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“A Question Everybody Danced Around”: Gay Men Making Sense of their Identities in
Christian Colleges

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Abstract

Despite broader social changes in attitudes and policies regarding LGBTQ people, the space available for gay students to develop and express their identities in Christian colleges provides only limited and fleeting relief because of the culture of heteronormativity central to their history and identity. Yet, in an era of enrollment competition in higher education, Christian colleges must navigate their traditional mission to preserve and advance the faith, changing cultural attitudes regarding LBGTQ people, and the financial realities facing contemporary institutions. This paper draws from interviews with men who attended Christian colleges. First, we present their narratives to render the presence of LGBTQ people visible in these sites. Secondly, we seek to understand how these men made sense of their sexualities within educational cultures saturated with retention imperatives, institutional surveillance, and denominational ambivalence or hostility about LGBTQ persons. The men's narratives highlight the challenges they faced as "unfit subjects" (Pillow, 2004), their absorption of normative constructions of gender and sexuality governing their educational context, and the need for Christian colleges to better serve their gay students of faith.

Keywords: LGBTQ, gay men, Christian colleges, higher education, identity development

Introduction

“I see so many different threads of Christianity...but as a whole, I guess, if you take all those threads and weave them into a rope, that rope is still predominantly anti-gay” (Nathan)

Symbolic and Protective Function of Christian College Spaces

Christian colleges are unique higher educational institutions that offer powerful symbolic, spiritual, and educational meanings for those who support, administer, and attend them. Many adherents understand Christian colleges (that is, higher education institutions affiliated with self-professed Christian churches or denominations) as important vehicles for protecting and advancing the faith in an increasingly secularized world (Adrian, 2003), for providing sites for learning in which religion and faith are central, as well as retaining and cultivating future generations of proselytizing believers (Kingsriter, 2007). The missions of Christian colleges, while varying by denomination, are also invested in protecting ideals and traditions, including openly enforcing and proscribing various gendered and sexual beliefs and behaviors. For example, students attending these schools often sign agreements that include specific guidelines about dating and sex (SafetyNet, 2014, August 7). The most typical set of rules involve a prohibition against sex outside of heterosexual marriage, restrictions on time spent in one's room with people of another gender (i.e., “visitation hours” for men in women's rooms and women in men's rooms), prohibitions against pornography (including internet filters at many institutions as reported by student handbooks and student conduct contracts) and strict prohibitions against faculty, staff or students having same-sex romantic or sexual relationships.

While select Christian colleges have adopted policies that are “LGBTQ-affirming” (Rockenbach & Crandall, 2016, p. 63), many conservative Christian colleges, especially those in the Evangelical tradition, have policies barring LGBTQ students from openly enrolling or

graduating (Barton, 2012; Wollf & Himes, 2010) to protect “traditional” ways of life—and young adults—from the dangers some believe same-sex relationships represent for Christian values. Others have “don’t-ask-don’t-tell” policies, whether written or unwritten, that suggest LGBTQ students may attend so long as they do not speak about their feelings, reveal their identity, and/or engage in sexual behavior. Still others perpetuate varied informal and formal practices that create a silencing or restrictive climate for those who are questioning or identify as gay (Strunk, Bailey, & Takewell, 2014; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean & Brooke, 2009), as is true of other private and public institutions as well (e.g., Blount, 2005; Johnson, 2014; Mayo, 2007; 2013; Meiners & Quinn, 2012; Meyer & Carlson, 2014). Teachers in a range of institutions have faced similarly hostile purges or chilly climates (e.g. Graves, 2009; Rankin et al., 2010).

For some proponents, Christian colleges remain important educational sites that preserve Christian values for and in future generations. They provide space for faculty, staff and students of faith to openly express and explore their deeply-held religious convictions. Given some perceptions of public higher education as liberalizing and secularizing, Christian colleges offer a protective grounding in “traditional Christian values” through curricula that typically include Christian morality, religion, and biblical knowledge. Messaging about these protective functions usually contrasts public colleges with Christian ones, particularly the potential moral and religious ramifications (the “high cost”) of sending one’s children to a less-expensive but liberalizing and/or secularizing state institution (Kingsriter, 2007). In a previous study, we argued that such institutions, in the Southern United States in particular, can accrue important symbolic meanings steeped in family and regional affiliations that represent honorable bastions of tradition in a changing world. Southern participants’ appreciation for family tradition, in fact,

shaped their initial decisions to attend their parents and grandparents' alma maters. Initially, the schools felt like "home" (Strunk, Bailey, & Takewell, 2014). Many schools host varied spiritual development events and required students to attend institutionally-hosted religious services regularly. These institutional practices support religious expression and devotion to help cultivate a faithful future for those who attend. These colleges also serve to defend and preserve traditionalist values around gender and sexuality.

