to get along with one’s neighbors, to not offend, to present the social façade of harmony and good humor” (p.84). Participants in this study described social norms in the Bible Belt in a manner synonymous with this term. One participant used another expression to explain trends in social behavior as she has observed in the Bible Belt:

> There’s a country club mentality, where instead of realizing that doors should be open, people of similar backgrounds stick together, but everyone feels like they barely “got in” so once they are a part of the group they feel a pressure to keep their mouths shut.

Another participant elaborated on how this manifests colloquially:

> There’s no room for any differences here, people want others to conform to their views instead of opening up to other people’s experiences… People try to keep it friendly and say things like “Bless your heart” when they’re really being mean. Being raised here definitely taught me to avoid confrontation and to be less direct.

One participant referenced these cultural norms as part of “Southern etiquette”:

> Southern etiquette calls for people to be polite and respectful, keep certain things private and avoidance of conflict... It’s classic Bible Belt culture, “you have to believe this because we believe this”.

One participant commented on how the pressure to “fit in” has influenced her personally:

> People don’t often talk about controversial topics here. In the Bible Belt, I have often felt silenced by my fears of what other people are thinking about me - there is a lot of pressure to fit in.

Finally, the following participant described how the high value placed on “getting along” could
silence topics regarding the LGBTQ community:

Generally, in the Bible Belt people tend keep things surface level and not delve too deep. Culturally, there are things you “just don’t talk about” like sexual orientation.

In a typical category, a majority of participants stated, I notice pervasive promotion of a “traditional” lifestyle. In this case, participants referenced social elevation of “traditional” gender roles, the institution of opposite-sex marriage, and the importance of having a family. As one participant described, “There is social pressure to follow [a] certain life trajectory, getting married after college, looking for a partner if you’re single.” Another participant noted, “It’s a hard place for anybody who is not perceived as the cookie cutter, white picket fence ‘norm’, White, straight, cis and Christian. A certain way of living is expected from you.”

Domain 3: Current cultural factors influencing LGBTQ advocacy

As participants reflected on their developmental process and how their allied interventions have evolved over time, they commented on several cultural shifts that have impacted that process.

Participants frequently referenced the 2016 presidential election, and three variant categories related to cultural shifts following the 2016 presidential election emerged. Participants noted that the results of the election exposed rampant apathy regarding civil rights and equality. One participant captured this succinctly stating, “The election revealed that people will prioritize economic values over civil rights and equality.” Another woman commented on the emotional impact of this realization, noting, “The Trump election was very traumatic for my family, it was alarming to see how much of the community would vote for a candidate who uses hate speech regularly.”

A variant number of participants also noticed political tensions leading to increased frequency of political discussion, debates, and arguments within their communities. One
participant noted, “Since the election, there’s been increased media coverage and I notice people talk about politics more and there are more arguments.” In the third variant category related to the election, participants noted an increase in discrimination and expressions of prejudice. One participant compared recent efforts to diminish LGBTQ rights as similar to reactions of the women’s movement:

There’s actually a book called Backlash and it's about women's rights. And this is kind of a classic, it's old but she [author] kind of walks through how every time women would get certain rights then there would be a backlash. And really you know it's well researched and I think maybe that's kind of the same thing we are seeing with LGBTQ rights because you know, why are we having bathroom bills in the state of Texas? That's not an issue. It is absolutely not an issue. But that way they can... it's backlash but then again, it's also a platform to raise money for this candidate, raise money for this non-profit, that sort of thing.

Another participant shared her observations on a college campus in the region: “I have seen prejudice against some groups, such as international students, worsen.” One woman believed that the outcome of the election had resulted in more cultural permissiveness for proclamations of prejudice: “We have a president who promotes hate and now White nationalists who used to be in the closet seem to have a platform to promote hate also, while hiding behind religion.”

In a more hopeful tone, four categories emerged related to progressive cultural changes impacting the LGBTQ community and advocacy. Three typical categories included: increased visibility of LGBTQ community and individuals in media, social media and internet, increased visibility of LGBTQ community and individuals within my community, and an increase in LGBTQ rights, often specifically referencing marriage equality as an example of specific legislative and policy change. One participant described how she has seen this increased visibility impact people in her community, stating, “Media has also helped with gay visibility and increased people’s curiosity and interest in education.” Another participant specifically referenced the impact of Caitlyn Jenner coming out, noting, “Caitlyn Jenner’s transition made transgender
issues a major topic and older people I know seem to be working to better understand these concepts in part as a reaction to this exposure.” Participants both noted that visibility had increased within their communities and provided some examples of how this was occurring. One woman noted seeing more signage in public places, she noted “more stores are putting up pride flags and safe note stickers in shops.” Another woman had observed increasing visibility within her field, stating, “These days, I know a lot of people in the country music industry who identify openly [as LGBTQ] and are thriving.”

Less common was the variant category in which participants noted gender roles are becoming more fluid. One participant stated, “I’ve noticed that the traditional roles of family, where male is the breadwinner and female is the homemaker, have been changing.” Another noted progress in the professional sphere, sharing, “I believe women are more accepted today in my traditionally male field, and in other professions as well.”

**Domain 4: LGBTQ Allied Identity Development**

When asked how they came to see themselves as an LGBTQ ally, participants reflected on a number of memorable experiences and influential people who guided their process. Congruent with Herek’s contact theory (1988, 2000, 2002), which highlights the value of close relationships with openly identifying LGB individuals in one’s allied development, the greatest number of categories in this domain related to informal education through contact with LGBTQ individuals and community. In the one general category that emerged, participants noted close contact with LGBTQ individuals has influenced my LGBTQ affirmative attitudes. While participants cited this contact as occurring at various points across their lifespan—within the context of different relationships, and taking place in a number of different spaces—participants consistently reported that interaction with openly identifying LGBTQ individuals
was central to their development as a person who strives to engage in daily behaviors congruent with their LGBTQ affirmative attitudes. For example, one woman reflected that she has never forgotten the first time she saw two women kiss, and how this experience contextualized homosexuality for her:

This is weird but I remember when I saw my first lesbian kiss I was in a theatre production and I was like 19 years old. And one of the lead women, I had no idea, I mean I knew about people being gay, but I had no idea that this lead woman was, and her girlfriend came backstage after and they were like having this very passionate kiss. And I remember thinking, like well that's kind of interesting. But it wasn't... I mean that was many years ago. And... And that was kind of I don't want to say eye opening because that's not the right word. It's more like well that's interesting.

Other participants noted that growing up with early exposure to LGBTQ individuals/community meant that a broad range of sexual orientations had always been familiar to them. One woman shared:

My mom played softball when I was a kid and she had some really good friends that were lesbians. And so maybe that you know when I think about it, maybe that's what it was, where I didn't think it was that weird. My parents never acted like that was weird. And they hung out with them and you know even after the games and stuff that we would all go eat. So, nothing was ever strange about that to me.

Several participants noted that their involvement in the arts has brought many LGBTQ people into their lives. One woman noted, “So, I've always worked kind of in the entertainment industry and there's a lot of gay people in that.” Another shared:

I’ve been involved with theatre since high school, so I’ve pretty much always had friends who were gay. In fact, most of the gay guys that I knew would like me first, because you know and they're still like questioning and like they know but they're trying because they're in the Bible Belt, and we went to a Christian school. I would find that I would be, I guess because I was in theater with them and all that stuff, I was the girl that they were like maybe I can date her, and it would be okay.

In a typical category, participants reported I have learned a lot through supporting a loved one throughout their coming out process. One participant noted that having a good friend from high school come out helped solidify her changing beliefs and allied identity when she was
in college. She shared, “Having someone close to me come out… strengthened my belief that people would not fight so hard and expose themselves to backlash if LGBTQ identities were not innate.” Another participant described how her friend’s coming out process facilitated her own educational process as well, stating, “He began kind of the process of coming out and I was there for all of that… So that was a lot of like education I guess.” Another participant noted having various friends come out in high school. She described one friend’s process as particularly impactful for her, noting, “We would sit together and talk and just cry together. You see, his parents were very, very religious, very, very intense. And they sent him to this conversion therapy camp.”

In another typical category, participants noted I have learned a lot through meaningful discussions with LGBTQ people - hearing their stories. One participant noted that her friend’s stories have deepened her understanding of LGBTQ concerns and the need for ongoing progress:

I keep learning, like you know, with the person who introduced us, like learning that she can’t go over to her partner’s family’s house, I was shocked. I just like, did not, or my other friend here in this, in this same building, who can’t bring his partner to his grandparents’ house. Like I just think, I just… that's what I mean about, I feel like people should be this way, because like, it still, and that’s, I learned this year, shocks me to my core how these struggles are ongoing, even though so often people seem to keep these things private.

Another participant commented:

Honestly, I kind of never thought about [issues related to sexual and gender identities] in depth until I started living with people who are out… I feel like that was the first time I ever really had an actual conversation about it instead of just like, oh that person is gay. Like, it was more like, oh WOW like. You went through so much more than I did… I never had to like worry if my parents were gonna’ still love me, or if my friends are still going to like me, or if I could hang around straight men and them be OK with me, knowing that I'm not trying to get in their pants kind of a thing and - There's just a lot of things like I never thought about.
I have learned a lot through firsthand observations of prejudice against LGBTQ people also emerged as a typical category. One woman noted that frequenting gay bars with her LGBTQ friends raised her awareness regarding the discrimination they faced:

The people I started hanging out with the most... we were constantly going to the gay bars on 4th Street in Austin. And so, I would experience people who were just walking down the street like being awful to people I was with. It was the first time I started seeing this in a real way, and I was like twenty-seven. So, it was either, I mean I was obviously just not paying attention before that.

Another participant described an incident at a pride march that was eye-opening for her:

I remember one time, I was at pride with my childhood friend… and we were just kind of, I think we're coming in and out of some bar and there were all those people on the street corner with the insane signs, just saying crazy stuff about religious stuff and just saying how, basically they didn't agree with, you know, LGBTQ. And um, that was the biggest blatant thing that I kinda ever saw. I think and that was one of the biggest things I was just like, that's unreal, like I just can't believe how somebody could be that rude to somebody, d'you know what I mean? Just not even, to have no compassion or understanding or even like open mind.

Three categories emerged related to other informal educational opportunities. Participants typically reported, I learned a lot through consumption of LGBTQ-friendly materials of various mediums. They discussed books, music, TV shows, movies, plays, YouTube videos and social media accounts that had been meaningful in expanding their perspectives and influencing their allied development. One woman discussed a book she read that she found helpful in reconciling her Christian beliefs with her then established LGBTQ affirmative attitudes:

There was a book that I read, called Changing Our Mind. It was like amazing. The author was this theologian, really well known and respected. He wrote books on homosexuality and how it's wrong, and then turned around and wrote this book, saying that he was completely wrong… The first part was just about how we need to stop being so judgmental and just be accepting and like, showing statistics of how people aren't accepted into churches and how the suicide rates for LGBTQ community people are skyrocketing and a lot of it is because of people who are in the church and people who are not accepting them... And then in the second part, he's like, now I'm going to go into
the theology of why I don't believe it's in the Bible and he breaks down the verses used against LGBTQ people.

Another participant noted that her development as an ally began when, “I kind of discovered the internet and like, books that really challenged my thinking and music that really challenged my thinking”, and that one TV show helped expand her views on sexuality specifically, she shared, “My friend and roommate at the time, who’s gay, cliché or not, he introduced me to Sex in the City and we would watch the DVDs together.”

Participants typically stated, *I learned a lot through discussions with peers exploring social justice related issues.* When asked about any standout experiences related to her LGBTQ allied identity development, one woman stated:

I think it was just being on my own and probably talking to people like my friends who also identified as straight just about our beliefs and stuff. I think it was just listening to other people's opinions about their politics and their beliefs that made me more open-minded.

Another woman noted how important discussions with supportive peers has been to her within her advocacy work and allied development:

I have a really great group of girlfriends and it's like every time we get together I think that we all are the types of people like we just feel things really intensely and like with all of ourselves. And so, it's like just everything going on in the world right now. We just we will get worked up and talk about it and then it's like we always in like. But. Here we are. We just got to keep going and like. You know. Do what we're doing. Like spread the word and just try to be nice to people you know… We support each other, educate one another and share updates about upcoming events and ways to contribute to social causes.

Typically, participants reported *exposure to new and different cultures expanding perspective made me a better ally.* One participant stated:

See, I think you need to surround your people with other – Surround yourself with different types of people. Otherwise you get stuck in a bubble and everyone has the same opinion, they all want to do the same thing and how boring is that! You know, you got to expose yourself to, as much as you possibly can. We're not on this earth very long and so you might as well expose yourself to – you know, go travel go - go see how other people live, their religions, their – I mean it's just – that’s been so valuable in my life!
Another participant explained how moving outside of the Bible Belt for a period of time broadened her perspective:

I guess I didn't really realize how much of the Bible Belt was ‘the Bible Belt’ until I moved away for a couple of years and then came back and realized like, WOW! …like for instance, growing up, I never realized how sexist and stuff things can be done here until I experienced something else… and then I came back and I would hear what people would be saying like on the street or anywhere and I was, and I’d be just like - oh OK! And it was the same way with other things, like LGBTQ, and with race, and all that kind of stuff. People just not realizing that what they're saying is offensive most of the time just because that's the conversation they've been having since they were little. Because from what I’ve seen, usually people who are born in the Bible Belt don't move away and perspectives aren’t challenged when that's kind of the only conversations they're having.

Less commonly, participants reported two variant categories related to formal education opportunities. In the first variant category discussed, participants noted I learned a lot through participation in classes, talks, programs, and groups with social justice related education. One woman described a program she had been involved with, and how experiences with this organization impacted her development as an ally:

One of the other things I'm involved in... something called Girls Rock Camp. It's a summer camp for girls, where we... our mission is to empower girls through music… And I think this experience has like changed... opened my eyes to a bunch of different things, even as far as LGB – um being an ally – I learned a lot from it in general but last year I went to the conference and so we go out to this like camp, like with cots and everything… With leaders from camps from all over the world, and so like, Japan and Brazil and all these different places and like, you introduce yourself with your pronoun, and just like all of those kinds of things, where I was like, ooooooooh-kay! This is new for me and it was a challenge, but by the end, I got it! At the conference, I received all of this education and took part in discussions about things that I hadn't really grappled with before.

Another participant noted how influential introductory college courses were for her:

You take your first sociology class and you're like *explosion sound*, mind blown. And then… you take a psychology class and you like, learn all these things about – I just, I guess like the more psychology I took and the more I've experienced things, it just made me so empathetic. And to me it's like... who am I to judge anybody?
In another variant category, participants reported *I learned a lot from (an) allied mentor(s) in an official position*. Two participants specifically referenced allied mentors in the workforce. One woman noted a boss who guided her in her allied efforts:

The principal at the school I taught, I mean he was the one who coached me through like talking to these kids who were being awful. You know, and he was a champion of these kids who were brave enough to be out at a young age.

Another woman spoke fondly of a colleague who served as a mentor to her before he passed away a couple of years ago:

He was the most significant mentor in my life… The minute I met him, I just fell in love with him. And then, anytime professionally I needed anything I called him… He was from a different era, and so I knew he was gay, but he kept his life and the precious love of his life separate from everything in his entire career... Anyway, I watched him – I watched him train his leaders. I watched the way he treated people. I watched the way that he took a good long pause, giggled, and said well. And then he would explain to people why everything they just said was inappropriate and discriminatory and uh, and just all of that. So, if my life was a charm bracelet, he would be on my bracelet.

One participant reflected on how her high school theatre teacher took risks to promote LGBTQ affirmative attitudes at her otherwise conservative Christian school:

One specific teacher I had would talk openly about sexuality, and she probably would have gotten in trouble actually if anyone knew… Anyway, her best friend at the time, he had gone with her to a Christian university, but he left in the middle of the schooling there because of the fact that he just didn't feel represented. He felt judged. He was told not to be so flamboyant and all that kind of stuff. And so, I think because her friend went through that so hardcore, she wanted to make sure that before people even got to college that they felt OK. And so, I think that's why she would see it in some of the students and then we would all together talk about those things [sexuality]. And then also like there would be specific musicals that she took us to [that addressed sex and religion] … and we would all talk about the musical together.

Two categories emerged *related to education through personal role models*. Typically, participants reported *I had role models who promoted kindness / tolerance / empathy*. While quotes and cores statements within this category often reference LGBTQ individuals or other marginalized groups, they do not specifically reference promotion of social justice or advocacy
for equal rights. Rather, within this category participants are reflecting on a more general sense of humanity endorsed by role models, and how this ultimately promoted their own sense of social justice within their allied development.

In reflection of her LGBTQ affirmative attitudes, one participant recounted the values her mother instilled in her:

Something I got from my mom, she taught me from when I was very little, like whenever I'm interacting with people at a restaurant or at Starbucks or wherever we are like just being, trying to be really friendly and just making other people feel good. Like she's always like just always look to make people feel good. Compliment them on something you know genuine like they're working this job like. It was just always something that we learned to do watching her and mirroring her… and she was always especially mindful of people on the margins.

Another woman shared a story of acceptance within her family. Her paternal grandfather was estranged from the family after he came out as gay. Her mother had insisted that her father reconcile with his father. This story had sent a clear message to the participant about kindness and acceptance being prioritized, even when in conflict with conservative religious beliefs:

And then when you learn about my grandfather, and then it's like, oh this stuff happened to him because he came out in the 50s... and like... you know my mother was kind of a frustrating person, but she forced my dad to reconcile with him when they were 20 or 21, like you can't, we're not getting married until you talk to this man... Even as a religious person, my mom is like, I believe there's a God, but I don't believe what this church is telling me about how I should feel about this kind of person.

This participant went on to remark on the lasting impact of her mother’s resolve:

I think in becoming aware of my grandfather’s sexuality really opened my eyes. I realized, I know somebody like this and that's somebody I love deeply. And then learning about like how... I was one of his only grandchildren that was able to talk to him because my dad was one of the only one of his children that still spoke to him... And so, I think that was like the first time that it was like well then this can't be wrong.

Another participant cited her mother’s kindness as an influential factor in her allied development. She noted that her mother modeled kindness and acceptance of LGBTQ people in a manner that resonated with her:
I remember there was this guy in my school, he was in my brother’s grade and he came out I think in middle school or high school… And he’s… always loved my mom… He played football with my brother… and um she was just always kind to people, and was especially kind to him. And so, I know for him he always loved that. And that was like one of um, not the first indication but definitely one of the many times that I saw my parents like saying, "That's OK. We accept everybody."