Changing Attitudes and the Slow Shift in Evangelical Traditions

At present, Christian colleges find themselves immersed in a broader culture of shifting norms and laws regarding gender and sexuality as well as increasing competition in recruiting students in order to sustain financial health. In society at large, widespread changes in attitudes toward LGBTQ people have occurred in the past two decades, with a quickening pace (Jones & Saad, 2012). The majority of American now support same-sex marriage (Pew Research Center, 2017, June 26). Heterosexist and homophobic attitudes appear to be becoming less common among students at Christian colleges, too (Wolff, Himes, Kwon, & Bollinger, 2012). Some colleges host gay speakers, discussion groups, and/or have centers for LGBTQ students and allies. The continuing visibility of the topic is evident in the schedule for the 2018 Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) International Forum, which incorporates program space for discussing "human sexuality" and transgender issues, though the tone of those conversations is yet to be seen (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, n.d.). Also, the larger Christian and Evangelical communities have witnessed gradual changes and generational differences in attitudes toward LGBTQ rights and individuals, with younger Evangelicals increasingly holding accepting views (McMurtrie, 2016). Contemporary Evangelical thinkers variously argue for a fully affirming approach (Beach-Ferrara, 2013), for championing as a

Christian value embracing the individual but rejecting the sexual identity of LGBTQ people as inherently sinful (Estanek, 1998; Yoakam, 2006), and for steadfast rejection of all LGBTQ individuals (Ribas, 2004). The most common middle-ground visible in this complex terrain is represented through the catchphrase, “love the sinner; hate the sin.” It reflects a stance of embracing individuals while rejecting their identities and/or sexual behavior as unacceptable, even abhorrent.

This same “love the sinner; hate the sin” approach is evident in Christian college policies, which reflect what Burack and Josephson (2003) might call a “compassionate” conservative response to a changing social, ecclesiastical, and theological environment. This ‘compassionate’ response refers to a range of fiscally-conservative approaches to social issues that represent to proponents caring about people in need, but that removes individuals and governmental entities from direct responsibility for providing that care. Those approaches frame compassion as policies and practices that emphasize personal responsibility, support traditional family structures, or limit welfare provisions. Christian college industry groups have advanced this same narrative of “compassionate” response. The CCCU represents approximately 174 Christian colleges, and their 2001 report on how Christian colleges might handle LGBTQ issues suggested that although “consensus is eroded within the Church” (p. 2), “homosexual behavior also represents direct disobedience to the command of the one true God” (Jones, 2001, p. 5). The CCCU suggests the best way of negotiating the “highly divisive issue of homosexuality” (Jones, 2001, p. 6) involves differentiating between individuals and barred behaviors. In other words, they recommend that colleges bar “a type of sexual behavior” but not “a sexual orientation *per se*” (p. 3). Some gay Evangelicals accept this distinction for their own lives (e.g., Worthen, 2016, February 27).

Although the Jones (2001) report is the most recent official statement of the CCCU's position, the CCCU has more recently published a number of papers written by member institutions regarding the topic of LGBTQ students. For example, Jones (2004) writes that "there is nothing persuasive presented in contemporary scientific research that renders invalid the classical ethical judgment of the Christian Church about homosexual conduct," and that "homosexual conduct... violates [God's] will" (p. 1). Such conduct is understood as inherently immoral sexual intimacy with those of the same sex that represents succumbing to sin, and reflects an essentialized, binary contrast between homosexual acts and their unnamed but normative opposites. The report evidences a particular concern with the idea of extending recognition to all LGBTQ persons. The CCCU considers what they perceive as flexible categories such as bisexuality as particularly threatening to morality. The report states,

The inclusion of bisexuals must signal the gravity of the shift being proposed in Christian sexual morality. How can we be construed as simply broadening traditional sexually-exclusive monogamy to couples of the same gender when we are being asked to extend full acceptance to persons committed to sexual intimacy with individuals of both genders? (Jones, 2001, p. 9).

More recently, the CCCU (2015) wrote to then-President Barack Obama on behalf of its membership to object to the Department of Education letter interpreting Title IX as protecting LGBTQ students under existing law. Their letter stressed the CCCU view that religious freedom entitles Christian colleges to a level of exclusion in hiring and admissions policies. In the Fall of 2015, the CCCU experienced turmoil related to two member institutions' (both Quaker) adopting policies allowing for hiring faculty members in same-sex marriages. Other member CCCU institutions quit the Council in protest. Eventually, the two Quaker institutions left the CCCU

due to the conflict (Jaschik, 2015, August 13). The CCCU has also considered an initiative termed, “Fairness for All,” to support protections for LGBTQ persons so long as religious organizations are exempted from such policies and do not face “discrimination” based on their beliefs about gender and marriage (LoMaglio, 2017). Much of the discourse around LGBTQ protections, especially as part of Title IX, is in flux as, following the 2017 U.S. presidential transition and shift in policy positions, now-President Trump’s U.S. Department of Education rescinded the guidance issued by the Obama administration around LGBTQ rights (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, February 22).