Less commonly, in a variant category, participants reported *I had role models who promoted liberal values / equal rights*. In this category, participants specifically noted role models focus on civil rights and equality. One participant noted having grown up in a conservative area but with liberal parents, stating, “I was a really unique case growing up because I lived in a small town, but my family was always democratic and always like was voting for equal rights and all these different things.” Another woman shared that her mother’s political leanings were infused into her upbringing:

She was very always very liberal on her views, and she taught that like everybody is equal and you should love everybody and that you need to like that there are different lifestyles and there are different ways to live your life. So, I think that that was like that was the biggest thing that my mom taught me. And then just exposing me to stuff.

**Domain 5: Sense of Allied Identity**

Participants for this study were nominated by LGBTQ individuals as a heterosexual and cis-gender person who supports equal civil rights, gender equality, LGB social movements, and challenges homophobia as it occurs, but were not required to personally identify as allies. Therefore, there was some variation in regard to participant’s personal identities and their sense of confidence as an ally. This domain captures participant reports regarding their reactions to being nominated as an ally, the evolution of their relationships to this identity and their sense of self-efficacy as an ally.

Nine categories emerged in this domain. Two categories are related to response to allied **identification**. Typically, participants noted *I am honored / proud to be named an ally*. In a
variant category, participants stated I think that all people should be “allies”. One participant reflected on her reaction to having been nominated:

I identify as an ally, but it’s awkward because I feel like, well you should have a lot of people who are like that, who identify with the definition. So, when my friend told me they nominated me to do this, I'm like, I mean that's fine but like I don't think that it's special because I feel like people should be that way.

When discussing their response to being nominated as an ally, another participant noted, “I don't know I just feel like that's being a human person. But I guess not everybody thinks that…”

Five categories related to sense of self-efficacy as an ally emerged. Typically, participants noted that their confidence as allies increased with age. In another typical category, participants stated, I sometimes feel under-qualified or as though I am not doing enough. One participant reported:

I guess I'll always feel like. A little bit like oh I could do even more because everyone, anyone can do more. You know I definitely could do more and stuff like that. I definitely want to do more. So yeah, I guess I'm – I'm someone who always feels like a little bit like just my personality, like am I doing enough. What more can I do?

Another participant noted questioning whether or not she was enough of an authority to speak on behalf of “allies”:

So, that's the only reason I feel uncomfortable talking about this, because it's like, why… why is this hard to find? If that makes sense… And am I really an authority? I am always wondering, am I being intersectional enough? Am I being an ally enough? That kind of thing.

One participant explained how missed opportunities stay with her, and recounted a particular instance in college in which she wishes she had done things differently:

There were definitely times where I had an opinion, but I didn't say it and my opinion could have helped someone else, and like that crushed my soul for days for not speaking up… For example, in one class we were discussing things you would be willing to do and not willing to do on stage and film, and this is a Christian school so it was like things like would you do nudity, would you do a female and female kiss, male and male kiss like that kind of a thing. When it came to me like, I was too scared to say anything… I had friends there at the time who were not out of the closet who also lied. And it was just one
of those things where like, as an ally, I should have been able to say something that would make them feel more comfortable in their own skin kind of a thing.

In a variant category, participants reported *I experience anxiety about “getting it wrong.”* One participant discussed her experience learning to use they/them pronouns. When asked if this new experience caused her any anxiety, she responded:

> About getting it wrong? Oh 100% and I definitely have. Mis-gendering a person is a nightmare to me. Like even a child, like at a school that hasn't told me their pronouns and I'm like, "oh she went that way" and they're like "that's a boy" and I'm like "oh! I really feel bad about that" you know the child didn't hear me, but you know, the teacher did and it's like, I feel terrible.

Another participant shared that she can be self-conscious when advocating for a marginalized group she is not a part of; she shared, “Saying something wrong is my biggest fear because you don't want to preach for someone and then be preaching the wrong thing. And it's not preaching just like - speaking I guess, but yeah.”

Two typical categories *related to the ongoing evolution of allied development* emerged. These two categories discuss the ongoing self-exploration components of allied identity and development. First, participants typically stated, *I consistently evaluate my efficacy, own my imperfections and mistakes, and recognize my need for ongoing education and development.*

One woman noted that as she continues to become more confident starting discussions and intervening, she also recognized a need to continue to develop more “tools” for her “toolbox” of strategies:

> There's been multiple times where like I've started the conversation and then someone says one thing that shuts it down but it's like I know that's wrong but I don't know how, to like, convey what I need to, to like prove that – disprove what they said. Or counteract it… As I'm coming more confrontational it's good, but I definitely wish that I had more strategies in my brain.

In another example of self-reflection, a participant reflected on an area of growth within her allied efforts, as she struggled to recall examples of heterosexism within her community. The
participant noted that she may benefit from instigating deeper conversations with her LGBTQ friends about experiences of discrimination to learn how to better support them:

…it is definitely something that you know I would love to talk more with some of my close friends about. I feel like every time we hang out we always talk about the good things the good times. It's never like "Hey, did somebody disrespect you today?" you know so maybe that's something that you know I need to dig deeper with them and you know… I just feel like there's so much to learn and know.

Another woman noted her willingness to ask questions as having been greatly beneficial to her in her allied development:

I grew up playing soccer, and there were lots of lesbian women I played with and I think because I was around them so much that I learned to understand and I would ask questions. I think a lot of people were just afraid to ask questions. They just thought it was some - some - something that you should just be at arm's length about, they’d say “I know it [sexual orientation] but I don't want to ask any questions or have you in my life.” Not me! I want to understand, I wanted to know the women I played with, so if I had a question, I just asked!

This interviewee demonstrated this curiosity and humility within the course of the interview as well, as she asked the interviewer for clarity about the LGBTQ acronym:

…frankly the acronym. I Screw it up! Because they added Q. [laughing] So what's the difference between queer? And being gay? [interviewer provided overview] Oh, ok! Because that was just added... so now we have lesbian, gay, bisexual, T – transgender and Q – queer. I see how the Q opens things up! But that one is new for me, we just would not have said queer when I was young, so I’m learning.

In another typical category, participants reported that it is through acknowledgment and understanding of my own privilege I have become a better ally. One participant noted that watching an LGBTQ focused film with LGBTQ friends, and then discussing the themes and listening to their stories helped bring her own privilege into her awareness:

And I was like insane because we had just finished watching Boys on the Side and I was like weeping… I was like, I just don't know how like you guys do it… And then they just told me stories about growing up and stuff and then that made me cry more… But I don't know I feel like the straight thing is it's always been ingrained so like I've never had a moment of just being like that is it. I don't know. There's never been a moment for the straight thing for me where I realized anything about it. But for my friends, coming to
understand their sexual orientation wasn’t so simple, and I think that was the big turning point for me.

Another woman reflected on an experience that prompted her to confront her privilege:

…at camp, they do caucuses, and it's like, I don't fit into any of them. Because just being a woman in Girls Rock land is not even enough... like there's the people of color caucus, here's the non-abled body caucus, the LGBTQ caucus, and it's like... at first, I felt a little bit bad. Like, oh I don't have a small group of people I get to meet with. And then I thought, oh yeah! My very existence is that group of people… And then I'm like, oh everything is not about what my experience is, right? Like all of those people are my friends on Facebook now because of - I met them at the conference, and it's like this was like a special space for them. Because in real life they don't - outside of this, they're not getting the small group of people that they get to meet with [at camp].

Another participant noted that she had an aunt that encouraged her to use her sensitivity and her privilege wisely:

I have an aunt that I said it was “the gift” when you can realize that somebody has got a difference that they are not comfortable with revealing but that they're treated differently. And so, like if God gives you “the gift” to recognize that then you have to go out of your way to help those people.

Domain 6: Advocacy Behaviors

The sixth and most robust domain describes the various ways in which participants assert themselves as allies, or advocate for LGBTQ individuals and civil rights. The first ten categories are related to overarching intervention style. As these are fairly straightforward, quotes are not included in their introduction. Rather, these styles are evident within the more particular interventions participants noted using, which are described throughout the rest of this domain.

The first four typical categories that emerged include: (a) I take a calm, gentle, non-judgmental approach, (b) I use humor, (c) I encourage perspective taking, and (d) I share concrete information/logical arguments. The remaining six categories were variant in frequency: (a) I use of specific/personal narratives, (b) I use open-ended questions, (c) I tailor my approach to audience, (d) I avoid debate or preaching, (e) I use social media as a platform, and (f) I notice
emotional persuasion to be effective. Individual styles varied in a manner congruent with participant personality. Each participant endorsed a unique combination of these styles, as advocates must develop an approach that suites them.

Four categories emerged related to confrontation of prejudice. Typically, participants noted that they confront prejudice by correcting heteronormative assumptions that I hear. One participant shared an example of having done this with her mother:

I went to a wedding of my two friends and I came back and my mom was like, "oh did the bride look beautiful?" And I was like, *James and *Tom? {laughs} and she was like, "ya, is *James the bride?" I was like, "it was two guys mom!" and she was like, "oh I just thought it was a weird name."

In another story referencing generational differences, a participant told a story about gently challenging a coworker’s perspective:

…one of my coworkers the other day, we were at her house, and a TV show was on and there was like a gay character. She's like "you know... In every single TV show now... they feel the need to put a gay couple or a gay character." And she's like, "To me it is just kinda’ ridiculous because like... in my real life that's not how it is." And I was like "well... for me, I would say that is representative. I have several friends who are gay, and my husband’s best friend from high school just came out recently too.” My coworker is older, so her experience has been different, but I just shared my experience to highlight that things are changing.

Another participant noted the power of subtle corrections:

I've got two daughters getting married... People would ask about my daughters’ future husbands and then I would say you know my daughter *Sarah is marrying *Mallory, and just very matter of fact. And I think maybe if you, if people just normalize things more, that people may start to think differently.

In a variant category, participants reported, I bring bullying/harassment to the attention of authorities that may be able to help. Within the examples provided, participants noted being discouraged by the outcomes of these efforts. For instance, one participant discussed reporting incidents of bullying at her children’s school to the principal:
...through my three children I've watched as other students have been bullied in elementary school because they presented outside of gender norms... there's been times when I would bring it to the attention, behind closed doors of the principal, or the guidance counselor, whoever might be able to affect or do something about the situation... I didn't see that much of a difference. Now there was, they did do like some little program. I know they cooked up like, a fake program where um there were discussions... just about sensitivity and, because it's a Catholic school I think they felt weird about how to handle LGBTQ related bullying.

Another participant shared an instance in which she tried to have someone removed from a bar for harassment:

...we were with two guys who were gay and dating and I was like dancing with them the whole time... And then all of a sudden, I see this guy sitting at a table pointing his camera phone at us. And I was like really disturbed by it, obviously. I was trying to figure out what he was recording, and it seemed like he was recording the two guys. I kept staring at him and I'd be like "you have to stop." And he just wouldn't. So, it didn't feel right. Yeah, it felt very creepy... and uncomfortable. And so, I went to the bartender, to ask this guy to leave because he was making everyone uncomfortable by recording them. In the end, he wasn’t asked to leave and we all just continued with our night, but the whole thing was unsettling to me.

In another variant category, participants noted, I confront individuals privately. In this category, participants noted that one-on-one discussions tend to be more impactful, as this helps to create a safe space to discuss with less interference related to defensiveness or shame. A variant number of participants reported, I reference rules and standards when necessary. One participant discussed the value of written standards when working with sororities on college campuses:

I worked for the National PanHellenic Conference as a consultant traveling to sororities to try to help the campus identify inappropriate or risky behaviors that were going on there and then come up with an action plan to help implement... So, sometimes we would have to address some people not wanting - not allowing women to bring other women as their date for socials or formals. And of course, there were, there were lesbian women in all of those sororities, it's whether or not they choose or trust their group enough to discuss or let them into part of their life... This didn't make the cookie cutter NPC report on the action plan, but I'd figure out within those respective campuses, groups, like the advisors, who were the advocates, and a lot of times before I go to the campus I would print off the NPC group sorority values and some of their policies and procedures, and so I'd have like a big manual thing and so I would show them their exact thing. Like, clearly
this should not be an issue because, and I’d point to the manual, and have you looked at your university website?

Another participant coaches teachers regarding incorporation of social justice related material.

When met with resistance, she noted an instance of falling back on standards:

...Martin Luther King Day last year, [some teachers I coach] were like, "oh we don't want to talk about segregation, like second graders don't need to deal with that"... um... and I'm like, "well is it in the standards?" And so that was really easy for me to be like, "yes! it's in the standards, you have to talk about that with them."... in that particular instance, I had the specific reference, and they ended up adding [segregation] back in [to the curriculum]. Cause the resource they were told to give by the curriculum people, who are in this building, had it had the word segregation in it, like, you HAVE to talk about it, they're second graders.

There were two categories related to provoking discussions and promoting awareness.

In a typical category, participants stated, I provoke discussion aimed at challenging beliefs and raising awareness about injustice. One participant described this idea quite succinctly, stating, “I try to interject a different opinion or try to ask somebody questions to kind of engage them into an actual conversation about the idea when people share opinions that seem close minded to me.” She went on to describe a particular instance at work, where she was able to use this strategy effectively to broaden her coworker’s perspective:

...at work like this girl she was talking about how the Boy Scouts are going to start allowing girl members. She was like I just can't, I just wish things would be traditional. And I was like... what's your idea of traditional, you know? And it's like, she just was like, some things are for boys and some things are for girls. And I was like, well it means a lot more to be an Eagle Scout than it does to be a Senior. Did you even know that that was the like highest tier of a Girl Scout? And she was like, well no. And I was like, but you know an Eagle Scout is right? And she was like, Yeah. So, I was like, wouldn't you rather put that on your resume then if you were a girl? And people might take you more seriously for sticking with that like all through high school? And she was just like yeah, I guess...

One participant recounted a discussion she had recently had with her father who had historically voted for republican candidates:
I printed out the republican primary ballot for him, and so I was reading the prompts. And I was like, so these prompts don't mean you're voting on them, it just means like, I agree with my party about this. And so, I specifically pointed out the party’s stand on the trans bathroom bill one is, saying, this one’s insane. He was like why do you think that, and I was like, "well they won't put any restrictions on guns to stop killing kids and like nothing is happening in bathrooms so like why? What is the point of this? This is just about discrimination." And he was like, "oh I see your point" and so, like those kinds of conversations do happen.

Another participant noted that she relies on spontaneous and casual experiences, such as watching TV with friends, to provoke discussion about the prejudice inherent in a heterosexist society:

It's more like those very subtle conversations with people where you – You know we're watching TV and people see two girls make out and they say how uncomfortable that makes them, it's kind of just like having a conversation that isn't judgmental or aggressive but just kind of like expressing my view about how I disagree with them in a calm and gentle way… I’ll say something like, “I think it's great that they're showing more visibility for the gay community in media, because that's something that is new and hasn't always happened. And if we pretended that gay relationships didn't exist just to make other people comfortable that's oppression. And I just think that that I think it's really cool that they're showing that on TV.”

Typically, participants reported, I provide education about LGBTQ culture and terminology. Participants noted that they do their best to educate people in their lives. One woman captured several themes participants noted within this educator role:

I think transgender issues or non-binary like ideas like ideas around non-binary or, like no, just gender neutral like stuff… just gender in general I think that that's hard for people to understand. And then also like the idea of like toxic masculinity and the idea of a lot of feminist issues, those are the things that I end up talking about more now. But I try to take that approach of like let's just talk about it for a second and then I will try to like educate them on at least what I know, and then maybe try to find like an article or something to send them or you know, whatever. And I actually have had a lot of people ask me things because I'm also very vocal, like on social media. I share a lot of stuff. And just to be like, hey if you don't know about this, here's a great podcast or here's a great article you should read about it you know. And so, I think a lot of people will come to me and be like I don't understand this, and I just like what do you, like we'll just have a good conversation about it.

Another participant described her experiences in the role of educator:
I think with my friends who are older... I think transgender, transsexual, drag, they don't understand that as much. But they don't disagree with it. I think sometimes they just have trouble with the pronouns and things like that. I definitely feel like I've educated a couple of my friends in that way.

One woman noted that she finds herself in the role of educator frequently within her allied efforts:

I feel like another like a big role of mine has just been education... There're levels to the questions you get, up to the beginning, is like, so who's the girl and who is the boy. So, you gotta’ be like OK that's, you know, there's a myth... Some people assume that when you say partner, then they also assume that you're gay – or other times it would be like, OK so transsexual versus transgender versus like – to all that stuff. And I had to be like, actually no, I don't think we can say tranny anymore. But like I think we can say this this and this... we're all, always like jokey about it but also like being sincere.

Four categories emerged related to general assertions of allied identity. Generally, participants noted I make my liberal beliefs and LGBTQ support known. Participants noted various means of making their LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes known to both LGBTQ individuals—who may be monitoring the behaviors of those around them to assess for safe spaces and people—and to cis-gender, straight individuals, whose perspective may be challenged indirectly as the culture around them shifts. For example, participants noted wearing clothing or posting signage that proclaim LGBTQ friendly messages. Participants also discussed publicly asserting their political leanings, if not discussing their beliefs in depth. One such woman shared, “I expect that people know I support LGBTQ equality because I openly identify as a liberal.”

Within this category, participants stated that they are also conscious not to censor themselves in regard to referencing their connections to LGBTQ loved ones and the community, even when—and perhaps, especially when—they know this may make those around them uncomfortable. One participant described this type of assertion as an effort to expand LGBTQ visibility within her network:
I use social media as a way just to share my life accurately as it is. These are important people in my life [referring to LGBTQ loved ones] ... And I feel good when I see people who I know are very conservative minded and stuff like that... will like my pictures of me with my sister and her partner. And I'm like, you know that's something! It's not, it's not revolutionary but it's like at least they can like maybe see people they know, who are not straight... I think it's all about like seeing other people's perspectives and some people, like because of how they grew up, maybe see things through a certain window. And I think one of the ways you can try to change people, it's not like arguing with them or trying to give them anything, it is just having them see a different person's perspective or view. Posting pictures with my sister and her partner, or of me attending LGBTQ events, is one way that I do that.

Participants also shared examples of making their beliefs known by vocalizing enthusiastic acceptance and support for LGBTQ individuals on a one-on-one basis. For example, one woman shared:

...I met a friend of a friend at a bar once, and she was talking about how she recently came out and I was just being like over the top like, “that is so cool that you're coming out, I’m so happy for you!” Like I was just be like so like loving about it because, I feel like I was like extra doing that, because I know in the South it's so hard, so much harder. And she was expressing how it was really hard for her and how she lost a few friends because of it. So, I feel like whenever I do meet people who I know are part of the community I just really want to do my best to support because they should feel love and acceptance.

Another woman noted keeping an eye out in her day-to-day life for opportunities to express her support to individuals:

If I see people that I suspect may be LGBTQ, like if they have a rainbow pin on at Starbucks for example, I always try to acknowledge that somehow, so that like – that's like a subtle way I can let them know like, I see you, I support you.

Two typical categories emerged related to assertions of allied identity. In the first, participants reported, I attend marches, rallies, pride and other LGBTQ affirming events. For the second typical category of this kind, participants stated, I vote and/or campaign for LGBTQ affirmative policy and politicians. Participants noted various acts of political activism to support equal rights for LGBTQ people. One woman recalled her one of her first experiences with this type of advocacy:
…when North Carolina had Amendment One and that was the one that was… going to make it more difficult for same-sex couples to get married. It was like an unnecessary bill that they were just doing to be rude about it anyway. UNC had a conniption trying to get people to vote it down… We all got T-shirts that were big rainbow-ey t-shirts and wore them to the voting polls in the county, and I just felt so proud.

In a final variant category related to assertions of allied identity, participants reported, *I introduce other straight, cis-gender people to queer affirming spaces/media.* For example, one woman described hosting a fundraiser that accomplished this goal of exposure:

I hosted a drag queen bingo. It was to benefit a foundation for the LGBT community. And it was, it was a fabulous time! I think everyone thinks it's a cool and different thing to do and you're actually donating money to a good cause. Without them - well you're not being confronted with something really, it’s more like slowly submerging them into [a different perspective] – And then they understand – because these drag queens! I mean they're just so talented! And it is – it's just a lot of fun. So, I try to do fun things to... take people out of their comfort zone and believe it or not I invited 12 straight women and all 12 of ‘em came! They were really into it, and they wanted to do it again!

Three categories emerged within the advocacy behaviors domain *related to creating safe and inclusive environments.* In a general category, participants noted being conscious of their potential influence on other straight and cis-gender individuals, as they reported instances in which *I model LGBTQ affirmative attitudes and advocacy.* These efforts do not necessarily require confrontation of prejudice or engaging deeper discussion, but instead reference living one’s life in a manner that is congruent with these ideals. Participants model affirmative attitudes and advocacy through the activities they participate in, the spaces they frequent, people they spend their time with, topics they discuss, and language they use, etc. While participants indicated varying degrees of intentionality and pervasiveness of such efforts, each participant noted instances of modeling LGBTQ affirmative attitudes and advocacy. Within predominantly straight spaces this modeling acts as a passive educational tactic with other cis-gender, heterosexual peers, while also helping to create safe environments that are inclusive of LGBTQ individuals and those currently exploring their gender and sexual orientation identities.
Typically, participants reported, *I am purposeful about my own use of language (use of pronouns / careful and thoughtful with word choice)* in order to convey respect. It has been noted above that participants work to explicitly educate others regarding LGBTQ culture and terminology; participants also noted making a conscious effort to facilitate the creation of safe spaces through intentional word choice. One woman discussed her efforts to practice and model appropriate use of “they” pronouns based on individual preference:

…I’ve worked hard to understand, like, oh you know… *Trey’s in the kitchen and they are making this thing and they needed help, you know and it was the first instance where I actually learned to refer to somebody as “they”. It took some getting used to and then I was like, ok, it is very important that I get that right because that is what they desire.

Finally, a variant number of participants reported, *I set clear boundaries regarding expectations for LGBTQ friendly speech and actions*. Within this category, participants discussed how they have used their authority in a variety of roles to create safe and inclusive environments. Participants discussed efforts with their own children, starting at home, to establish high standards for conscious speech and LGBTQ-friendly behaviors. One woman explained that it was important to her to begin this process early with her sons, “before they’re thrown out into the real world you know, and people are telling them like many people tell them that's wrong and that's bad.”

Another woman recalled being careful and intentional about the expectations she set in her classroom when working as a teacher:

…just being aware in the class of what we can and can't say or what we can and can't do… and I remember having to like pull kids out and be like, "you can't use those words, you can't speak to people that way, that's not ok." like, "who they are is fine" kind of thing.

Another participant noted setting clear expectations regarding language and attitudes from the student employees she hires:
In orientation, I will say "Some of your people might be racist. They might be sexist. They might be homophobic. They might be... And so, guess what? You don't have to own that. You didn't create that. You were born to that, but it's not gonna’ be tolerated here... And so, I'm going to explain uh, I'm gonna’ explain why we gonna’ do the role plays on these cards... If you want to ask me a question, NOT within the group, you can come to me at any point and ask me every, any question, but I don't have the ability to lie. I don't have the ability to make haters feel better about their hate speak." And so, I said "I'm never gonna’ – if something happens..." and it does all the time, "where I realized that you said something that perhaps you didn't intend to and, and you wouldn't have had a knowledge of it being inappropriate. I’m going to let you know. But it's going to be in private, it’s gonna’ be the two of us discussing it. It's not, you don't have to go rat-tat-tat to all um the other little leaders and tell them, oh I got in trouble or whatever. It's your information you can own it. The first time will be in private like that, the second time you won't work for us. And depending how vile the thing is you say the first time, you won't work for us.” Because clearly there are some things that like... that crosses all lines.

Seven categories emerged related to support of specific LGBTQ individuals. Other categories within the advocacy behaviors domain refer to efforts to make a positive impact on the overarching community. These seven categories, on the other hand, refer specifically to allied efforts that take place directly within the LGBTQ community and with LGBTQ identifying individuals.

As noted within the LGBTQ allied identity development domain, participants had typically cited supporting a close loved one throughout their coming out process as a significant experience within their education and development as an ally. Further, the second domain outlines participant descriptions of the Bible Belt. In brief, participants noted the Bible Belt to be a region that is predominantly conservative, lacks LGBTQ visibility, promotes a “traditional”/heteronormative lifestyle, and is characteristic of pervasive prejudice towards the LGBTQ community, which is often justified using religious tenants. As participants reflected upon the ways in which they have acted as allies to the LGBTQ community, they frequently cited their efforts to support another’s coming out experience. When we consider participants’ commentary on the cultural climate of the region, it is unsurprising that many of these anecdotes
reference challenging or even traumatic coming out stories. However, for the purposes of this study, focus was on participant reactions and efforts to support LGBTQ individuals as they navigated those experiences, rather than examining the coming out process specifically. Therefore, quotes used below cannot be interpreted as being representative of the average coming out experience within the Bible Belt. It is also worth noting that the coming out process need not always be a negative experience, and LGBTQ youths are currently challenging existing linear LGBTQ identity development models, suggesting instead a more dynamic process (see Klein, Holtby, Cook & Travers, 2015). With that said, the process of owning and openly declaring sexual orientation and gender identity remains a formidable experience for many, as noted by participants in this study.

When participants were asked how they had expressed LGBTQ affirmative attitudes within their community, or asserted themselves as allies, participants shared experiences of supporting LGBTQ individuals within their coming out experience. Participants discussed several aspects of this support. Generally, participants noted, I am cognizant to remain consistent across all aspects of my relationship with LGBTQ individuals after they have come out. One participant noted the importance of communicating and enacting this message with her friend, especially given the response he had received from some individuals in his life:

I think the biggest thing was like making sure that he didn't feel like anything change because it didn't. He had a lot of people that, in his family especially – more distant family, who would reach out and be like, I heard and I love you anyway. And it's like no you should just love him! Like saying I love you anyway makes it seem like you did this horrible thing but I love you in spite of it. And it's just, I think that was the hardest thing for him and so even though it was a huge transition in his life like it really didn't change anything about our friendship. And so, I think just still being the friend that I always was. Just being consistent… Really nothing changed. For us like us as friends, except that it was like, oh my gosh you're going through all this stuff and obviously that's going to dominate our conversations for a while.
Another participant noted a similar sentiment as she described her relationship with a close friend who had come out:

Ever since she came out, it's just like you know nothing's changed, instead of talking about guys we just talk about girls and we talk about you know her relationships still and we talk like we all talk about our relationships. It's like maybe I've just been an ally in that I didn't allow it to make me uncomfortable at all, like we just kind of, like our relationship stayed exactly the same.

As participants reflected on their support for loved one’s within their coming out processes, another typical category emerged: *I support my loved ones as they explore their identity by providing time and space for my loved ones to come out on their own terms.* One woman reflected on waiting patiently for her friend to feel ready to disclose:

…there were rumors about it in our hometown for so long before she came out to her friends here… I think someone from our high school had seen her making out with someone at a bar or something and brought it back to the hometown… And people would always ask me about it, but at this point she hadn't talked to me. And I'd be like, who knows? And would just kind of brush it off to try to divert focus until she wanted to share. And then when she came out to me, she texted me and kind of said like, hey I'm sure you've been curious about this for a while, because she knew the rumors were happening obviously, but I like girls and I have a girlfriend and so on, I forgot what she said exactly. And I'm like, yeah like I have been a little curious but like it's cool that you haven't told me yet… I was waiting for you to come out on your own time to me and like I'm so happy for you... I am 100% accepting, and I just want you to feel - I want you to know that.

One participant reflected on raising her daughter, who she suspected was gay, and trying to express support without imposing beliefs or values upon her daughter’s developmental process:

…even in her elementary years I, you know whenever I finally I was like OK what do you want to wear? So, she wore all boy clothes… She hung out with boys. They were all her best friends through high school. I mean in elementary through high school. And so, I wondered, do I have this little tomboy or is it really something else going on? …I mean that may be wrong to think that she's a lesbian at that point in time. But there was just something about her that was different and I knew it… And I have a really good friend, who is gay, and I even went to him before she ever opened up to me and I said, you know, I think my daughter's gay and I don't know what to do about that, I don't know if I go to her? And he goes, no you hang back and she'll come to you. And so that's what I did. I just waited for her to come and tell me.
Another woman talked about challenging assumptions to help protect the time and space for her friends to explore their identities without being labeled by others:

...none of my friends, who have now come out, came out while we were in high school. When people were like accusing my friends of being gay in high school... I never wanted to like put them in a box and it wasn't because I would have disapproved or have been judgmental about it but I wanted them to have the space to figure everything out on their own. So, when people would call my one friend gay I would just challenge their reasoning, “I mean he does plays and he's more feminine but that doesn't mean that he's gay. He says he's not gay. Leave him alone.”

Typically, participants reported, *I support LGBTQ loved ones by accompanying them to queer spaces.* It is notable that participants tended to describe their roles in these spaces consciously as supportive—careful not to be voyeuristic or exploitative—as there is a risk of exoticization when majority community members patronize minority community spaces. For example, one participant, who self-reportedly frequents gay bars, noted being cognizant of her role in queer spaces, stating, “If I'm the straight girl who goes [to the gay bar] I'm going to be the one who's probably like carrying the coats in the background, like, I don't want to be an imposition on that scenario.” Another participant reflected on a heartwarming story of having accompanied two friends who requested to go to a gay bar not long after they had both come out:

There were four of us. M is um heterosexual, he dates women. And I date men, and we were always just friends. And then our other two friends had recently come out as gay and lesbian. They were still coming into those identities and not necessarily out in all areas of their lives just yet, and they were like *whispers* "Can we like, go to the gay bar?" And I was like "Yeah! Let's go!"” So, like we all four went to one of the gay bars. M and I just like sat at the table at first, and watched our friends for a minute having the time of their lives and... We just really looked at each other and were like, “this is how it should be. Like, they are enjoying themselves. They feel so accepted here where almost everyone is... identifies like them” … we were just so happy for them. Like, I'm pretty sure I like teared up. That was like such a great moment, for all of us. And then we all went up and danced and it was just so good!

Participants reported in another typical category, *I express support by being an active participant and researcher alongside my LGBTQ loved ones as they explore their own identity*
and LGBTQ culture. One woman captured this category well, as she noted being an active participant in her friend’s identity development as a gay man:

Together, we learned a lot of details about like sex between gay men that I had no idea about I mean that I had ideas, but I didn't know a lot of things… And then also a lot about relationships in the male gay community. As he started dating, we would have to look things up, like terms we didn’t know and so on.

Another woman spoke about supporting her friend who was exploring their gender identity by discussing all of the new terms they were learning from YouTube videos:

They were trying to figure out who they were because they never fully felt comfortable with themselves. And so, like I always just thought it was like LGBTQ. And then there was the non-binary and then just all different, I can't remember all of them, but they would watch videos and all that… And then just like pronouns and stuff and how that changes for different people because they don’t feel comfortable, and like I never knew anything about that until like the last year or so, like that was new for both of us.

In another variant category, participants reported, I connect LGBTQ individuals in my network with friendly spaces, people and community. If and when participants are plugged into the LGBTQ community in their area or within a particular network, they discussed sharing those connections with LGBTQ individuals who have recently come out or are new to the area or simply in need of support. For example, one woman talked about connecting her sister with queer friends in her city as a resource for information:

…she was thinking about moving here and she asked, like can I talk to your friend, Sarah*. Like she's been on like dating apps and sites and stuff and like sought out relationships with women. And I just want to see like what her opinion is on it and like how it was when she went on dates and like she wanted, she that was a huge factor in life where she wanted to move if she wanted to know like can I be out in public and be gay? And like how are people going to receive that or do horrible things happen to people? She was really like scared and nervous about it you know, so I put them in touch.

Participants also stated in a variant category, I support LGBTQ loved ones as they navigate relationships with unsupportive family and friends. The role participants play here revealed itself to be complex and delicate, as they grapple with their own anger, frustration,
and/or disappointment in response to the treatment of their LGBTQ loved ones, while simultaneously acknowledging and honoring the significance of the relationships their of LGBTQ loved ones may hold with their unsupportive family and friends. Family and friends may take time to overcome their own internalized heterosexism and homophobia in order to accept their LGBTQ loved ones, and unfortunately, some never fully do. This leaves LGBTQ individuals with many difficult decisions regarding the navigation of these important relationships. As an ally and supporter, participants described efforts to help ease this process for LGBTQ loved ones.

One woman noted that she has acted as an intermediary between her daughter and her ex-husband, who has struggled to accept his daughter’s sexual orientation:

…over the years we've had all those conversations as far as, you know being there for her and being that dad that she needs. When she first came out, I would call him and encourage him to be more supportive of our daughter... I continue to play that role when I speak to him, but over time I have encouraged her to stand up for herself more and more. I've told her, “You've got to do this on your own. I will be there to back you, 100 percent but you've got to be the one to tell him how you feel and how he's making you feel.”

Another woman described her experiences counseling her friend regarding his relationships with family members:

I think just listening, and you know trying to give him advice especially with his family. And, you know, that – sometimes it would be like maybe you should be a little more forgiving with them or patient with them, but then also sometimes it would be like maybe you should hold them accountable and call them on their bullshit you know. And so, I think it was just kind of like finding that balance.

The final category related to support of specific LGBTQ individuals emerged as, *I try to protect my LGBTQ loved ones from dangerous or negative situations*. Participants described being cognizant of their loved ones’ well-being and using various protective tactics to minimize the distress of their loved ones. For example, one participant described one of her best friends
growing up as an effeminate boy who was sometimes made fun of by neighborhood boys. She recalled using a diversion tactic to diffuse a particular situation:

One time, we were playing baseball, but it was at his house, and they big farmers… I remember he was pitching, and I don't remember who's at bat. But he had a powder puff shirt on because one baseball team was powder puff, so it's probably a hand me down from his female cousin… anyway, some of the boys starting to go off about it, making fun of him. And then when I came up to bat I threw my bat like towards infield and said, "This is so boring I quit. *Steve let's go to my house." Just as like, a smoke bomb. Just like, distraction. I just acted like, this is, you know, I'm done with this. But I was DONE with it because of the way *Steve was being treated. And we didn't speak of it. We just went and played at my house.

**Domain 7: Contextual and Relational Factors Influencing Advocacy Behaviors**

Participants make choices about when, where, and how they are go about advocating for LGBTQ equality. This domain illustrates factors considered within that decision-making process.

Two categories in this domain *related to participant’s social networks*. Participants’ social networks influenced their exposure to prejudice, opportunities for intervention, and sense of community support in allied efforts. A typical number of participants reported, *I have created a social microcosm for myself, filled with people who share similar values to my own*. While some participants reported the homogenous nature of their social network to be coincidental, or simply a direct reflection of where they spend their time, others noted making intentional choices to remove people from their daily lives who do not share the same values and attitudes. For example, some participants noted deleting connections to prejudiced people on social media, or distancing themselves socially from people who express homophobia or heterosexism. One woman noted, “I choose not to associate with people like that; life is too short.” Another said, “I honestly don't hang out with many people who are a little weird about homosexuality… I don't
need the negative - I don't need the weirdness that they bring. I just don't even have anything to do with them.”

Participants described the process of curating like-minded social networks as fairly organic and intuitive. One participant stated that this occurred naturally for her when she left her hometown after high school, stating, “I think whenever you move away from home, you really get to choose the people that you're around.” Another outlined this process:

…I'm sure your parents probably told you this growing up… That when you got to high school your friend base would get bigger and you could choose your friends and it'd be different. And then college was the next level of, you don't have to just play with the people that live on our street… You're going to be able to choose people that, that either challenge you and it's a healthy debate or y'all just like similar art or music or you have an appreciation for these things.

As discussed in domain 4, LGBTQ allied identity development, social connections with LGBTQ individuals and social justice-oriented peers, are essential components throughout the ongoing developmental process. As one begins to see the world with increasing cultural sensitivity, it is understandable that this becomes a trait they are drawn to in others. Indeed, participants reflected on their like-minded networks with affection and gratitude. However, as they reflected on interview questions regarding the prejudice they observe in their community and their efforts to combat heterosexism, participants also grappled with the idea that they may have created a safe bubble for themselves that is not representative of the greater population.