Purpose of the Study

In this paper, we present findings from a qualitative study that explored through semi-structured interviews how gay-identified men who attended Christian colleges experienced their college environments and came to understand themselves as gay within their college contexts. Contemporary Christian colleges are saturated by a range of internal divisions on gay rights within denominations and colleges, restrictions and surveillance related to sexuality and gender norms, as well as contradicting “identity” and “behavior” messages. We argue that, following Burack (2014), practices of embracing someone perceived as a “sinner” in an era of accountability, recruitment, and retention while restricting his or her speech, visibility, and behavior essentially absolve institutions from responsibility for stigmatizing, excluding, and silencing gay people in higher education. Inductive analysis revealed how participants made sense of their gendered and sexual identities as all but one came to recognize themselves as same-sex desiring or as gay-identified while in college (one participant came out in high school). They wrestled with how their sexual and affectional feelings for other men troubled their religious faith, and how their faith, in turn, troubled long-held assumptions of a Christian/gay

divide. They used the very resources of their faith and their education, varied scriptures and scientific texts, to consider their place within broader complementarian and hegemonic concepts of masculinity central to conceptions of manhood in their faith communities. We suggest that developing a gay identity amidst official policies and institutional mechanisms often encouraged them to violate their sense of self and maintain their own oppression.

Methodology

Participants for the present study were self-identified gay men recruited through snowball sampling. Initially, emails were sent to several individuals known to the researchers, who were then asked to identify others who might be interested in participating. A total of nine individuals from six institutions were interviewed (see Table 1 for demographics; all names are pseudonyms). All interviews lasted between one to two hours of time, with additional contact to clarify procedural issues, which we recorded, transcribed, and analyzed collaboratively using inductive (ideas and themes that emerge from the data) and then theoretical (using theories to “think with” the data; see Jackson & Mazzei, 2011) analysis. We initially used a semi-structured interview protocol with questions regarding participants’ family and religious backgrounds, their major and career, their journey to choosing to attend a Christian College, and details about the particular college they attended. We also asked questions about participants’ identification in terms of religion and sexuality (e.g., “how do you identify now?” “at what point would you say you began identifying as gay?” “how did you identify when attending X college?”). When participants turned to sharing their sensitive experiences being gay in college, the questions became nuanced and individualized. The researchers used probes and prompts or asked for clarification (e.g., “tell me a little more about that”) about particular experiences. While the

emotional tenor of the interviews fluctuated—moments of somber reflection, humor, bitterness, as well as wrenching pain—all participants seemed invested in sharing their experiences.

We began our analytic process while in the field through noting insights, discussing interviews, and transcribing the data (Poindexter, 2002). We followed a layered, iterative process in sifting and processing the data., reading through the transcripts repeatedly, tracking and discussing common themes of struggle, safety, secrecy, hiding, authority, masculinity, and negotiation as the men made sense of their sexuality in these educational sites. As part of our analytic process, we “thought with” a range of theories to make sense of the emergent themes (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011), including developmental stage theories of identity, social identity, and poststructuralist theories. For example, varied developmental models pose coming out as a process marked by linear stages (Cass, 1979) or broader phases (Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), that are cyclical and can differ for lesbians and gay men (Degges-White, Rice & Myers, 2000; Fassinger & Miller, 1996). Using the linear stage framework as an initial touchstone for meaning-making, we considered how some participants narrate their college experiences through aspects of these familiar stages.

Yet, scholars have noted such “coming out” narratives, a form of “sexual storytelling,” as now formulaic in their content—involving childhood discontent, a “critical incident” of awareness, and eventual resolution of a gay identity (Crawley & Broad, 2004). Notably, participants’ retrospective accounts, shared primarily between three and ten years after graduating (with one exception), do not map on quite so tidily to such models, as having access to new concepts, terms, and scripts that emerge from years of reflecting and revising necessarily produce new forms of telling. Indeed, Orne (2011) describes the coming out process as a type of “strategic outness,” that is selective, strategic, and dynamic throughout one’s life based on

relationships and social context. With our perspective that conceptions of subjectivity and sexuality and gender are fluid, constructed and narrated within the discourses available in a given place and time, we chose to emphasize in our analysis the grounded, emic (terms and ideas used by members of the group under study) and recurring framings that participants relayed in making sense of their sexuality in these educational contexts (see finding 2). Over time, and through incubation and immersion with the data, these emic terms and themes led us to the theoretical frame of Foucauldian disciplinary power as a fitting force for animating these men's experiences.

Participants

Participants attended colleges spanning six states throughout the U.S., all of which are associated with Evangelical denominations and are members of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). These denominations reflect a broad spectrum of doctrine within the Evangelical tradition, but they are relatively uniform in their rejection of LGBTQ individuals, behaviors, and relationships. Elsewhere, we analyzed the symbolic significance of Southern place for select participants in this study who attended Christian colleges in the South (Strunk, Bailey, & Takewell, 2014). Here we focus on nine participants who completed their undergraduate degrees at varied institutions between the years 2005-2010, with the exception of Ethan who graduated in the early 1980s. Each reflected retrospectively about their years in college during a semi-structured interview, the protocol for which focused on experiences and identity during college.