One woman noted how filtering out negative attitudes and prejudice may blunt her impression of discrimination within her community:

So, I'm kind of in this little microcosm that I've created for myself you know, and now especially I work for a company that's more progressive and all my, you know, people I work with it's like, we're all primarily on the same page… And so, it's, I'm just not as familiar with how things maybe really are here.
Capturing both sides of this predicament, one woman noted, “I've been really lucky in creating a little bit of a safe haven of people who are loving.” But pondered that this may reduce her opportunities to intervene as an ally. As she spoke, she noted feeling conflicted:

Um, I don't know. It's like maybe I need to you know, open up my friend group to people who you know, need to be educated. I don't know. But I'm quite comfortable where I'm at, in terms of like, I know that I align with everybody. You know, so I don't - I don't know.

In a variant category, participants noted, *I seek and work to create LGBTQ-friendly work environments*. When reflecting on their advocacy efforts, some participants specifically reflected on efforts within their workplaces. One participant noted that it was at work where she felt like she was able to have the biggest influence:

I feel like I’m able to advocate more when I'm working because I've always been very comfortable in that setting to talk to people, like let them know how I feel and just educate them and maybe open their eyes without judging anyone. That environment just allows for more conversations.

Another participant had purposefully chosen a position with an explicit social justice focus, and she noted feeling grateful to work with, “highly intelligent people who are very good at their craft, who want to think deeply about education, and engage openly in conversations about White privilege, social justice, and restorative practices.” However, even in this setting, she acknowledged the need for intervention at times. She specifically noted using humor when confronting a boss, who she stated, could be, “inadvertently sexist, saying things like, ‘you know I don't experience male privilege because as you see I work in a room of 40 women’”.

Another woman noted that her efforts to create an inclusive, LGBTQ-friendly work environment begin within the hiring process of new employees:

And we set it from the beginning and we even broach it during the interview process just to make sure that, if for some reason somebody comes from a background or is close minded in any kind of way that there's other amazing opportunities for leadership here, but this position will never be right for them.
Four categories emerged related to considerations of context, relationships, and audience. Opportunities for social justice promotion are commonplace in our daily lives if we are alert and sensitive to inequity and prejudice. Intentionality of efforts can strengthen the impact. Participants noted several factors they consider when choosing whether or not to intervene, and how. Sometimes, these considerations led to inaction while, other times, they were used to guide strategies.

In a general category, participants stated, I consider the appropriateness based on the setting and the audience. Participants noted the environment and their relationship to the people present as influential factors in their reactions to displays of prejudice. Regarding environmental considerations, participants discussed differences in their responses when in private as opposed to public, as well as professional versus personal settings. Participants also noted that their decision-making processes were significantly influenced by the nature of their relationships to those present (e.g. stranger, friend, family member, boss, client, etc.).

Participants also noted valuing respect for their elders. They acknowledged that perspectives have changed over time, and while their elders’ language or ideas may be dated, this is not always indicative of malicious intent. Therefore, participants noted that they may be inclined to approach elders with deference, and they certainly consider potential differences in perspectives when considering their approach to education and intervention with older individuals. One participant noted, “The way you can argue or disagree or debate with your friend is different from my mother in law, who's 89 years old and grew up in a different time.” Another participant noted that she frequently challenges her parents, but that, “it depends on the audience. Because I don’t want to make other people feel uncomfortable trying to call my parents out for certain things.”
Other participants noted being similarly conscious of their social impact when with their peers when in public spaces. One participant stated generally, “I am conscious of my friend’s preferences and I try not to embarrass them with my reactions.” For example, this participant outlined an experience attending church with a friend and choosing to suppress a strong negative reaction to the sermon:

I went to this Baptist church… with one of my roommates. And it was a sermon about marriage. And. It was like, I don't know, he just talked about marriage and the institution of marriage and divorce and stuff. And then he was like well by the way “‘Gays’ getting married, like that doesn't count.” …He was like, “Oh and if someone's gay it’s because they were sexually assaulted when they were younger, and we need to help them because they're living in sin.” …I felt really uncomfortable. I was looking around the room trying to see if anyone else was as disturbed as I was. I was trying really hard not to roll my eyes and shake my head the whole time because I was with my friend who… had made friends with this older couple there we were with, and I didn't want to embarrass her and I was just very taken back and so I was in shock and probably didn't act the way that I should like... I wanted to walk out. Like that's what I wanted to do but I just felt like I was just so not expecting to hear that I think that I just kind of like let it happen… I talked to my friends afterwards and I told them how awful it wasn't like I told them I never was going back again. But yeah, my reaction was very subdued. I kind of just like I was looking around like seeing if anyone else was cool with it and everyone else, I mean, seemed like fine with it, which I was shocked by.

Regarding a professional setting, one woman noted, “There are times when you cannot be confrontational, because you’re mad at inappropriate behavior. There isn’t always time, but you respond clearly without “setting things on fire”, and move on.”

Participant decisions not to respond at all in order to “keep the peace,” or maintain social harmony, are consistent with social norms related to “personalism” discussed in domain 2, Bible Belt culture. Within the following examples, however, participants noted that factors related to “personalism” helped them to determine their approach. One participant reported:

…depending on who it is - I mean if it was out in public or something and it was somebody like passing I'd probably not be like aggressive. But if it was a guy saying something rude to somebody or something I'd be like, “what is your problem?” But if it is someone that I know or even just like an acquaintance especially like at work, typically I try to have a conversation with people about it and just be like, “why, so why do you feel
that way?” You know just kind of try to get them to talk about it a little bit and encourage them to shift perspective.

Another participant echoed this idea of tailoring her intervention based on the audience and setting. She provided an example of how she may argue against the anti-trans bathroom bill in a professional setting:

…in the business world, I would talk about how it's stupid for businesses. I would ask, “How are you planning to recruit people? You know it's a non-issue. Why are they wasting time? Why are they wasting taxpayer money on stuff like that? When we have all these other issues that should be addressed.” So, I tend to argue from logic instead of emotion and in the business realm, maybe that CAN go further. Because they're all money oriented, right? So, you try to think of what are – what are the things that might be persuasive to them?

In a typical category, participants reported, I assess the potential impact of the intervention as part of a cost/benefit analysis when considering whether or not to engage in advocacy. Participants’ explicit outlining of this decision-making process tended to pertain to cases in which they are likely to choose not to engage, however, it can be assumed that this process occurs as a precedent to acted upon interventions as well. The following quotes correspond to this category. One participant noted:

There are some people who, if you know them well, and you know you're never going to change their mind. I mean I have people like that, where I just say, I'm not going to have the discussion with you, because you're not going to change my mind, I'm not going to change your mind, so it's pretty fruitless to you know, we can't seem to have productive conversations so we're not going to talk about this because I'm not going to waste minutes out of my life doing that.

Another participant stated, “Self-care and protecting from burnout to have enough energy to keep going and keep doing, means also picking your battles and choosing the people that you want to have those conversations with.” She also provided a specific example of this decision-making process:

…with my boyfriend's parents it's like, sometimes I’ll just walk away because I don't know that there is hope for them. And it's like I would rather put my energy elsewhere.
And I'm sure like once, like if my boyfriend and I get married and we have kids like there are going be some stern conversations – like you will not be spreading these hateful ideas to my children. But right now, it's like y'all can live your hateful lives the way that you want to if that makes you happy.

Another woman noted trying to change the minds of her college friends for quite some time before deciding:

…nothing's going to change with these people and so I can either continue to suck my energy out hanging with these people and having to try to educate them or I can spend my money and my time some way that's more beneficial and less frustrating. [After several years of feeling as though] I would have to turn into like, legal defense for the people that can't speak for themselves… I chose to realize, OK I've outgrown this group.

A variant number of participants reported, *I am more likely to engage in advocacy behaviors when with people I feel close to.* One participant explained why she is more likely to confront her in-laws than she may be to correct a co-worker:

My in-laws just are super traditional, but like, but we can sit with them like and talk. We can at least talk about these things, like micro aggressions. We've also sat in our living room and just drank coffee and like... gotten into deeper subjects. There’s a buffer in that relationship that isn’t there with everyone, like someone you work with for example. With my in-laws, I can apologize if I need to, and whatever comes up, they still have to love me cause I'm their daughter-in-law, and will have their grandchildren one day.

Another woman noted that the security of her relationship with her husband allows for them to discuss difficult topics with relative ease:

He is more conservative for sure. But I feel like his heart was always more open to marginalized people… And so, it's like whenever he has things come up where he’s like, “wow I don't understand this.” Then we'll have conversations and he's much more receptive of people that are different or don't fall in like specific spots on the spectrum and stuff… And so, it was easy to guide him along and like kind of influence him. The nature of our relationship makes it easy and that's there's a lot of dialogue there you know because he's my person.

In another variant category, participants reported that *whom the prejudice is being directed at is a consideration factor in deciding whether or not to intervene.* In this category, participants reported that they may be even more likely to intervene when prejudice is directed at
someone they are close to. To this end, one participant stated, “If I see someone personally attacking someone that I know, that's when I get mama bear. Like if you talk about someone I know, that I love, I won’t back down.”

Two categories emerged related to considerations of consequences and potential repercussions of advocacy. The first was a typical category, in which participants noted, I consider how conflict may disrupt my social and/or professional relationships when deciding whether or not engage in advocacy efforts. One woman reflected on the professional concerns that sometimes silenced her when she was younger:

It may not reflect very well on me to say it but sometimes, especially when I was younger, I would be looking how is this done? Will this hurt me in my career? Because I had a family to support, so I didn’t want to antagonize too many people.

Another woman shared that while she was raising her children, she was married to someone who was very religious, and their social network was quite conservative and religious. She noted that at the time, she had thought it would be better for her children if she maintained harmony with her husband and their social circle. The participant stated:

When I would hear things I disagreed with, I didn’t say anything. I did it to keep, I guess, to keep the peace and the calm in the relationship and, you know I would think, you know, you always just kind of sit down and think these people are crazy but I would just go through the motions and it wasn't until I guess, finally, whenever you finally have your voice, and you're just like, “hey, this isn’t right.”

Other participants noted choosing their battles with in-laws carefully. One participant said, “They're definitely somebody I kind of have to pick my battles with, it's like do I want them to like me? Or, do I want to let them know like what you're saying is not okay?” Another shared:

…it's so hard to even just like, hold my tongue. And so, it's almost like – since they are in our lives and they're gonna’ be in our lives. It's just almost like I just kind of keep it like at an even keel because, they're gonna’ be in our lives and I don't, I genuinely don't think I could change some of their viewpoints and things like that, and speaking up would make it even more of a conflicted situation. And so, it's easier to just show up for an event and make some small talk and let them do their thing.
In a variant category, participants reported, *I evaluate my physical safety when deciding whether or not to intervene.* While less common, some participants shared examples of staying quiet out of concern for their physical safety. In the following example, one participant noted being highly aware of the potential for violence, and the vulnerability of both herself and her friends:

One example would be leaving a cookout with some friends, and then someone in the drive thru, who was probably drunk just started yelling out stuff, something like “faggots and like I like your pants. Where'd you get those?” Because they were wearing tight pants – It was just about our appearance... And like my goal when that happens is like de-escalation kind of thing. You know we were like we just don't need to get beat up… any time anyone's like called us out verbally like on the street or something it's always just been like do not engage. Especially because I'm not necessarily in a position to like de-escalate what could be a really bad argument situation if it goes wrong.

**Domain 8: Motivation for Advocacy Behaviors**

Participants noted different sources of initial and ongoing inspiration for their allied development and various motivations for their advocacy efforts. Three categories emerged related to sources of inspiration. In the first of these, participants typically noted being inspired by the LGBTQ social justice movement, the individuals fighting for equal rights and ongoing progress regarding LGBTQ rights. In this category, participants reported that the energy generated by the social justice movement—and the individuals that fuel it—is inspiring to them. They noted that the progress they have seen already and the progress they believe is to come in for the future, helps them to keep a positive attitude.

One woman described her observation of the movement as one of the major influencing factors in her development as an ally:

I saw so many people out there who are challenging the social norms right now by having these parades, and having these movements, and trying to make this community of people more visible, and they're not it's not easy for them, they're not you know, it's not a walk in the park… It's hard, and still they’re showing up!
Another woman commented on the power of marches, stating, “I’ve been in the marches. And it gives you that energy to participate. And it also gets media attention.” More generally, another participant pointed to the people in the movement as a source of her motivation:

You know what inspires me... other people with the energy! You don't always – I'm – I'm not gonna’ be like a leader, the first one but I will grab onto a great idea and then pretend it's your own {laughs} because I don't – you don't want to reinvent the wheel!

Participants also spoke of the change they have seen already and their hope for an even greater change in the future. For instance, one woman noted, “There is so much more curiosity, we're asking questions and I think it has gotten better.... I think this, your generation and then the next, is really going to help us keep turning things in the right direction!” Several participants noted that the shift in perspective that they notice in the next generation is encouraging. One participant shared, “My niece, she's seven, she looked at me [following an older person’s expression of a heteronormative assumption] and she was like, ‘it's ok for boys to like boys and girls to like girls.’” Another noted that while she has to work to challenge her own heteronormative assumptions and reset her thinking at times, her son seems to have a much easier time with the concept of gender fluidity, stating, “My two year old is like, ‘you know mom sometimes boys are girls and girls are boys. And I'm like, ‘Yes! Yeah exactly.’ They - at a young age, I guess maybe like humans just get it intuitively and it’s beautiful.”

In a variant category, participants noted that the 2016 election woke me up to the need for change. One participant shared:

I think before the election I just really didn't talk about this stuff. Even with friends, I didn’t talk about the election. I just decided this is the thing I want to vote for – I'm just going to not talk about it. I guess I was worried about conflict but now I am speaking more about politics.

Another woman noted:
I've got more involved politically than I ever have in the last year and a half. And it's specifically over rights of everybody. It started out with women's rights, the ‘me too’ piece of it. And then, you know I got my pussy hat and did some marches. {laughs} But it [referencing her previous political inactivity] was more so, just a feeling inside that, I think so many times that we sit back, and we don't think we can do anything. But in actuality one person can do – do something. And it's a movement that's been going on and it's been burning inside of all of us. And I think – I think it was just the timing of it. It wouldn't it couldn't have happened four or five years ago, but the election was a turning point.

A variant number of participants reported being inspired by Christian values. One participant captured how her Christian beliefs are at the core of her allied identity:

I think it's one of those things that like we're supposed to – if we're gonna’ consider ourselves Christians like we have to love and accept everyone, and yeah, I mean very fundamentally it’s an easy thing, you're just supposed to love and accept everyone.

Another participant noted how Christianity aligns with social justice, “When I think of Christianity I think we're supposed to be accepting of everyone… Jesus hung out with everyone.”

Two categories emerged related to allyship to improve one’s own life. In the first of these, a typical number of participants said that, being an ally offers me more perspective and opens my mind to the world. Participants noted that through their connections to the LGBTQ community and their allied efforts, their own lives have been positively impacted as they have come to see the world through a more expansive lens. One participant noted:

It's the total perspective shift, it's like things – that you potentially cannot realize, the struggles that you could potentially... And so, the information that they give you and feed you… sure you can help other people with this information, but it also opens your mind to – well, everything in the world.

Another woman discussed how the shift in her perspective encouraged her to think outside of the box and consider more possibilities for her own life:

You can work. Yeah, you don't have to fit into these structures. So, like you can do whatever you want. Yeah, it's like a very. Yes. Once – once that's figured out yeah {sighs with a big exhale}. Observing my friends’ experiences with all kinds of relationships…
in different formats that weren't sticking to the like, “traditional”. I mean it was never going to be traditional, so setting their own rules and boundaries… just like we don't have to do things the way everybody else does. And I was like, WHAT? …Like you don't have to just like date in court like it says in the song of Solomon and whatever. Like you know it's like, there’s just no set prescription for life. It's like [my gay friends] exposed me to that and then I was like, OK! …I just had never really had to like challenge anything I believed in, everything just come easy to me. So, it was like, yeah – My friends have enabled me to be so much more of myself. Because they're so fiercely themselves also!

In a variant category, participants noted, gaining positive social connections. One woman noted that her connections to LGBTQ individuals are both a source of ongoing allied development and a motivator in continuing to evolve as an ally:

I mean I've made these wonderful friends… And my husband and I are both friend-centric people, like that's what brings us joy is like being with our friends and our family and spending time with people… I love people who bring out the best in me and it’s just so happened that many of my friends are gay… I couldn’t maintain these friendships if I didn’t have the beliefs I have and if I didn’t try to be an ally.

Two categories emerged related to allyship to improve life for others. A variant category emerged in which participants noted a motivation to make a positive impact for the LGBTQ community overall, while participants reported a desire to improve circumstances for specific LGBTQ loved ones in another variant category. In identifying her motivation for advocacy and ongoing development, one woman simply stated, “I would never want someone to feel like they need to hide a part of themselves to exist.” Another stated, “I think it’s just important to make sure that people are heard, because I’ve felt heard in my identities, so I feel like everybody should be able to be heard.” Other participants noted that they are inspired to advocate for LGBTQ rights because they want to improve the lives of specific LGBTQ people close to them.

One category emerged related to allyship to improve life for all, in which a typical number of participants reported a belief that LGBTQ equality strengthens community and
Paulo Freire similarly argued that individuals’ understanding how allyship directly supports one’s community, by strengthening its connections and overall bolstering communal fellowship is essential for progress and change (1972/2000). One woman summarized this concept with her own sports analogy:

And I always put with politics or – and everything, we are only as good as the last person on the bench. And I learned that from sports. You have to have a good bench. And that means taking care of everybody.

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to better understand LGBTQ allies living in the Bible Belt region of the United States. Participants, nominated by LGBTQ individuals from their communities, were asked generally about their responses to this nomination and how they connected with an LGBTQ allied identity. Participants were asked to reflect upon the ways in which they assert themselves as allies, respond to homophobia/heterosexism in their communities, and how they would describe their process of coming to identify as an ally. Further, participants were asked to describe their cultural environment—particularly in regard to cultural norms and expectations related to gender and sexual orientation—and reflect upon how these cultural norms may have impacted their allied development process and current approaches to allied behaviors. This summary is intended to highlight key themes elaborated above.

Various common personal traits, values, and experiences emerged amongst the participants. These are described in detail above, as they may help provide insight into existing correlational research findings. For the summary, the most prevalent traits (represented by general and typical categories) are noted in their relation to Bible Belt culture and participant’s LGBTQ allied identity developmental process.
When describing Bible Belt culture, participants generally highlighted the prevalence of Christian faith. They noted experiencing pressure to identify as Christian, and in fact, the majority of participants personally identified as such. Interestingly, other themes also emerged amongst participants regarding religious orientation. Amongst the Christian participants, most noted their orientation to faith involves a critical examination of religious practices and beliefs. As they actively explored their religious beliefs, most noted choosing to focus on the underlying principles of love, kindness, and acceptance of others. It was reported that church culture and religious practices are often at odds with these values, and that religious arguments are often used to justify acts of social exclusion, prejudice, and judgments of others. For Christian participants, this was especially distressing. As they maintain a Christian faith, based on love and kindness, these participants described a process of negotiating and coming to peace with a personal practice that may at times diverge from more rigid and traditional religious practices.

The Bible Belt region was also described as predominantly conservative in its political leanings. Participants were not explicitly asked about their political ideology, and yet most referenced liberal, social-justice-oriented political leanings within the interview. However, while some specifically identified themselves as democrats, many discussed political support for social-justice-oriented policy without asserting any particular affiliation with a liberal political party.

Generally, participants characterized Bible Belt culture as cloaked in a social façade of harmony. People in the area were described as speaking in an indirect and tangential manner. Further, discussion of topics that might offend or create conflict was reported to be generally avoided and seen as impolite. Fitting into the dominant culture—one that is dictated by heterosexual, cis-gender, White, Christian norms—is generally considered essential. Therefore,
diversity (of culture, identities, opinions) may be ignored or minimized to maximize cohesion. Participants described Bible Belt culture as “traditional,” and a place where rigid gender roles are promoted. In accordance, participants shared a felt pressure to commit to opposite-sex marriage and have children relatively early in one’s adulthood. Deviations from this “traditional” lifestyle were said to be viewed with suspicion. Thus, it is not surprising that participants noted LGBTQ visibility and queer spaces are relatively rare, especially outside of progressive urban bubbles.

Participants also noted prevalent heterosexism / homophobia / transphobia, which is often communicated through microaggressions. When discussing prejudice and discrimination within the community, many participants noted their concerns about the prevalence of problematic racism. However, participants rarely spoke directly to concerns of intersectionality.

Cultural norms tend to evolve, and participants noted several ways in which this occurs within their communities. Participants generally cited increased LGBTQ visibility in traditional media and social media platforms and within their communities as evidence of progressive changes. Further, many participants described feeling encouraged by policy changes in favor of LGBTQ rights, most often referencing marriage equality. However, some participants reported feeling less encouraged by several cultural shifts observed since the 2016 presidential election. Participants reported observing more frequent explicit and direct expressions of prejudice that may have previously been shared privately and in hushed tones. Additionally, participants noted that political tensions seem to be encouraging individuals within this generally conflict-avoidant culture to openly debate policy related to politics, including policy related to LGBTQ rights. Some participants noted the outcome of the election, and the increase in overt discrimination has inspired them to become more active as allies and motivated them to educate themselves and others more fully.
The educational process of an ally can be understood as an LGBTQ allied identity development process, or the process by which one becomes familiar with LGBTQ culture and relevant social and political issues faced by the community, and comes to possess increasing confidence and efficacy in their acts of advocacy. Consistent with Herek’s contact theory of sexual prejudice, which suggests meaningful interactions with LGB[TQ] individuals foster positive attitudes towards the community (1988, 2000, 2002), participants noted their relationships with LGBTQ individuals played a significant role in their developmental process. All participants noted their social networks to include a significant proportion of LGBTQ identifying individuals, and half of the participants specifically reported having an LGBTQ family member. While reflecting upon their developmental process, participants most commonly identified experiences supporting loved ones throughout their “coming out” process, meaningful discussions with LGBTQ people, and first-hand observations of prejudice towards LGBTQ individuals as key developmental milestones to becoming an ally. Participants also noted the consumption of LGBTQ friendly materials (e.g., books, documentaries, music) and exposure to new and different cultures as influential in broadening their cultural perspectives. These experiences were not necessarily related to sexual orientation and gender, instead what seemed to be the most prominent within these stories was the opportunity to have one’s previously held assumptions challenged. Similarly, participants tended to cite role models who promoted overarching values of kindness, tolerance, and empathy as having been influential in their allied development, even though these messages were rarely linked directly to kindness towards the LGBTQ community specifically.

In regard to specific advocacy behaviors, participants all used a variety of tactics, which were tailored to match their personalities and adaptive to fit their current lifestyle. Participants
reflected on their own allied development as they developed strategies to engage in advocacy. Specifically, given the awareness that it was important one not feel judged, that being educated and informed improves one’s confidence to speak up, and that perspective-taking is important in their education, they likewise, made efforts in their own advocacy to take a calm, non-judgmental approach, often using humor, and sharing concrete information with others. They also encourage others to engage in perspective-taking. Participants noted various means of confronting prejudice, but most noted opportunities to provoke more in-depth conversations as a preferred means of education.

Participants tended to engage in LGBTQ pride events. While some felt that these public events helped to spread awareness, others expressed doubts regarding the efficacy of these events in attracting support for the movement. More generally, participants noted this type of activism provides a sense of community and inspires those involved. In addition to attending LGBTQ affirming events as a means of pronouncing their allied identity, participants also noted making their support known through explicit, public proclamations and attire or signs posted on their property. Participants noted voting and campaigning, but the bulk of advocacy behaviors were in everyday acts of support. For example, participants noted modeling LGBTQ affirmative attitudes in their homes and workplaces. They described mindfully creating safe spaces for the expression of sexual orientation and gender diversity. Further, participants noted various means of supporting LGBTQ individuals in a one-on-one capacity.

While most participants noted feeling proud to have been nominated as an ally, many also described feeling under-qualified or concerned that they are not “doing enough” to have earned the title. Overall, participants described themselves as becoming more confident in their efforts as they age and become more self-assured and less concerned with the perceptions of
others. Further, some participants acknowledged increased security in their career, finances, and social relationships as they have gotten older. Therefore, perceived potential risk of advocacy may decrease with age. To this end, participants reported generally being thoughtful about when, where, and how they intervene or assert themselves as allies. When they anticipate repercussions, such as disruptions to social or professional relationships, they were less likely to act. However, most of the time, participants reported this decision-making process involves various considerations within a cost-benefit analysis. When the potential impact of intervention seems likely to be successful, participants were more likely to take risks compared to when they believed their efforts would be dismissed. Perhaps to mitigate these efforts, participants noted creating social microcosms for themselves dominated by LGBTQ and LGBTQ friendly individuals.

Finally, participants discussed their motivations to engage in advocacy. The most prevalent amongst these being the belief that their participation in advocacy improves their own life, and that equality is essential in strengthening the community at large.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The current era has seen progressive changes with regards to American perceptions of sexuality, gender expression, and identity (Loftus, 2001). Throughout the country, some regions have embraced this evolution more readily than others, with the Bible Belt lagging behind (State-by-state, n.d.; Barton, 2010; 2011). In response to the stymied growth of equality in areas such as the Bible Belt, allies can have a positive impact on their communities and the LGBTQ people living in them. Researchers have examined predictors of LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes, motivations to engage in activism, and the developmental process of social justice allied identity. Fewer studies investigate the actions taken by allies to promote social justice, especially those related to everyday behaviors aimed at creating a more inclusive and just cultural environment. Further, psychology continues to move towards an increasingly multicultural and constructivist perspective (Ponterotto, 2010; Sue et al., 1998). Therefore, it is important to consider the cultural context in which allied development occurs. It has been suggested that regional tensions within the United States may be particularly salient in academia, with anti-Southern attitudes openly expressed inside Northern academic institutions (Edgerton, 2018). We must challenge this bias and direct focus of evidence-based scholarship to the nuances of regional cultural differences, so as to continue to tackle LGBTQ prejudice in regions of the country where progress may be needed the most (Cohen, 2009; Edgerton, 2018). To this end, the present study seeks to better understand heterosexual and cis-gender individuals living in the Bible Belt who support equal civil rights, gender equality, LGBTQ social movements, and challenge homophobia as it occurs.
For the purposes of this study, the Bible Belt was defined as a region of the United States that spans across the West South Central (Barton, 2010, 2011; Heatwole, 1978; Tweedie, 1978), is characterized by pervasive Christian fundamentalism (Barton, 2010, 2011; Heatwole, 1978; Newport, 2009; Tweedie, 1978), and political conservatism (Jones, 2016; Political Issues of 2016, n.d.). Participants reported residency in Texas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and North Carolina, and were required to confirm that they consider their hometown to be within the Bible Belt before participating in a one-on-one interview with the primary researcher to address the following research questions: What types of characteristics seem to describe the heterosexual and cisgender people in the Bible Belt nominated as allies? What are the cultural underpinnings of the Bible Belt, and how do these norms influence the allied development process, activism, and advocacy decision-making? How do nominated “allies” personally identify with the title and how confident do they feel in this role? How do Bible Belt allies describe their developmental process? How do Bible Belt allies express their allied identity? What kinds of behaviors do they engage in to advocate for a more socially just society? What motivates activism in the Bible Belt?

This chapter is designed to explore the findings of the current study, examine how the results relate to the existing literature, and propose implications for further research, education and training. The chapter will begin with a thorough and detailed discussion of the recruitment process, as the nomination process and anecdotal observations of this process are worthy of examination. This is followed by a summary of results, with particular attention paid to the contribution to current literature and research gaps. Limitations of the study are explored, followed by implications for research and social justice educational programs.
Recruitment Through Nomination

Benefits and Strengths of Nomination Approach

McAdam (1986) notes the difficulty in defining participation “in” a movement, as one does not formally “join” a movement in the same way that they may join an organization. While activism is often conceptualized as participation in explicit, public acts of political protest, everyday activisms should not go unexamined (Pink, 2012). Fish, King, and Almack (2018) coin the former as iconic activism, or efforts that “target the macrostructures, organizations and institutions of society” (p. 1196). In contrast, everyday activism takes place in everyday life, in local neighborhoods and homes, and may at times be associated with more obscure forms of resistance or intervention aimed at promoting social change (Fish, King, & Almack, 2018; Pink, 2012). McAdam (1986) also outlines two types of activism: efforts that would be of little risk or cost to the participant (i.e., Low-Risk/Cost Activism), and that which may require a deeper investment in the cause and greater access to activism networks (i.e., High-Risk/Cost). Risk/Cost is relative to each person and dependent upon context. Ultimately, various forms of activism are important and influential in social change (Fish, King, & Almack, 2018; McAdam, 1986; Pink, 2012). This study aimed to examine allies who are participating in both iconic and everyday activisms, of low and high risk/cost.

Determining an appropriate recruitment method proved to be challenging, as this study aimed to include exploration of less commonly examined phenomena related to everyday activisms enacted by allied members of the general Bible Belt population. Typical recruitment methods employed within allied research presented various concerns. For example, some researchers have surveyed participants who self-identify as allies, however, this provides no control for efficacy of allied efforts. Interviewing individuals who participate in more concrete
forms of iconic activism is one method to remedy this dilemma (Goldstein & Davis, 2010). However, research shows that the subset of the population participating in protests and political activism is generally quite small (Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank, 2019). In fact, within stigmatized groups, only a small proportion of individuals tend to attend protests for social movements on behalf of their group (Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank, 2019). Further, those who have resided in Southern communities during adolescence and adulthood are less likely to participate in this type of activism across various cultural and racial identities (Swank & Fahs, 2017). Therefore, recruitment based on iconic activism may have introduced a confounding variable and led to a sample of individuals who shared particular personality traits, which is difficult to identify or control for in a qualitative study. For example, protestors also tend to share various demographic traits: younger, more educated, unmarried, and coming from more precarious financial stability (Swank & Fahs, 2017; Swank, 2019). Ultimately, it was decided that a more heterogeneous sample would better illuminate the experience of the Bible Belt ally and provide description of a wider range of the everyday activisms.

Per committee recommendation, a nomination process was utilized for recruitment. The primary researcher contacted LGBTQ individuals who currently reside or had at one time resided within the Bible Belt, to nominate potential participants who met the following definition: “a heterosexual and cis-gender person who supports equal civil rights, gender equality, LGBTQ social movements, and challenges homophobia as it occurs. Qualified participants may or may not personally identify themselves as straight allies.” This approach is unique and arguably a strength of the current study, as few researchers have examined allies who have been identified by individuals from the group with whom they support (Ostrove & Brown, 2018).
Ostrove and Brown (2018) suggest that nominated allies are indeed more effective activists than non-nominated individuals. Comparing nominated White allies, to non-nominated White individuals and White friends, Ostrove and Brown found the nominated allies to be rated higher on affirmation-related qualities and informed action. In the current study, there may also be evidence to suggest that those nominated are particularly effective allies. Edwards (2006) argues that the most consistent, and therefore most effective, allies hold a combined selfishness (“I do this for us”) motivation. Consistent with this, the most commonly cited motivation for advocacy reported amongst participants in the present study was one related to motivation to improve life for all, with participants holding the belief that LGBTQ equality strengthens community and improves culture for everyone. The second most frequent motivation was also consistent with an “I do this for us” mentality, as it was related to the value that allyship improves one's own life, or the belief that being an ally offers me more perspectives and opens my mind to the world. Therefore, the participants in this study reported motivations consistent with those of more effective allies (Edwards, 2006).

Challenges Encountered in Recruitment

Initial recruitment efforts relied upon outreach within the primary researcher’s social network. Outreach was subsequently expanded to advertisements through social media with a link to a brief online survey allowing LGBTQ individuals to nominate allies, and finally, LGBTQ resource centers across the Bible Belt were also contacted. Ultimately, the most effective strategy proved to be direct communication with personal contacts and contacts once removed, involving repeated follow up with both nominators and nominees via various technologies (e.g. phone call, text message and email).
Despite best efforts, the various forms of outreach made it difficult to precisely track the recruitment process. However, some trends were noted. More than 30 LGBTQ individuals were directly contacted by the researcher, yielding over 30 nominees for participation. Approximately one third of the LGBTQ individuals spoken to explicitly stated that they could not identify a single person within their Bible Belt community who met the description provided of an ally. Many commented that while they had straight and cis-gender loved ones who provide support and love as individuals, potential nominators did not believe that these same individuals would “challenge homophobia as it occurs.” In fact, some noted that the same loved ones that came to mind as personal advocates also hold general beliefs that homosexuality is “wrong”, and endorse a “hate the sin, love the sinner” mentality. While I was prepared to hear stories of the lagging cultural progress in my culture of origin, I had not anticipated the frequency of this response, and I found these discussions to be quite emotional and discouraging. This speaks to my underestimation of how small the allied community is in the region. At times throughout recruitment, I discussed this finding with interviewees and known LGBTQ supporters, who tended to express a similar sense of alarm and disappointment. This begs the question, how many people in the Bible Belt may be overestimating progress and overlooking ongoing prejudice in their communities? Amnestic heterosexism refers to the denial of discrimination against LGB people (Walls, 2008). The underestimation of prejudice I noticed may not reach the severity implied by amnestic heterosexism, but it is concerning for a variety of reasons. Notably, research suggests that those who believe discrimination against LGB people is a remnant of the past feel less personal responsibility to intervene (Katz, Federici & Ramos-Dries, 2019).
Observations of Trends in Allied Development Amongst Participants

Edwards (2006) noted that allies vary in regard to their effectiveness, and that the developmental process can oscillate over time. Indeed, throughout the data analysis process the current research team noted incongruities across participants in regard to their LGBTQ knowledge, willingness to educate and/or confront prejudice, and general range of advocacy behaviors. While each participant was nominated with enthusiasm by a LGBTQ individual who had experienced the nominee as an ally, no assessment of competency was included in findings. Further, it is unclear which of the participants’ actions were perceived as supportive by their nominators.

As previously noted, insights and demographics regarding LGBTQ nominators is limited. However, there is reason to believe that there may be some variation amongst this study’s LGBTQ nominators themselves in regard to their sexual identity development, and the degree to which they engage in activism. For instance, several nominators were known to be community advocates, while a smaller group of nominators had more recently come to identify with the community.

Present findings suggest that participant allies gained much of their knowledge, confidence and experience as an advocate by supporting loved ones throughout their coming out process, meaningful discussions with LGBTQ people, and having firsthand experiences/observations of prejudice through connections to LGBTQ people. Further, participants often noted these experiences to have taken place with the same individuals who had nominated them. If we can assume that allies are often learning alongside their LGBTQ loved ones, it may be that allies’ own development process often mirrors or follows that of the LGBTQ people in their lives, and thus our own allies’ development may parallel their nominator’s. Thus,
some nominees, may continue to progress through allied development as their nominators continue to explore their own identities and come into more enlightened phases of identity development.

**Summary of Results**

**Bible Belt Culture**

**Participant observation of cultural trends.** Across the various states and towns represented by participants, there were clear consistencies noted regarding description of the Bible Belt, indicating that there are indeed cultural norms specific to this general region of the country. With that said, the research team pondered to what degree participants had been able to speak to the cultural norms within their hometowns. The team noted that participants who had lived in the Bible Belt for a shorter period of time more clearly pinpointed cultural trends. We speculated that this is related to the concept of constructivism, as many participants’ sense of reality is rooted within these very cultural norms, and thus they may be less capable of identifying unique characteristics of the Bible Belt (Ponterotto, 2010; Sue et al., 1998; Wadsworth, 1996). Additionally, it is likely that many cultural trends had simply been accepted as “the norm” and thus were inconspicuous to participants. Indeed, Sue and Sue (2008; 2012; 2013) argue that our worldview is limited to our exposure and thus our exploration of various cultures is influential in broadening our perspectives. Participants’ difficulties with spontaneously describing the culture may have resulted in lower frequencies for categories within domain two—Bible Belt culture. The categories presented in this domain should be presented to a larger sample to increase confidence in the findings.

**Christian identity and the Bible Belt.** Consistent with Barton’s (2011) finding that “at least the presentation of complicity with Christian fundamentalist attitudes is compulsory for
most in the region” (p. 88), participants in the current study typically remarked on pressure to participate in the Christian faith. It is not surprising that all of the participants in this study noted being raised Christian (most were raised within the Bible Belt) and eight of the twelve identified as Christians currently. The remaining four participants reported “spiritual,” “nonreligious,” or “agnostic” identities, and no one reported affiliation with any other religion or identified as “atheist.” However, regardless of reported religious identity, all participants noted critically examining and questioning religious faith. This finding seems to imply that allies may be more likely to be questioners, critical thinkers, or individuals who are unafraid to challenge the status quo. Although, participants descriptions of the Bible Belt suggest that this orientation is not likely to be celebrated within the region.