The majority of participants reported coming out as gay, either to themselves or select others, while in college. One came out in high school and stayed selectively out in college. Six participants were raised in the South-Central and Southeastern region of the U.S. often described as the "Bible Belt", important for shaping "an individual's expectation of Christians and

Christianity” through forces of “hegemonic religious” space (Barton, 2012, p. 8; See also Strunk, Bailey, & Takewell, 2014). Five participants were in the 25-30 age range, three were in the 31-35 age range, and one was in the 50-55 age range at the time of the interviews. The snowball sampling process recruited primarily white participants who attended primarily white institutions; only one participant identified as African American. Four of the participants, David, Joshua, Ethan, and Andrew, left the geographic region of their alma maters following graduation while all others remained near their schools. In terms of religious faith, the participants vary in how they identify with the faith with which they entered college (see Table 1). Alex and Jacob now identify as atheist or agnostic, Joshua, Simon, and Jason remain Christian-identified but not in the same denominational affiliation, and Nathan and Andrew remain similarly Christian-identified as when they began at their respective colleges.

Findings and Discussion

Diverse Mechanisms of Surveillance

Awareness of diverse mechanisms of surveillance (Foucault, 1975) emerged through inductive analysis and data immersion as a salient feature of participants’ narratives. Among Foucault’s productive concepts, disciplinary power is a dynamic form of power that operates in diverse ways (including arranging built space, policies, behavior) to regulate bodies and behavior in a given society. In seeking to understand, to give voice to, and come to terms with their emerging sexual subjectivities, participant narratives revealed the intense, recurring and diffuse policies, practices, and perceptions that disciplined their identities, behavior, speech, and thoughts in their contexts. These layered, overt and covert mechanisms took a variety of forms, including policies understood to be expressions of God’s will, perceived networks of potential informants, and subtle gestures and distancing mechanisms such as avoidance and threats of

circulating petitions that would out suspect individuals. Significantly, participants both profoundly suffered within these conditions and, at times, hungered for these signals of surveillance to control their feelings.

The faith-based contracts and guidelines related to sexual conduct and dating that are involved in attending or working in some Christian colleges reflect and enable particular forms of surveillance that are unique to these educational institutions. Participants described college cultures that reflected their deeply-held religious beliefs, investments in traditions, familial connections, and regional and denominational values and expectations. Their narratives reflected an understanding of authority central to those environments and, often, adherence to disciplinary rules and norms. For example, Andrew described the expectations for students at his institution to “uphold various values” such as “[not] lying, cheating, stealing,” and maintaining “chastity.” Students agreed not to “engage in sex outside of the marriage covenant.” To ensure members upheld these values, a church/school leader monitored adherence on an ongoing basis through careful documentation. Andrew described the process:

...you will then also go twice yearly, every six months, [to] have an ecclesiastical endorsement, so you're interviewed by a [leader] who asks you a number of questions about your moral conduct, standing in the church... you have to have this form signed twice yearly and turned into the school to maintain your enrollment ... questions [can] focus on masturbation, pornography, ...your political views and whether [you] support organizations [consistent with the values of the faith].

Although participants' recall of the specific contractual details at their institutions varied, they were aware that signing honor code documents signaled their compliance with institutional rules. Joshua described reading the policies on sexual behavior in the student handbook and signing the

student conduct contract carefully and intentionally. Andrew grappled with his sexuality during his college years under the weight of these commitments. Rather than leaving the school or rejecting the honor code, at one point he broke up with a man he was dating because they “agreed together that we could no longer in good conscience sign” the agreement.

While such mechanisms of surveillance were overt, others functioned in more diffuse, covert, and generalized ways. In *Pray the Gay Away*, Barton (2012) uses Bentham’s concept of the panopticon to describe the networks of power (Foucault, 1975) operating in Bible Belt communities “manifest[ed] through tight social networks of family, neighbors, church, and community members, and a plethora of Christian signs and symbols sprinkled throughout the region...” (p. 24). Similar dynamics animated participant experiences. For example, some men felt concerned that networks of evangelical people in the community or school would inform one another of any unorthodox behavior they witnessed. Jacob explained that, “the [denominational] world is so small, and one person knowing on campus could spread to six people knowing, could spread to the nearby church, could spread through the network to my parents...” At first, these tight-knit connections provided a sense of comfort, but over time they came to represent risky circuits for disseminating secrets. When Ethan was accidentally “outed” during college, the “news kind of shot around the campus pretty quickly...just about everybody knew about it by the end of the day.” As participants recounted their college experiences, seven described shifts from experiencing their campus as comforting and familiar to restrictive, scary, and stifling.

Similarly, several described “stories” of suspicious behavior or of people who “might be gay” circulating on their campuses. In one example, Nathan described hearing about a student who visited his boyfriend’s house on weekends, after which “word got out and... it was really messy.” Such talk posed an ever-present threat and mechanism of control in these campus and

community networks. Simon recounted how vague circulating stories could take an intentional turn for use in ferreting out and purging violators. In one instance involving a coworker, Simon said, “people were walking around asking other people on campus, ‘Do you know this man is gay?’ ... And if they said yes, there were like, ‘would you write it down and sign your name to it?’” One participant mobilized such homophobic threats to inscribe and circulate “evidence” of gayness to serve his own ends. When Ethan’s fraternity planned to “rescind his membership” because they thought he was gay, he “threatened to ‘out’ other fraternity members who were either gay, gay-friendly, or...gay-curious.”

Yet the most common consequences of the normalizing function of disciplinary relations of power in these sites expressed through gossip, networks, and policies were in self-surveillance (Foucault, 1975). Participants described hiding gender-non-conforming behaviors, avoiding members of the same sex, self-blame, and suppressing feelings of desire through a range of strategies, including drinking. They often avoided even privately conceptualizing their affections in terms of “gay” terminology. In fact, several participants hungered for such institutional surveillance to have sufficient power to stem the tide of their feelings altogether. Alex believed he selected his college in part for that reason:

I wanted to have a community . . . of Christians that . . . I could be around and that would support my faith. I also, I think in the back of my mind, I knew [Northern Midwestern Christian]’s stance on homosexuality and I thought maybe there was still a chance for me to change...my orientation . . . Not really consciously but unconsciously.

Similarly, Andrew “firmly held” the values of his faith when he enrolled in college, dutifully signing the honor code, meeting with church leaders, and “going to reparative conversion therapy during that time.” He hoped these efforts would help him “become straight or to at least

suspend my homosexual attraction.” Jason, in fact, felt frustrated that his guilty feelings from being in a “Christian environment with people” he knew and cared about were insufficient to control his attraction. He lamented, “how is it that I’m *not* changing, that my feelings *aren’t* changing toward other men? Why am I always attracted to other men?”

Diffuse power dynamics were manifest in college spaces functioning to police “open expression of a homosexual identity” (Barton, 2010, p. 24). Even those who understood themselves as gay “who knew each other” would “never acknowledge” one another on campus. Hazards were numerous, including the threat of expulsion from school, the lack of out role models, gay public spaces, or visible support, persistent surveillance of gendered and sexual norms and expression, and the threat of loss of financial, social, familial stability and respect if campus members discovered one’s sexual identity. Participants’ desire to “not rock the boat,” (Joshua), not “get kicked out of school” (Joshua, Simon, Jacob, David, Alex, Andrew), and not face the financial and academic ramifications of suspension or expulsion reflected their profound awareness of the dominant messages in the schools they attended. And, for some men who yearned for relief from their conflicted feelings, they hoped the institutional culture of surveillance—this brew of formal documents, cautionary tales, overt threats, and covert networks—might be sufficient to purge the gay from their lives.

Making Sense Within Restrictive and Ambivalent Spaces

People I meet are astounded I can be a Christian and Christians are astounded I can be gay... So I have people on both sides of this looking at me like I’m some sort of unicorn walking around. (Joshua)

Despite broader social changes in attitudes and policies regarding LGBTQ people, such changes are uneven, fragile, and contested in diverse geographic and educational sites.

Educational institutions have variously surveilled, ignored, tolerated, or provided for the needs of their LGBTQ students, and participant narrations in this study almost entirely reflected a pervasive culture of silence and surveillance in their college environments. The participants primarily described the lack of out gays in their lives, of exposure to other LGBTQ persons, or of any forms of structural support available to questioning or gay students during the very period of time they were struggling most intensely to understand and name their sexuality. Joshua captured potently the culture surrounding and permeating his college when he described a “noisy wash” of hatred that was difficult to sort out: “I was getting messages about it everywhere at that point from various places. So it kind of all washes. It kind of gets this noisy wash of blah blah blah... you hate me--got it”. Men of faith attending these college campuses were left to make sense of their sexuality within this “noisy wash” with occasional allies, and the tools of their faith.

The individual gay students we interviewed had limited frameworks and opportunities to explore and express their sexual identities because of the culture of heteronormativity and surveillance that was central to the history and identity of Christian Colleges they attended. The necessity of negotiating policies that proclaim, variously, “no gays,” or, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” or “Identity without Intimacy,” shaped what students and their administrators and teachers could and couldn’t say. As Nathan noted, “this is like the one thing that we can’t talk about, and if you’re dealing with it that just counts you out...you don’t have anyone that you can talk to because it is simply something that we don’t talk about here.” Ethan said that “same-sex relationships were completely forbidden, unofficially, but completely,” which shaped the language and resources available for meaning-making, for identification, and for solace.