Social norms in the Bible Belt. Barton (2011) references the term “personalism,” originally coined by essayist, Loyal Jones in 1997 to describe the social norms of the Bible Belt. Jones describes “personalism” as “the desire to fit in, to get along with one’s neighbors, to not offend, to present the social façade of harmony and good humor” (p. 84). During initial attempts of cross analysis, our research team identified several categories related to social norms in the Bible Belt, including but not limited to: indirect speech patterns, avoidance of confrontation and debate, politeness and silencing of controversial topics such as politics and sex. Some initial categories were determined to have unique qualities, but perhaps due in part to the previously noted trend for participants to describe cultural norms in vague scarcity, each category was endorsed with relative infrequency. Therefore, these were collapsed into one general category under the above definition of personalism, however, the subthemes may be worth further investigation in future research.
As may be expected within a culture defined by personalism, participants typically described themselves as *avoidant and non-confrontational*. However, this trend may be the product of larger American and Western cultural norms. One need only to look as far as one of the most famous, and controversial, psychological experiments of modern science to appreciate human tendency to follow directions, especially when promoted by authority figures. The Milgram shock experiments (1963) demonstrated that an alarming number of individuals were willing to go as far as physically harming another, when an authority figure instructs them to do so. Many other researchers have further demonstrated the powerful influence of social desirability and human inclination to adhere to social norms as well (Cialdini, & Trost, 1998; Khan, & Cangemi, 1979; Tedeschi, 2013).

Participants described the Bible Belt as a place where controversy and overt social disharmony is carefully avoided (i.e. *personalism*), heterosexism is promoted both in regard to valuing of a “traditional” lifestyle and the prevalence of prejudice, and there is palpable pressure to participate in the Christian faith. Finally, and perhaps most concerning, participants generally noted a trend of religious explanation for acts of social exclusion, prejudice, and judgment. When fundamentalist Christian faith is the predominant faith in one’s community, and church figures are openly condemning of same-sex sexual and romantic relationships, it stands to reason that anyone who is simultaneously critically examining religion (endorsed by all participants) and promoting LGBTQ equality (per nomination criteria) is indeed challenging the status quo. Yet, only a variant number of participants openly identified as someone who challenges the status quo or identifies as an “outsider” / “lives on the fringe”. Understanding these traits as being socially undesirable within the cultural context of the Bible Belt, suggests that participants may be more comfortable expressing their alternative, and potentially
controversial, LGBTQ-affirmative perspectives with more passive or obscure forms of everyday activism. Further, they may also be more effective in their allied efforts when choosing these tactics over iconic activism strategies such as protesting.

Consider here the previously noted trend for those who have lived in the South to be less inclined to participate in protests (Swank & Fahs, 2017). Indeed, one participant in the present study noted, activism such as “chanting and marching, those sort of things, turn other people off… I don’t think [those events] change the minds of people who don’t [believe in the cause]”. Generally, participants noted that attending marches, parades, and protests were a part of their allied development process, but with the exception of one account, these experiences seemed to follow behind coming to a clear identification as a supporter of the cause. For Bible Belt residents, attendance may be more likely to deepen commitment and as the above participant notes, “give you energy to participate.” The one participant who reported being inspired by parades and subsequently shifted their position from a more apathetic position to a more supportive role as an ally, notably grew up outside of the Bible Belt. This is not to undermine the importance of marches, parades, and protests, but rather to incite speculation as to the role this type of activism plays within a cultural context where protest stands in stark contrast to values rooted in personalism. As noted by the above participant, iconic activism may be particularly likely to undermine progress with non-supporters within the region, while serving as an important means for inspiration and inclusion for target group members and their supporters.

“Traditional” values and perceptions of progress. Participants typically noted the pervasive promotion of a “traditional” lifestyle, frequently speaking to the oppressive nature of this societal value. At the same time, many talked at length about marriage equality as a primary source of evidence for the progressive cultural change they observe. While same-sex marriage
is widely cited as a success for the LGBTQ civil rights movement, it is notable that none of the Bible Belt allies in this study mentioned any components of the “assimilationist dilemma” often discussed within the LGBTQ community (Bernstein, 2018). In the fight for same sex-marriage, activists noted relying upon strategies that promoted assimilation into the existing heteronormative societal narrative through reliance upon intentional use of language and frameworks that best fit into a heteronormative worldview. There are concerns that these compromises to appeal to the dominant public often undermined the fluidity of sexuality and gender, and ultimately took attention away from other important LGBTQ concerns (the large body of literature regarding the role of same-sex marriage within the LGBTQ civil rights movement is beyond the scope of this article but worth review, see Bernstein & Taylor, 2013 and Bernstein, 2018 for overview). Participants focus on the success of marriage equality and the absence of an acknowledgement of concerns related to the “assimilationist dilemma,” may reflect internalization of the “traditional” values held within the cultural context of the Bible Belt. In other words, despite their criticisms of “traditionalism,” participants seem to greatly value the “traditional” institution of marriage, conceptualizing marriage as an important privilege that should be afforded to all.

**Becoming Allies**

**Critical thinking and cognitive flexibility.** It is difficult to know whether critical thinkers are born or made, but given the field’s current stance on nature vs. nurture, one can presume the answer is both—people may be born with a greater inclination towards critical thinking, and over time this trait may be encouraged through various experiences (Sameroff, 2010). In regard to their social justice development, allies often cite memorable experiences that inspire intense affective responses, and in turn trigger confrontation of self-bias, judgment, and
rigid thinking. Researchers have referred to these as “critical”, “influential,” and “trigger” events (Borgman, 2009; Dillon et al., 2004; DiStefano et al., 2000; Duhigg et al., 2010). It is unclear whether these experiences are sufficient in and of themselves, or if allied development is triggered exclusively amongst those who are more sensitive or more inclined to critically evaluate these experiences. Regardless, there is sufficient evidence that participants in this study critically examine various aspects of life.

Participants in the present study noted critically examining and questioning religion, and tended to identify as a person who is curious, open-minded and/or likely to engage in perspective taking. Participants frequently reported having significant exposure to other cultures, either through having lived outside of the Bible Belt, typically having moved by choice as an adult, or through extensive travel. Allies seem to seek opportunities that will challenge their current perspective, through both formal and informal education opportunities.

In what may be additional evidence of cognitive flexibility, several younger participants anecdotally described their own sexual identity as fluid. While all participants noted engaging primarily in opposite-sex romantic and sexual relationships, and ultimately deemed themselves an individual who benefits from straight privilege, several noted that they openly explore their sexuality and perceive this aspect of their life to be more fluid than “straight,” “gay,” and “bisexual” identity definitions can accommodate. This is consistent with research findings that exploration of one’s own sexual identity is positively correlated with LGBTQ affirmative attitudes, and plays an important role in coming to better understand experiences related to sexual-orientation and gender within a hierarchical societal system of oppression and privilege (Dillon et al., 2004; Eliason, 1995; Worthington et al., 2005). That this finding was exclusive to
younger participants may simply reflect generational differences, with younger individuals having grown up in an increasingly LGBTQ affirmative society (Egan & Sherrill, 2005).

**General versus specific nature of education.** Each participant noted educational experiences specifically related to sexuality and gender as having influenced their development as an ally. However, it is notable that participants also frequently cited the influence of more general experiences that encouraged their critical thinking and led them to reexamine previously accepted “norms.” In addition to exposure to different cultures, participants also discussed literature, art, music, and films that challenged them to consider alternate vantage points.

Further, participants often discussed the values they internalized early in life as motivating them to act as advocates. These values were not necessarily specific to the LGBTQ community. For example, participants discussed role models who *promoted kindness, tolerance, and empathy* generally, and role models who promoted a general sense of *liberal values and equal rights*. Rarely did these role models specifically reference sexual orientation or gender identity with participants. At times, these role models were individuals the participants knew through their churches growing up. Sometimes participants equated the before mentioned values with *Christian values* that motivated their advocacy. This finding further illuminates the complex relationship between Christianity and social justice advocacy, particularly with regards to the LGBTQ community (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Borgman, 2009; Duhigg et al., 2010; Herek, 1987; McFarland, 1989; Olsen, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Russell, 2011; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005).

**Exploring the role of contact theory.** It is clear that experiences with LGBTQ people play a strong influential role in the development of LGBTQ allies. However, similar to the concept of critical thinking, it is less clear what comes first—the inclination to be an ally or a
connection to the community? It stands to reason that this answer likely varies amongst allies. Some may hold LGBTQ affirmative attitudes with minimal connection to the community, and others may be apathetic or even critical prior to interpersonal connections with the community. Regardless of the progression of an ally’s beliefs, it is doubtful that any ally can be particularly effective in their efforts without significant connection to the community.

Freire (1972, 2000) argues that one must fight alongside their oppressed peers. Similarly, Edwards (2006) argues that those whose advocacy comes from an “I do this for us” approach are most effective. In order to work alongside the community, it is important to maintain awareness of community goals, perspectives, and current cultural trends. Given significant differences of opinion within the larger LGBTQ community, this can be a difficult task, and certainly is not achievable without various connections. In line with this, participants generally reported that a significant portion of my current social network identifies as part of the LGBTQ community.

Four of the eleven categories in the LGBTQ allied identity development domain were related to informal experiences with the LGBTQ community and specific individuals. Further, in a fifth category regarding allied mentors in an official position, it is notable that these mentors were often LGBTQ identifying as well. Participant reports of connection to the community is a positive indicator of the efficacy of their efforts. However, it is also worth noting that participants typically described a lacking LGBTQ visibility within their communities, and when a community’s LGBTQ population is restricted, opportunity for education is also more limited. This is a particular challenge for Southern (Bible Belt) and rural communities, as LGBTQ individuals tend to move away from these communities (Barefoot et al., 2015).
Acting as Allies in the Bible Belt

**Consideration of perceived risks and costs.** As discussed above, there are many kinds of advocacy. Both everyday and iconic activisms can hold low or high risk/cost evaluations depending on the context (Fish, King, & Almack, 2018; McAdam, 1986). McAdam (1986) suggests that “costs” account for time, money, and energy required for participation, and “risks” refer to anticipated dangers of participation including but not limited to those relating to legal, social, physical, financial areas. Advocates consider costs and risks to participation in any advocacy, be it of an iconic, explicit, and public, or a more subtle, everyday nature (Fish, King, & Almack, 2018; Goldstein, 2017). Additionally, researchers suggest that advocates also consider the potential benefits within any opportunity for intervention (DiStefano et al., 2000). Participants in the current study spoke mostly to perceived risks and benefits, with some commentary on energy costs.

Costs and risks are contextually bound and thus, cannot be considered equal for everyone (McAdam, 1986). In this study, most participants noted that they *assess the potential impact of an intervention as part of a cost/benefit analysis when considering whether or not to engage in advocacy*. This mirrors previous qualitative study findings that allies may not act when they anticipate an intervention may be “futile” or “not effective in the long run,” instead allies report that they “pick and choose” the “battles” or “the best times” to act, so as to maximize the effectiveness of their work (DiStefano et al., 2000, p. 137).

Categories that emerged related to considerations in advocacy decision-making, appear to be related to Bible Belt culture, including: *considerations of appropriateness of setting and audience*, and *considerations of how conflict may disrupt my social and/or professional relationships when deciding whether or not to engage in advocacy efforts*. Of note, the latter
category may capture two broader types of social risk—a more practical kind of social risk taking place in professional or community settings, where repercussions take form as professional interference or loss of social standing, and a more emotional, personal social risk involving ruptures to important familial and social relationships. Participants described both kinds of social disruption, or “risk,” however, this particular study yielded insufficient data on the subject to clearly delineate between the two potentially separate types and thus, further investigation is warranted.

As noted above, participants’ consideration of potential risks did not necessarily equate to self-silencing or missed opportunities for intervention, although this is of course a potential outcome. Rather, considerations seem to inform intentionality of advocacy. Intentionality, especially within a cultural context defined by careful and indirect confrontation, may be one way to preserve personal power in a manner that ultimately allows efforts made to be particularly impactful and effective at swaying opinions. Lately, those who are acutely persistent in their focus on concerns related to social inequality are at risk of being undermined with a label of “social justice warrior.” Many have noted the tendency for conservatives to use this title in a derogatory manner so as to dismiss those who promote social equality (Foy, 2016; Young, 2015, 2016). In this way, it seems that allies—similar to individuals targeted by discrimination and oppression—are vulnerable to being dismissed as hypersensitive “complainers,” which in turn undercuts the efficacy of their efforts (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2013). When examined through this lens, it makes sense that the allies nominated by LGBTQ community members for participation in this study provided many examples of more indirect, passive, and matter of fact approaches to their activism.
2016 Presidential election as a catalyst for social change. The 2016 election results elicited much discussion regarding concerns of the impact of media, particularly social media, on public opinion (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). As more and more individuals have become reliant on online news sources since the early 2000s, many caution that exposure to contrary perspectives is being restrained, and instead like-minded citizens are forming “echo chambers” or “filter bubbles” (Sunstein 2001a, b, 2007; Pariser 2011 as cited by Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). While social media algorithms may have furthered this effect, participants in this study noted that their “filter bubbles” also exist within their day-to-day, lived experiences. Most participants noted having created a social microcosm for themselves, filled with people who share similar values. Meaningful exposure to alternative perspectives often seemed to be limited to relationships with extended family and work settings. However, some participants also noted filtering their social network even further by seeking work environments where others hold similar beliefs. Some reflected that the results of the 2016 election encouraged them to consider how their constricted social network may in turn limit their influence as an ally. Several participants noted that the election woke them up to the need for change and inspired them to become more active in social justice causes.

Participant reactions to the 2016 presidential election were often described as emotional. Their observations of cultural shifts following the election appear to be complex and may reflect themes that are often described in literature describing political backlash and the countermovements that arise in response to social justice movements. Scholars have suggested that backlash against social progress can serve as a catalyst for social justice movements (Bernstein, 2018; Dorf & Tarrow, 2014). Countermovements typically arise in response to social progress, which in turn draw greater attention to a cause and mobilize more passive supporters to
become more active in their advocacy efforts (Dorf & Tarrow, 2014). Current findings indicate that Bible Belt allies predominantly perceived cultural change over time for the LGBTQ community to be progressive, as evidenced by reports of: *increased LGBTQ visibility in media, social media and on the internet*, as well as within the *community*, an *increase in LGBTQ rights*, and *gender roles becoming more fluid*. If we understand these impressions to be fairly consistent with the general public, we may expect that prior to the 2016 election many individuals believed that social change was happening in favor of LGBTQ equality. For many, the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election has been seen as a cultural resistance against such progress, and ultimately reflective of backlash.

Participants described observations of cultural shifts following the 2016 election within their communities. On the one hand, participants were disturbed by the *rampant apathy regarding civil rights and equality that was exposed by the election*, and discouraged by their observation of “backlash” or *increase in overt expressions of discrimination and prejudice*. However, they also noted that these *political tensions had led to increased frequency of political discussion, debate and argument*. Some noted discomfort with this increase in debate, and indeed these types of discussions stand in contrast with cultural values synonymous with *personalism*. However, this observation is likely a positive indicator for continued social progress in the region, as uncomfortable discussion has been argued to be an important component of allied development and necessary to change hearts and minds (Dillon, et al., 2004; Duhigg, et al., 2010; Fingerhut, 2011; Schultz, 2017).

**Advocacy in action.** Activism aimed at combating discrimination and oppression is a defining characteristic of an ally (Broido, 2000; DiStefano, Croteau, Anderson, Kampa-Kokesch, & Bullard, 2000; Duhigg et al., 2010; Goldstein & Davis, 2010), and yet this dimension of allied
experience continues to receive the least attention within the literature (Jones, Brewster, & Jones, 2014). As noted above, McAdam (1986) points to the ephemeral nature of social justice movements and highlights the difficulty of defining participation “in” a movement, as clearly demarcating boundaries between ambiguous terms such as “activist” and “supporter” presents challenges. Fish, King, and Almack’s (2018) two types of activisms, iconic and everyday activisms, are used here to organize and better understand the current findings (definitions provided in above “benefits and strengths of nomination approach” section.)

The present findings add support to existing theory, while also expanding upon the available research through the addition of specific and nuanced descriptions of advocacy efforts. Further, findings may provide insights into the nature of advocacy work as it occurs within the conservative Bible Belt region of the country. The comprehensive outline of domain six—advocacy behaviors—includes categories that illuminate trends in intervention style, as well as several fairly specific categories that elucidate concepts previous researchers have often subsumed under more broad descriptions. The categories are described in further detail below.

McAdam (1986) notes contextual differences impacting activism include a person’s “biographical availability,” which he defines as personal constraints to activism based in “employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” (p.70). These factors may limit access to various methods of activism, and/or increase “risk” to activism at certain points within an ally’s lifespan. Consider the following example encountered within the current study – a stay-at-home mother who temporarily stepped away from her career to raise her children noted losing access to larger professional systems or organizations while focusing on raising her children. As a result, her allied efforts had shifted to focus on an intentional approach to raising her children
with LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes, and daily interactions at her local grocery store, her
children’s schools and/or neighborhood events and groups.

Given that participants in the current study represent a range of life stages and come to
their advocacy from a variety of biographical contexts, their responses also covered a broad
spectrum of approaches to activism. Therefore, the many examples of advocacy presented can
be used as a guide for those who want to tailor an advocacy approach to be consistent with their
personality and current phase of life. Further, participant anecdotes can be relied upon to inspire
brainstorming for a wide range of advocacy efforts.