All participants entered college as Christian, and all but one described the challenges of accepting their non-heterosexual sense of themselves in a Christian college environment after a

lifetime of devotion to their faith and as members of families and churches that characterized homosexuality as a sin. These difficulties echo what O'Brien (2004) describes as a "tremendous existential crisis" (p. 185) for gay people, particularly those who grew up in staunch church traditions, because of the perceived incommensurability of inhabiting the complex identities of "gay" and "Christian" simultaneously. Nathan captured this tension when describing others' reactions to him, "as if I am sort of unicorn walking around." O'Brien (2004) underscores the profound psychic threat some Christian gays face who believe "to experience homosexual desires, and certainly to pursue the fulfillment of these desires, will result in being cast out from the cosmology through which one makes sense of one's life..." (p. 185).

Wrestling with feelings of expulsion from such a cosmology was evident for the majority of participants, perhaps made more salient given the site of faith, friends, and family (i.e., the Christian college campus) in which it occurred. For Jacob, who had ministers in his family and had once aspired to ministry himself, the process was profoundly physical and utterly traumatic. Describing his secret weight in corporeal and symbolic terms, he said, in his church, "sin is this really heavy presence...". He said, for the first two years on his campus,

I probably cried my eyes out on a pretty regular basis...I would get down on my face... underneath the altar and just cry for, I mean, I don't know how much time would pass, but I would just be bawling... I felt dirty all the time and I felt like there was this thing inside me that if I could just get it out I would be okay.

Efforts to exorcise this "sin" often took place in the college chapel. Similarly, Joshua, realizing he was gay after years of assuming he lacked interest in girls because he had not yet encountered the "right one," found the process difficult precisely because he believed "you can't be a Christian and be gay." Studies of the formulas of "coming out" narratives have noted such crises,

moments, and experiences as common for those who find their long-held beliefs suddenly in direct conflict with their emerging feelings and identifications (e.g. Crawley & Broad, 2004).

In addition to grappling with the perceived dichotomy between Christian and gay, some participants organically referred to distinctions among feelings, behaviors and/or identification that constituted the category “gay” as they made sense of it during college. Several noticed “gay” feelings before college, and kept hoping they would go away. When Ethan was age 11, he “suspected” that he might be gay, and discussed it with his father. In describing his father’s advice, Ethan highlights distinctions among feelings, behavior, and identification salient to making sense of his sexuality:

[I] talked to my father about it, who said, and rightfully so, ‘that those feelings would come and go, you don’t really know, and...don’t worry about it until you’re 18. Don’t do anything. But don’t worry about it until then.’ So, mostly I was able to just identify the same as everybody else...I was straight.

Some shared their secret selectively with others during college. Nathan made sense of his identity slowly, “coming out to myself” in his junior year, and choosing to share “quietly here and there for several years.” He described his process as “not a very big explosive coming out experience. It was much more intimate.” For Nathan, the process of speaking his identity culminated in a Facebook post several years after graduation, allowing him the protection of distance without personal contact. The use of impersonal means to “come out” after graduation was not uncommon among participants, and others have noted the pattern in their social media research with gay participants as well (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015). Joshua, who “didn’t want to come out” in his educational setting because “I was very much a ‘not-rock-the-boat’ kind of person,” shared his sexual identity on Facebook approximately one year after graduating. Still

others were not out at all (even privately) during their college years and voiced the words only after they graduated. Alex expressed:

I was not gonna come out publicly because it was just too stressful of an environment...that summer, and the fall of my senior year, I [said to myself] 'I'm just gonna get through this year and I'll come out when I'm done.'...I had told a select few friends that I was experiencing 'same sex attractions' [participant uses air quotes when saying these words], but I wouldn't have identified as gay before [then]].

Similarly, for David, during college he admitted selectively to friends that he “struggled with homosexuality,” but did not identify, even privately, as gay until leaving the Midwest after college. For Andrew, although he identified his feelings in his high school years, he began and continued “reparative therapy” through parts of his college career. Andrew clarified, “I knew I was gay, but I didn't know how much I was going to be able to live congruently with that.” Only after ending a long-term same-sex relationship did Andrew decide to “come out.” Only one participant, Simon, entered college with a strong sense of a gay identity and was selectively out and sexually active throughout his college years.

The difficulty of negotiating these feelings internally extended to college friendships. Speaking about his sexual identity was a sign of intimacy and part of the process of bonding that kept David without intimate linkages in college. Although he said he “definitely knew I was gay...” during college, he thought being gay “was a sin and a...sin temptation that I was afflicted with.” Reflecting the very fragmenting conceptions of sexuality infusing broader institutional discourse, David said, “I didn't view it as something that was *me*, I just viewed it as something I struggled with.” These data reflect dissonance between an internalized identity (“me”) and an external object and source of struggle (“something” that was a “sin”). He was almost entirely

silent about his “secret” and “very afraid of risking... the most important relationships” he had with his friends. He channeled his romantic feelings through strong homosocial friendships. As David, like Nathan, expressed, I “feel like I had something to disclose” that burdened him throughout his college years.

The fragmentation of identity—what we see in the data as concealing an aspect of identity that is intimately tied to other aspects of the self—had implications for cultivating meaningful friendships. Joshua said, “I didn't get to participate fully because I didn't get to share the deepest parts of me.” He was anxious that others would discover his secret. Joshua further shared, “honestly, anytime you're talking about anything that matters, you're having to be really cautious and shield what you're saying as a gay student who's trying to keep it in the closet. Because there is so much that you don't realize that your sexuality is kind of attached to.” Ethan similarly hid his identity the first two years of school, pretending to share his fraternity brothers’ quests for marriage partners, and “feeling psychically isolated” even before he was “outed” and actively shunned on campus toward the end of his second year.

Negotiating Constructions of Masculinity

“Um, uh, so I became more and more comfortable with being gay and saying that I was gay. More comfortable in my own skin, more comfortable with my own particular brand of masculinity.” (Ethan)

One factor contributing to participants’ identity negotiations are clear boundaries around gender and stereotypically-defined masculinity that are championed and enforced socially and institutionally within Christian college settings. Particular ideals of masculinity and femininity can play important roles in framing the lives of young Evangelical people. The complementarian view of gender, in which men and women hold unique and disparate roles that fulfill and

complement each other's "natural" gendered characteristics and roles—usually understood as men holding more dominant and authoritative characteristics and roles and women holding more submissive and nurturing ones—is common in Evangelical churches and schools (Bryant, 2009; Colaner & Giles, 2008). Students attending Evangelical colleges are more likely to hold such a view (Colaner & Warner, 2005). Although this view is by no means absolute, the general concept is important for understanding how men and women in many Evangelical traditions understand their place in families and society and the links they perceive between gender and sexuality.

These understandings of gendered roles surfaced as undercurrents and touchstones in the narratives of the diverse gay men we interviewed. Participants narrated themselves within those frameworks. Participants recalled sex-specific school policies, normative scripts of masculinity, stereotypes of feminine gay men, as well as moments of misogynist discourse. These experiences spurred active quests for authority in their meaning making process. A striking characteristic of participants' narratives is that women primarily appear as passing references in normative life scripts or as sources of evidence that helped them understand and determine their sexual interests lay elsewhere. For instance, while still resisting same-sex desire, Andrew imagined a life script in which he "hoped to get married one day and, to a woman, and have a family and continue in [my faith]." Alex developed friendships with girls to protect himself from the "very... emotionally... intense" feelings he experienced around men.

The mention of women was also distinct from their invoking of concepts of femininity to describe themselves and other LGBT people. Some participants specifically distanced themselves from notions of femininity, seeing this gendered expression as a marker of being gay and a stereotypical and undesirable quality for men to possess (e.g. Connell & Messerschmidt,

2005; Pascoe, 2007; Pharr, 1988). In contrast, they described women primarily as objects of heteroromantic pursuit; they considered a lack of interest in that pursuit as a marker of gay identity or as a challenge to overcome. Andrew shared that he was “always trying to meet girls and ask girls out and gauge my fit with them...I was trying very hard to do the right thing...” The spirit of participants’ comments about women echo in part Sumerau’s (2012) analysis of what he calls “compensatory masculinity” enacted among members of an LGBT Christian Church community he studied, a method in which men positioned in “subordinated” social categories “compensate” for their status by emphasizing a masculine self aligned with hegemonic masculinities. He describes LGBT men’s absorption of the ideals that shape “good” Christian men’s behavior, including “paternal stewardship,” “emotional control,” rationality, responsibility, and rhetorical distancing from the characteristics of stereotypical gay men. Sumerau summarizes, “regardless of their intentions, [the men in his study] collaboratively drew on and reproduced cultural notions that facilitate and justify the subordination of women and sexual minorities” (p. 467). In addition, Sumerau (2012) suggests that the men’s negotiation of subordinated masculinities in his study may also have been shaped by their primarily structurally-privileged racial positioning as white.

Constructions of hegemonic masculinity that saturate broader culture and some complementarian strands of Evangelicalism shaped how the men in our study understood their duty to pursue heteroromantic relationships and narrate their sense of self as good men. Alex expressed this idea forcefully:

And it was even things like saying, ‘God made a man and a woman unique for each other and they’re there to complement each other’ and just things that consistently made me feel like I was aberrant like...I was not normal. So it was just all these just continuing

messages that you are just so different that God would make you not complement *someone kind of like you*. Yeah, like ‘you don’t fit into God’s mold,’ was essentially the message over and over.

Ethan described the heterosexual culture in which he was immersed in college, as “you know in college everybody’s...trying to find boyfriends, girlfriends, and hooking up...oh, we’re all guys, we’re thinking we’ll be married, children. And so I’m saying ‘yes yes yes.’” For Ethan, hiding being gay among a “big ole pile of frat brothers” enabled adhering publicly to particular scripted and normative masculine roles. Jason similarly expressed, “the typical façade” to which some aspired was to “get married and to live the picture perfect 2.5 kids [life].” Andrew’s church leaders had a more direct and aggressive approach to ensure he married; he reports a church leader instructing him “to go on at least one date every week with a different girl until I found a girl that I liked.” The “girl” in this narrative functions as a passive object to pursue with due diligence, to choose or not choose, like or not like, rather than an agentic being also seeking a mutual connection.