**Iconic activism.** Political activism is perhaps the most commonly discussed in the
existing literature, and participation in such activities is often used to define advocates (Fish,
King, & Almack, 2018). For example, Goldstein and Davis (2010) assessed for level of activism
by asking participants about their attendance at demonstrations and official events, experience
with political participation activities such as making donations, contacting government officials
and signing petitions, distribution of information or the hanging of posters, and volunteer work
with social justice related organizations. In this way, advocacy aimed at intersecting
institutionalized discrimination has been emphasized in the research. However, focusing
exclusively on iconic forms of activism overlooks a large proportion of advocacy work. Indeed,
findings from the present study suggest that iconic activism accounts for only a small portion of
the advocacy work participants report. Further, when activism is defined as political action, or
macro-level efforts, those who self-report being highly involved, may represent a specific type of
ally. One’s whose personality is defined by extroversion, leadership, and independence, which
have been found to be highly correlated with this work (Munin & Speight, 2010). Participation
in political action or organized events and activities was not required of participants in the
current study and therefore, present findings add to the literature outlining a wider array of advocacy behaviors (Borgman, 2009; DiStefano et al., 2000; Hubbard, 2013; Washington & Evans, 1991).

**Everyday activism.** These daily actions promote the social change people hope to see in their communities. They are wide ranging and cover both overt and more obscure behaviors. While several studies capture examples of this type of advocacy within their findings (Borgman, 2009; DiStefano et al., 2000; Hubbard, 2013; Washington & Evans, 1991), detail tends to be limited within the broad themes presented as compared to the current study.

Participants provided several types of daily interpersonal interaction in which they advocate for LGBTQ equality, including: confrontation, provoking discussion, and providing education. Confrontation of homophobia and heterosexism is arguably the most commonly discussed intervention of the three (Brodio, 2000; Dillon et al., 2004; DiStefano, 2000; Duhigg et al., 2010; Edwards, 2006; Fingerhut, 2011; Gulker et al., 2013; Jones, Brewster, & Jones, 2014; LeMaire, 2017; Toomey & McGeorge, 2018; Washington & Evans, 1991; Worthington et al., 2005). However, the term “confrontation” is often used quite broadly, with researchers including examples of provoking discussion and the provision of informal education within their conceptualization (DiStefano et al., 2000; Hubbard et al., 2013). By definition, confrontation implies a clash or dispute, and thus inclusion of examples of discussion and education may undermine the potential openness of the audience. In the current research, participants’ reports of all three types of dialogue included varying degrees of tension, from interactions in which they feared for their physical safety, to pleasant conversations with naïve but open and curious others. Congruent with participants’ description of their intervention style as calm, gentle, non-judgmental, characterized by avoidance of debate and the frequent integration of humor,
perspective taking, concrete information, personal narratives, and open-ended questions, it stands to reason that intentional intervention tailored to the audience, while perhaps uncomfortable at times, does not typically reach a level of contention that may be implied by “confrontation.” Similar to Hubbard et al. (2013) findings, participants in the current study were less likely to engage in strategies that involved a direct attack of a person or statement. In fact, participants in the current study noted that confrontations that become hostile or come across as judgmental and critical tend to be ineffective. One woman noted, “you lose your whole opportunity to help someone see something differently if you start to berate them.”

Participants also discussed creating safe and inclusive LGBTQ friendly environments in their everyday lives. Washington and Evans (1991) previously discussed this concept within the purview of supporting LGB individuals. I would argue that while these efforts are helpful in improving cultural environments for LGBTQ individuals, they may also have more expansive benefits to the culture at large, especially when we consider the negative effects of heterosexism on people of all sexual identities (Barron & Bradford, 2007; Blumenfeld, 1992; Eder & Parker, 1987; Foley, 1990; Good & Sherrod, 2001; Mahalik, 2001; O’Neil, 1981; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005; Stevens, 2001; Worthington et al., 2002; Worthington et al., 2005; Worthington et al., 2008).

For participants in this study, promoting safety and inclusion is one way in which they work to create a world they want to live in. In order to do this, participants discussed modeling LGBTQ affirmative attitudes and advocacy to other straight cis-gender individuals, being purposeful about their use of language, and setting clear boundaries regarding expectations for LGBTQ friendly speech and actions. During one interview, I personally experienced how powerful these strategies can be. As a woman in my early thirties, who grew up in the Bible
Belt, I have become accustomed to conversations, especially in my hometown, where I am made poignantly aware of societal expectations to live a “traditional” life, including marriage and children, and in which family is prioritized over career and individuality. I was struck by my emotional response to one interviewee’s consistent and natural way of adding qualifiers into her reflections on life—“if you choose to get married”, “if you choose to have children.” Her tone implied no value judgment regarding the way in which one chooses to live their life, and coming from a woman older than myself, in a familiar Southern drawl, I was struck by how her way of speaking stood in stark contrast to my expectations and experience. Her words, delivered with such innate ease, felt like a kind of permission I had not known I needed.

In discussing everyday activism, many participants spoke of topics that were much more specific to support of LGBTQ individuals. Through these acts of daily support and relationships with LGBTQ people, allies also open themselves up to more opportunities for ongoing education and development as an advocate (DiStefano et al., 2000; Herek, 2000; Sullivan, 1998). Hence several categories related to support of specific LGBTQ individuals in domain six—advocacy behaviors—mirror or relate directly to categories related to informal education through contact with LGBTQ individuals/community in domain four—LGBTQ allied identity development. For example, consider activism in the form of supporting LGBTQ loved ones throughout their coming out process in domain six, and I have learned a lot through supporting a loved one throughout their coming out process in domain four. Therefore, allied behaviors play an integral role in the allied developmental process, and become more frequent and consistent as one moves through stages of development.

Present research findings are in support of the, albeit limited, existing literature. Consistent with previous recommendations, participants noted acting in a nonjudgmental manner
towards LGBTQ individuals so as to communicate acceptance, support, validation, and safety (Borgman, 2009; Washington & Evans, 1991). Findings generally mirror qualitative findings presented by DiStefano et al., (2000), while expanding upon them and providing more concrete descriptions within the categories related to support of specific LGBTQ individuals in domain six—advocacy behaviors. Similar to student affairs professionals in the DiStefano, et al. (2000) study, participants indicated that supporting loved ones through their coming out process and the ongoing developmental process as they explore their identities within LGBTQ culture is one way they participate in everyday activism. Participant reports in the current research provide further detail as to how this often manifests: supporting LGBTQ loved ones as they navigate relationships with unsupportive family and friends, and accompanying loved ones to queer spaces. Participants reports of connecting newly “out” LGBTQ individuals or LGBTQ people new to the community to a larger LGBTQ-friendly network is consistent with an example provided by DiStefano et al., (2000) in which one participant noted connecting a new colleague to other “out” LGBTQ individuals in the local community (p. 134).

**Value of specificity.** Participants noted the importance of tailoring their intervention approach to their audience, but several wished that they had baseline knowledge regarding more specific strategies which they could pull from. The scope of categories in the present study extends beyond the existing literature and provides a myriad of distinct strategies elucidated by rich quotes. The intention behind this was to provide developing allies and educators with a strong foundation of strategies that may reinforce the confidence needed to go beyond socially just beliefs, to become consistently involved in iconic and everyday activism (Brodio, 2000; Dillon et al., 2004; Borgman, 2009; Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2012). As allies gain initial experience with such activism, they are likely to build upon their sense of self-efficacy and in
turn continue to move from a more passive to a more and more active role in the movement for LGBTQ social justice (Ji, Du Bois, & Finnessy, 2009).

Strengths and Limitations

Present findings are largely consistent with literature outlining allied identity development (Borgman, 2009; Brodio, 2000; Edwards, 2006; Dillon et al., 2004; Duhigg et al., 2010; Eliason, 1995; Worthington et al., 2005), motivation to act as a social justice advocate (Duhigg et al., 2010; Gilligan, 1982; Freire, 1972, 2000; Kohlberg, 1984; Russell, 2011; Washington & Evans, 1991), and LGBTQ activism (Borgman, 2009; Dillon et al., 2004; DiStefano, 2000; Jones, Brewster, & Jones, 2014; Hubbard et al., 2013; Washington & Evans, 1991), pointing to credibility of the research (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers argue that transferability, or demonstration of the degree to which findings may be applicable in other contexts, is a better measure of trustworthiness than generalizability (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given the small samples used in CQR, there is greater risk of the findings being fairly specific to the particular ground of participants and researchers (Hill, 2012). Rich description of observed phenomenon is used in the presentation of the data to demonstrate transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This section will explore the ways in which transferability may be limited by the contextual characteristics of the Bible Belt, this study’s participants, and the study’s researchers.

This study relied upon a small and demographically constricted sample, embedded within a unique subculture of the United States, and thus it is important to caution against assumptions of transferability to a broader population. Several studies suggest that experience may be idiosyncratic to social context (Borgman, 2009; Barton, 2011; Hall et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2009; Swank & Fahs, 2017; Worthington et al., 2002), and thus this study is likely to be uniquely
representative of the allied experience within the Bible Belt region of the United States. Present findings support existing literature describing the region as a culture defined by pervasive fundamentalist Christianity (Barton, 2010; Gray, 2009; Heatwole, 1978; Newport, 2009; Tweedie, 1978), conservative politics (Jones, 2016), and social norms that reinforce “the social façade of harmony” (Barton, 2011), suppression of conflict, and minimization of uncomfortable discussions that may be necessary to promote social justice (Dillon et al., 2004; Duhigg et al., 2010; Fingerhut, 2011; Jones, 2016; Schultz, 2017). It is important to acknowledge that these cultural traits may also describe other regional, institutional, organizational, and familial contexts. To the extent that these features are congruent with any particular cultural context, findings may be applicable and relevant.

Findings should be interpreted through a cultural lens that considers both regional social norms, and various demographic traits shared by this small sample. Despite outreach efforts within the recruitment process to access racially and culturally diverse cis-gender men and women, participants ultimately consisted of a fairly homogenous group. Highly educated, self-identifying White, cis-gender female participants are overrepresented in allied research and this study was no exception. While there was some variation in level of education, most participants held a bachelor’s degree or higher (83%). Further, all participants identified as Christian (67%), or “agnostic”/ “spiritual”/ “non-religious” (33%), and all identified with a Middle Class or higher socio-economic status. When consulting the present findings, taking these factors into consideration is essential to garner the most beneficial and practical insights from this study. Results are likely to best represent attitudes, beliefs, experiences and advocacy efforts of college educated, White, Middle Class women who come from Christian backgrounds and live in the Bible Belt region of the United States.
As is often the case in qualitative research, the demographics represented by the participants are fairly consistent with those of the primary researcher. Scholars posit that individuals are potentially less likely to participate in qualitative research when the researcher is racially or culturally different from themselves, and qualitative researchers tend to have more success with recruitment when participants are personally familiar with them (Eide & Allen, 2005; Lindenberg, Solorzano, Vilaro, & Westbrook, 2001). These factors likely played a role during the recruitment phase of the current study. For example, as discussed in the “challenges encountered in recruitment” section above, personal contacts and contacts once removed were the most salient factors in predicting success of outreach efforts. Some suggestions to encourage more culturally diverse participants are related to recruitment and interview processes. A grassroots recruitment approach is likely preferable, in which the person (or people) in charge of outreach for the study are currently living within the Bible Belt, and active within local communities and culturally diverse settings where community partnerships can be built (Eide & Allen, 2005; Lindenberg et al., 2001). Further, if interviews were conducted by a culturally diverse team, as opposed to one individual, this may encourage access to a wider range of participants. Allowing potential participants to choose their interview time slot, and interviewer, through an online scheduling website would provide indirect opportunity to choose an interviewer with shared identities. Assuming that the team of interviewers represented a racially and culturally diverse group, and that this was made clear in bios, this may help protect against effects shown by Lindenberg et al. (2001), especially amongst younger generations who are accustomed to online scheduling.

The nomination-based recruitment process had some unique benefits. Research suggests that nominated allies are more likely to be effective in their efforts (Ostrove & Brown, 2018).
Indeed, participants reported motivations that are consistent with more enlightened developmental stages, and believed to be indicative of efficacy and consistency of allied behaviors (Edwards, 2006). Additionally, the use of snowball sampling within the general population allowed access to participants who are less commonly researched. Allied literature has historically investigated educators, clinicians, and college students primarily, and thus the participants in this study may provide alternative insights into cultural trends.

Efforts have been made to demonstrate trustworthiness through transparent depiction of results, data analysis procedures, and the research team, as recommended by qualitative researchers Hill et al., (2005). In order to ensure that future researchers are able to duplicate the research, the methods section describes recruitment and data collection procedures in depth, and participant demographics and interview protocol are included in the appendixes. Data analysis procedures, including support of an auditor and implementation of a stability check, are also outlined.

For this study, all three of the research team members were graduate students affiliated with Teachers College, Columbia University, who identify as non-religious and ascribe to liberal politics. The team members’ cultural lenses reflected various vantage points in regard to racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation identities, and familiarity with the Bible Belt (as shown in Table 3). Intentional strategies were used to try and harness the potential benefits of this diversity. Within a CQR approach, it is particularly important that each team member felt comfortable expressing their perspective. We spent ample time in our initial meetings discussing the literature, reviewing training materials on the CQR method, and generally developing rapport. In an effort to ensure that each argument was given voice as we began analyzing the data, we each reviewed the transcripts independently and tracked our suggested domains and
categories in similar but private spreadsheets. As team meetings progressed, the team lead began compiling each of the individual spreadsheets into one master spreadsheet and reviewed, highlighting all places where there was disagreement. The team then discussed each disagreement in team meetings, arguing to consensus. Prior to the use of this strategy, we had noticed that the team members who had greater familiarity with LGBTQ related research too often steered the conversation. However, this approach highlighted the fresh perspective that our other team member brought to the group, and ultimately elevated the level of discussion significantly. Another observed benefit of our diverse perspectives was related to having a member of the LGBTQ community as a part of the team. They were able to point out blind spots for the other two group members, and generally held the team accountable for maintaining high expectations of allies and acts of advocacy. At times, the team lead’s familiarity with the Bible Belt helped to add greater context to the transcripts, while the other team members’ lack of familiarity helped control for the team lead’s biases and expectations. The team members previously noted shared experiences and values must also be considered as having influenced the research process. It is possible that team members with different experiences and social reference points may have formulated a different approach, and/or presented an alternative interpretation of the findings.

**Future Directions for Education and Training**

LGBTQ allies have the power to positively influence institutional, organizational, educational, and familial environments (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Hall et al., 2018; Luhtanen, 2002; Shilo & Savaya, 2011; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). Research is useful in garnering insights into the allied developmental process, and helping to inform strategies to inspire LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes in communities and individuals, and motivate more
effective activism approaches. Cultural norms impact the way in which different strategies are received, and advocacy efforts should be tailored based upon the intended audience to maximize impact. The current findings inform the following recommendations for education and training.

As individuals progress through allied development, access to supportive environments and nonjudgmental others with whom they were able to discuss their beliefs, backgrounds, and biases openly is important for development (Brodio, 2000; Dillon et al., 2004). Participants in the current study echoed this sentiment, and throughout their allied work this was a pervasive focus, as they also described making efforts to help secure a similar sense of safety for others when confronting prejudice, educating and provoking critical thinking through discussion.

Given that participants describe social values in the Bible Belt as promoting the social façade of harmony, often by avoiding conflict, it seems that intervention efforts that are congruent with these values may be the most effective. Nevertheless, discomfort is likely unavoidable within a meaningful experience of allied development, as the process involves confronting difficult truths about systems of injustice, acknowledgement of the impact of ongoing prejudice, and at times painful self-exploration of one’s own biases and privileges (Sue & Sue, 2008; 2012; 2013).

Shutlz (2017) argues for striking a balance between comfort and discomfort, encouraging openness to the emotional challenges involved with cultural exploration and social justice identity development, while being careful not to shut down conversations and exploration prematurely. This may be a particularly delicate task in the Bible Belt region.

**Creating Safe Environments**

Creating an environment in which people are free to share authentic reactions and ultimately explore their own biases, privileges, and identities is no small task. While ongoing feedback is beneficial in provoking critical thinking, it is important to avoid instituting
repercussions or quantified evaluation of this process. Perhaps one of the biggest deterrents to the development of Bible Belt allies is the perception of social judgment. To guard against this, it is recommended that educators and training professionals openly acknowledge the emotional challenges associated with the process, monitor reactions and continually checking in about ruptures to the interpersonal relationship, to guard against potential factors that may shut down receptivity. Rather than engaging in debate, it is recommended that one takes a calm, gentle, and non-judgmental approach to these conversations. Approach difficult conversations with humility. Humor, open-ended questions, and the sharing of concrete information can be quite effective.

**Provide Foundational Education**

A certain amount of self-confidence promotes likelihood of engaging in activism (Brodio, 2000). Acquisition of knowledge, understanding, and experience discussing social justice issues are needed to facilitate that confidence. Given that individuals in the Bible Belt are especially fearful of offending others, they may be more likely to self-silence both when presented with opportunities for intervention, and within discussions that promote allied development. In formal training settings, educators should begin by providing foundational knowledge, including basic vocabulary, so as to empower individuals to engage in learning opportunities, and ultimately to engage in action.

In more informal educational efforts, recommendations echo concepts in the first recommendation. Social norms in the Bible Belt are likely to silence discussions regarding topics deemed impolite, such as those regarding sexuality. Therefore, microaggressions stemming from inadequate or outdated language may be more common in the Bible Belt compared to more progressive regions. Therefore, gentle corrections and provision of education
may be a sufficient confrontation at times. Further, individuals in the Bible Belt who appear indifferent, or remain silent, may be too embarrassed to admit what they do not know and fearful of saying something wrong. Allies might self-disclose similar anxieties and invite questions, or subtly incorporate definitions and/or background information into their own statements, in order to facilitate knowledge and encourage more open discussion with others.

**Use of a Subtle, Indirect, Matter-of-Fact Approach**

While emotional discussion and types of persuasion seem to be particularly salient in the allied development process, participants noted tolerating these types of direct discussions and debate best with people close to them. While allies may have some influence in their discussions with close confidants, participants noted greater significance of these types of conversations with LGBTQ individuals, where there are opportunities to hear firsthand accounts of personal experience. There is a large body of research supporting the power of personal connection to LGBTQ individuals in influencing LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes and the ongoing development of allies (Herek, 2000). To this end, allies may have some opportunities to facilitate these connections by bringing together straight cis-gender individuals and LGBTQ individuals within their social network, and/or by openly acknowledging their connections to the LGBTQ community in matter-of-fact references or through online postings for example. However, it should be noted that this requires acute awareness of the setting and LGBTQ loved ones’ preferences, so as to avoid unintentionally “outing” someone or drawing attention to their sexual orientation/gender identity at inopportune times. When used tactfully, public displays of support for LGBTQ individuals and/or the community can be quite effective.

In more formal educational environments, LGBTQ-friendly materials such as literature or film may allow communication of personal narratives that are impactful but do not require the
same vulnerability of a presenter or the audience. Reflections on these types of materials may
allow for a greater transparency and openness to exploring by reducing the audience’s fears that
their comments may offend others. Once a safe space is created, baseline knowledge is provided
and emotional content is introduced, tolerance for confrontation will likely continue to increase
and more difficult tasks related to self-exploration may then be tackled.

**Be the Change You Want to See**

Perhaps one of the most impactful strategies is simply to be a model for allied work.
Demonstrate acceptance and support through careful and thoughtful language choices;
intentionally and openly elevate LGBTQ individuals and their voices within professional and
social spaces; and finally, freely and consistently express LGBTQ-affirmative attitudes. These
everyday activisms may very well be the most effective means to shift cultural norms.

**Future Directions for Research**

In the past several years, researchers have taken a closer look at LGBTQ allies, and social
justice advocates more broadly. The current research proposal was developed between 2013 and
2016. At that time, psychological researchers had examined many facets of allied development
and activism, albeit the literature was less comprehensive. Further many of the most influential
studies and theories had been published in the 1980s and 1990s. Born out of the AIDS crisis,
these studies often reflected the cultural climate of the times. Since 2016, considerably more
research has been contributed to the literature, suggesting that the 2016 election may have
inspired a resurgence of interest in social justice allies and the LGBTQ social justice movement.
LGBTQ literature has often focused on LGB individuals, and should continue to shift the
narrative to include focus on the transgender and broader queer communities as well. Additional
allied research should continue to challenge heterosexist norms inherent in American culture at
large, as well as within psychological theory and practice. Historically, researchers have focused on prejudice and discrimination, but better understanding LGBTQ-affirmative beliefs, attitudes, and actions may be a more beneficial focus as researchers seek to inform both formal and informal efforts about educating and motivating more consistent and effective allies.

Qualitative studies, such as the present study, provide insight into the iconic and everyday strategies employed by allies (Borgman, 2009; DiStefano et al., 2000), and highlight the approaches that are considered most effective by the general heterosexual population (Hubbard et al., 2013). However, investigation of examples of action and activism has relied primarily on allied report. Future research should examine LGBTQ responses to these proposed activism efforts to better understand how allies and their activism efforts are being received. For example, this study could have gone further to ask nominators why they chose the individuals they nominated. What were the significant allied acts that came to mind when nominators thought of these individuals? The most effective efforts should be received as supportive and reflect the community’s goals. The literature would benefit from community insights.

While this study provides some insights into Bible Belt culture, and points to how these cultural norms may influence the allied experience, greater research is required to test these hypotheses. For example, a comparative study examining heterosexual allies’ perceived costs and risks across regions, would be useful in determining whether particular perceived costs and risks reported by participants in this study are unique to or more pronounced within the Bible Belt. Further, results suggest that people in the Bible Belt may be less comfortable with conflict or debate, which has implications for formal and informal education efforts. The experimental design utilized by Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, and Schwartz (1996) may provide insights into how one might examine regional differences in cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological
responses to conflict and debate. Indications of regional differences may help guide education and training practices, and inform effective advocacy efforts. For instance, Bible Belt inhabitants may respond more favorably to gentler education strategies, while shutting down in response to more confrontational approaches. Further research is needed to better understand how unique characteristics of different cultures should be considered and integrated into education, training, and allied activisms.

Cultural norms and societal attitudes regarding sexuality and gender have evolved over time and several researchers have pointed to generational differences in several domains. For example, older heterosexually identifying individuals are less likely to hold LGBTQ affirmative attitudes (Kazyak & Strange, 2018), and older allies report having experienced more negative reactions to their social justice efforts (Duhigg et al., 2010). Participants in the current study ranged in age from 24 to 60 years old, and were spaced fairly evenly between early twenties (33% of participants were 25 and under), mid-twenties to late thirties (33% of participants), and early fifties to sixty (33% of participants). While the research team noticed and discussed generational differences among these three groups, the sample size proved to be too small to compare subgroups. In addition to team observations, one emerging category may support the need for further research regarding generational differences. Although older individuals may be less likely overall to become allies, results from this study, indicate that allies often become more confident with age, which raises questions as to whether older allies may actually be in a position to be more active in their efforts. Participants noted that over time they have gained knowledge and experience, which has increased their sense of efficacy. Further, older participants may benefit from more security within their professions, relationships and finances, reducing the risks they must consider within advocacy work. Further, as people’s careers begin to wind down and
any children they may have raised have left the house, they may find themselves with more time and energy to devote to social justice causes (McAdam, 1986).

**Conclusion**

Vera and Speight (2003) argue that a multicultural approach is inherently rooted in social justice, and that psychological research needs to look beyond clinical intervention, to consider social advocacy aimed at tackling and preventing harm caused by systemic oppression. A multicultural perspective which, has been increasingly embraced in psychology, acknowledges that there exist various worldviews, shaped by historical, cultural, and social experience, and accepts that behaviors are best understood within a multicultural context (Sue et al., 1998). It is widely accepted that there are significant regional differences across the United States. These are tracked politically, highlighted in film, reflected in music, and easily recognized by travelers. While regional influence is at times alluded to and regional differences are sometimes compared, far fewer researchers have thoroughly explored the impact of regional cultural norms on individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. This study is unique in its exploration of Bible Belt culture and the LGBTQ allied experience.

Scholars have discussed and examined experiences of LGBTQ people living in the region of the Bible Belt. Their contributions highlight unique challenges for the community in the area, such as, social isolation due to smaller LGBTQ communities, significant mental health concerns, and for LGBTQ Christians, often also the fear of going to hell (Barefoot et al., 2015; Barton, 2010; Bell, 1995; Gray, 2009; Eldridge, Mack, & Swank, 2006; Herek, 2002; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; McCarthy, 2000; Snively et al., 2004). With less LGBTQ visibility in the Bible Belt region (Gates & Newport, 2013), allies may be even more influential in their roles tackling systemic oppression and engaging in everyday activism to combat prejudice and
discrimination. Previous studies suggest that the social context of the Bible Belt plays a significant role in the identity development of allies (Barton, 2010; 2011; Borgman, 2009), and this study provides an outline of the LGBTQ Bible Belt allied experience, including identity development, motivation, sense of self-efficacy, and activism.

While political conservatism is a defining characteristic of the Bible Belt, it is the pervasiveness of Christian fundamentalism that makes the area particularly unique (Barton, 2010, 2011; Heatwole, 1978; Newport, 2009; Tweedie, 1978). When religion is the cornerstone of all belief systems for so many in the Bible Belt and the Christian faith promotes traditional, heteronormative lifestyles, how does one come to understand sexual orientation and gender identity diversity? Christian allies might argue that the tenants of Christianity—promoting love, acceptance and empathy—actually inspire allied action. However, others cope with a deeper struggle related to “loving the sinner and hating the sin.” Ultimately, religious beliefs may be less predictive of LGBTQ allied identity and one’s participation in activism, than personality traits related to cognitive flexibility. Regardless of an ally’s personal religious identity, the pervasiveness of fundamentalist Christian faith certainly presents allies in the area with unique challenges, and at times, a rather resistant audience.

The existing literature has tended to focus on iconic activism such as protests, marches, and rallies (Fish, King, & Almack, 2018). Findings in the current study suggest that while important, the direct impact of iconic activism within the Bible Belt is less clear. Further, participants were much more likely to discuss engagement in everyday activism (Pink, 2012). These daily acts took place in peoples’ social, professional, familial, and deeply personal lives. Participants were motivated not only to support LGBTQ loved ones, but also motivated by the mission to create the kind egalitarian of environment and culture they want to live in. These
individuals were open about their experiences, their shortcomings, regrets and areas of growth, and inspiring in their vast efforts to continue to learn and enact strategies to change their worlds for the better. Their stories represent meaningful contributions to the growing literature on allies and social justice in an area that will surely benefit from ongoing progress and change.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer each item by circling or filling in a response

Were you born and raised within the United States?
   a. Yes
   b. No

What is your current age? _____

Please indicate your race: ______________

Please indicate your gender: _______________

Do you identify as heterosexual? _____

Level of Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
_____________________

Profession: ____________

How would you describe your social class?
____________________

How would you describe your religious beliefs?
____________________

What is the zip code of your current primary residence?
___________

Approximately how long have you lived in this area?
_________years _______months
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1) How would you describe the culture of the geographic region you live in?
   a. What are the cultural norms and expectations related to gender and sexual
      orientation in this area?

2) In what ways have you observed homophobia/heterosexism within your community?
   a. Any specific examples?

3) When you witness homophobia/heterosexism in your community what is your reaction?
   a. Do you intervene?
      i. Are there some situations/settings in which you are more or less likely to
         intervene? Why?
      ii. What comes up for you when you do/or do not intervene? How do you
          feel?
      iii. What risks might you perceive? Personal/social?
      iv. What motivates you to intervene?

4) [Name of person who nominated participant] nominated you as a person within their life
   who they would describe as, “a heterosexual and cisgender person who supports equal
   civil rights, gender equality, LGB social movements, and challenges homophobia as it
   occurs.”
   a. Do you identify with this description? Why or why not?
   b. What feelings come up for you as you reflect on this nomination?
   c. Have you always fit this description or has it been an evolution for you?
      i. Tell me about that evolution
ii. What were your thoughts?

iii. Feelings associated with this evolution?

iv. Any stand-out experiences?

v. *MAKE SURE TO GET INFO: regarding personal sense of knowledge and awareness of LGB issues AND sense of rewards to LGB ally behavior

*If not covered in answers to above be sure to cover:

1) Personal religious identity and experiences of religion and how this has played a role in their allied development

2) Personal relationships with LGB individuals

3) Has the participant always lived in the Bible Belt?
   a. If not, how might they compare this experience to living somewhere else?
Appendix C

Bible Belt Graphs

Figure 6a. Percent Bible Belt Population by County, 2000.
Figure 6b. Top 200 and Bottom 200 Counties by Bible Belt Percentage of the Population, 2000.
# TABLES

Table 1: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Professional Field</th>
<th>Religious Identity</th>
<th>Grew Up in BB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Television Production</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Non-Religious</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Upper-Middle Class</td>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Upper-Middle Class</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Law, Education and Entertainment</td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>Retail Sales</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Upper-Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>cis-F</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Frequency Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Personal Traits, Values and Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to exposure to other cultures</td>
<td>I’ve lived outside the BB</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m well-traveled</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to personal religious identity</td>
<td>I was raised Religious</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I critically examine and question religion</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I identify as Christian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’ve negotiated and accepted a personal approach to religion separate from prescribed religious practice</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I emphasize religious values of acceptance, love, kindness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to exposure to LGBTQ community and culture</td>
<td>A significant portion of my current social network identifies as part of the LGBTQ community</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have a LGBTQ family member</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I grew up around LGBTQ individuals/community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to personality traits and identities</td>
<td>I identify as a person who is curious / open-minded / perspective taking</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I identify as a person who is nonjudgmental / accepting / empathetic / kind</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have liberal social-justice-oriented political beliefs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am conflict avoidant / non-confrontational</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I challenge the status quo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I identify as an &quot;outsider&quot;/ someone who &quot;lives on the fringe&quot;</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Variant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bible Belt Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to LGBTQ Visibility and Safe Spaces</td>
<td>I observe lacking LGBTQ visibility within community</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I notice progressive urban bubbles</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to Prejudice</td>
<td>I observe frequent examples of heterosexism (including homophobia, transphobia, sexism)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I observe prevalent microaggressions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I observe prevalent problematic racism</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to Religion</td>
<td>I observe people using religious explanations for acts of social exclusion, prejudice and judgment</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I notice pressure to participate in the Christian faith</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I observe pervasive visibility of Christian faith in my community
I notice people making universal assumptions of Christianity

Related to Politics
Conservative political leanings are prevalent
Regional politics are directly linked to Christianity

Related to Social Norms
I observe rampant “personalism” in my community (i.e. the desire
to fit in, to get along with one’s neighbors, to not offend, to present
the social façade of harmony and good humor)
I notice pervasive promotion of a “traditional” lifestyle (i.e. gender
roles, marriage and family)

3. Current Cultural Factors Influencing LGBTQ Advocacy

Related to Cultural Shifts Following 2016 Presidential Election
Exposed rampant apathy regarding civil rights and equality
Political tensions leading to increased frequency of political
discussion, debates and arguments
Increase in discrimination and expressions of prejudice

Related to Progressive Cultural Changes Impacting LGBTQ
Community and Advocacy
Increased LGBTQ visibility in media, social media and internet
Increase in LGBTQ rights (e.g. marriage equality)
Increased LGBTQ visibility within my community
Gender roles are becoming more fluid

4. LGBTQ Allied Identity Development

Related to Informal Education Through Contact with LGBTQ
Individuals/Community
Close contact with LGBTQ individuals has influenced my LGBTQ
affirmative attitudes (exposure - growing up, queer spaces, pride,
etc.)
I have learned a lot through supporting a loved one throughout their
coming out process
I have learned a lot though meaningful discussions with LGBTQ
people - hearing their stories
I have learned a lot through first hand observations of prejudice
against LGBTQ people

Related to Other Informal Education Opportunities
I learned a lot through consumption of LGBTQ-friendly materials
of various mediums (e.g. readings, music, TV shows, movies,
documentaries, plays, internet, social media)
I learned a lot through discussions with peers exploring social
justice related issues
Exposure to new and different cultures expanding perspective made me a better ally

*Related to Formal Education Opportunities*
I learned a lot through participation in classes, talks, programs and groups with social justice related education
I learned a lot from (an) allied mentor(s) in an official position

*Related to Education Through Personal Role Models*
I had role models who promoted kindness/tolerance/empathy
I had role models who promoted liberal values / equal rights

5. Sense of Allied Identity

*Related to Response to Allied Identification*
I am honored/proud to be named an ally
I think that all people should be "allies"

*Related to Sense of Self-Efficacy*
I sometimes feel under qualified or as though I am not doing enough
My confidence increases with age
I experience anxiety about “getting it wrong”

*Related to Allied Identity as an Ongoing Evolution*
I consistently evaluate my efficacy, own my imperfections and mistakes, and recognize my need for ongoing education and development
Through acknowledgment and understanding of my own privilege I have become a better ally

6. Advocacy Behaviors

*Related to overarching intervention style*
I take a calm, gentle, non-judgmental approach
I use humor
I encourage perspective taking
I share concrete information/logical arguments
I use of specific/personal narratives
I use open-ended questions
I tailor my approach to audience
I avoid debate or preaching
I use social media as a platform
I notice emotional persuasion to be effective

*Related to confrontation of prejudice*
I correct heteronormative assumptions that I hear
I bring bullying/harassment to the attention of authorities who may be able to help
I confront individuals privately  
I reference rules and standards  
*Related to provoking discussions and promoting awareness*
 I provoke discussion aimed at challenging beliefs and raising awareness about injustice  
I providing education about LGBTQ culture and terminology  
*Related to general assertions of allied identity*
 I make my liberal beliefs and LGBTQ support known  
I attend marches, rallies, pride and other LGBTQ affirming events  
I vote and/or campaign for LGBTQ affirmative policy and politicians  
I introduce other straight cis-people to queer affirming spaces/media  
*Related to creating safe and inclusive environments*
 I model LGBTQ affirmative attitudes and advocacy to other straight cis individuals  
I am purposeful about my own use of language - use of pronouns / careful and thoughtful with word choice  
I set clear boundaries regarding expectations for LGBTQ friendly speech and actions  
*Related to support of specific LGBTQ individuals*
 In Coming Out Process: I am cognizant to remain consistent across all aspects of my relationship with LGBTQ individuals after they have come out  
In Coming Out Process: I support my loved ones as they explore their identity by providing time and space for my loved ones to come out on their own terms  
I support LGBTQ loved ones by accompanying them to queer spaces  
I express support by being an active participant and researcher alongside my LGBTQ loved ones as they explore their own identity and LGBTQ culture  
I connect LGBTQ individuals in my network with friendly spaces, people and community  
I support LGBTQ loved ones as they navigate relationships with unsupportive family and friends  
I try to protect my LGBTQ loved ones from dangerous or negative situations  

7. Contextual and Relational Factors Influencing Advocacy Behaviors

*Related to Social Networks*
 I have created a social microcosm for myself, filled with people who share similar values to my own  
I seek and work to create LGBTQ-friendly work environments
**Related to Considerations of Context, Relationships and Audience**

I consider the appropriateness based on the setting and the audience

I assess the potential impact of intervention as part of a cost/benefit analysis when considering whether or not to engage in advocacy

I am more likely to engage in advocacy behaviors when with people I feel close to

Who the prejudice is being directed at is a consideration factor in deciding whether or not to intervene

**Related to Considerations of Consequences and Potential Repercussions of Advocacy**

I consider how conflict may disrupt my social and/or professional relationships when deciding whether or not engage in advocacy efforts

I evaluate my physical safety when deciding whether or not to intervene

---

**8. Motivation for Advocacy Behaviors**

**Related to Sources of Inspiration**

The LGBTQ social justice movement, the individuals fighting for equal rights and ongoing progress

Election - woke me up to need for change

Christian values

**Related to Allyship to Improve One's Own Life**

Being an ally offers me more perspectives and opens my mind to the world

Gaining positive social connections

**Related to Allyship to Improve Life for Others**

LGBTQ community overall

Specific LGBTQ loved ones

**Related to Allyship to Improve Life for All**

LGBTQ equality strengthens community and improves culture for everyone
Table 3: Team Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>BB Familiarity</th>
<th>LBGTQ Familiarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Researcher</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>cisgender female</td>
<td>straight</td>
<td>non-religious</td>
<td>liberal / socialist leanings</td>
<td>lived in the region for 18 years</td>
<td>moderately high - high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>non-binary / trans-masculine</td>
<td>pansexual</td>
<td>non-religious</td>
<td>far left leanings</td>
<td>never been / familiar</td>
<td>moderately high - high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Member</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>cisgender female</td>
<td>straight</td>
<td>non-religious</td>
<td>no American party affiliation / socialist leanings</td>
<td>not familiar</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditor</td>
<td>Middle Eastern &amp; North African</td>
<td>Yemini-American</td>
<td>cisgender female</td>
<td>straight</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>moderately high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>