One expression of hegemonic masculine discourse visible in some participant narratives was in describing their gender expression as differing from “those types of gays.” For example, David struggled to understand and recognize himself as gay because he also perceived himself as stereotypically masculine. He, like others, seemed to conflate expressions of femininity in men with same-sex attraction rather than perceiving gender and sexuality as nuanced registers of affinity and expression on a spectrum with variously discrete or overlapping components. He expresses, “I felt like I was more masculine than the stereotypical gay person. And I just didn’t think there were other gays out there like me... I would have thought of myself as being very masculine, and did not want to be feminine at all.” Witnessing military personnel come out after

the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell in 2010 fostered his recognition that gay males' gendered expression could include hegemonic masculine characteristics (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although few participants articulated exactly what they meant by "femininity" when referring to "those types of gays," David's association of gays as "feminine" and Other to his own gendered sense of self complicated the process of developing and crystallizing his identity as gay. These comments seem to reflect both internalized misogynic and homophobic discourse as a "weapon of sexism" (Pharr, 1998) that links masculine gay identities and expressions to a rejection of femininity. Over time, through interacting with diversely gendered queer people, he became more comfortable with a wider spectrum of gendered expression, including his own "feminine" characteristics. Similarly aware of such gender norms, Ethan described over time, after leaving college, being more "comfortable in my own skin, more comfortable with my own particular brand of masculinity" and dismissing critiques that his sex/gender identity "is wrong and God doesn't like it and that I'm going to hell, that I'm not natural, that I'm not a man."

Masculinity matters in how gay men who attended Christian colleges framed their experiences. Given broader complementarian messages, gay men are not just "bad" sexual subjects but they are "bad" men, because their claiming of a gay identity ostensibly interrupts the important function of the gendered family structure and biological and social reproduction that is central to Christian masculinity, to producing future believers, and to a "stable" society. Specifically, men who pair with men remain incomplete because neither can complement the other's gendered role. For instance, David expresses how "out of the plan" he felt due to the potential threat queer identity posed to his idea of masculinity. Alex mentioned a "natural distancing" from stereotypically masculine men who talked about "video games or sports." He recognized that his gender expression differed from masculine norms, and he was afraid "they

would pick up on the fact that I was gay.” These comments reveal the powerful ways notions of hegemonic masculinity shaped participants’ religious upbringing and school settings that formed their sense of manhood. Feminine-imbued understandings of gayness were either at odds with their self-perceptions or at odds with “God’s ideal.” Both interpretations threatened men’s sense of place and power in their religious communities and became points they needed to navigate.

Finding Allies: Fleeting Comfort Amid Enduring Structural Silence

[when I came out after leaving school] I had a couple of faculty or staff members...message me their support...it really encouraged me that there were people in positions [at my college] that were supportive (Joshua)

Yarhouse’s (2009) survey of sexual minority students at Christian colleges found that students did not primarily attribute the “culture of negativity” they perceived to the actions or comments of faculty and staff (p. 104). In our study, participants commented on the importance of some administrators, faculty, and staff as sources of emotional or psychological support at moments during or/and after their college years in part because these college employees responded to or reached out to them even though such acts had potential consequences. Expecting rejection, hostility, or ostracism when identifying as gay, participants described feeling relieved when individuals responded warmly. Participants described these individuals as allies or as simply welcome surprises in an often “noisy wash of hatred.” For example, Nathan expressed surprise at the openness of professional counselors at his college to discussing his struggles, and explains that the counselor, “was really good about allowing me to find my path and all that sort of thing.” Similarly, Joshua commented that despite having a friend who previously espoused anti-gay sentiments, when he came out, the friend “pulled me in for a

hug...I about cried... that just meant so much to me...very unexpected support, love from almost everybody.”

However, recognizing that employees faced risks in providing such support, Joshua also was careful to protect the identity of those faculty and staff who supported him. After coming out, “unexpectedly, I had a couple of faculty or staff members... message me their support...obviously I would never say who they were because they might actually get in trouble for that but that really encouraged me...” In this example, even allies in relative positions of power in the college structure must remain secretive in their support to maintain governing institutional processes. Although such select individual support provided welcome relief to gay students, it also kept intact networks of disciplinary power; broader policies, practices, and external messaging (Burack, 2014a) framed gays as subjects that “trouble” Evangelical Christian values and college culture. Students anxiously watched others, watching them, for signs of allies.

Some narratives reflected “near misses” of institutional discovery that administrators helped cover up and negotiate when participants, or others to which they refer, were caught in sexual activity. For example, Simon described an upper-level administrator’s discovery that Simon had a sexual relationship with another co-worker at the institution, a violation of college policy that became public. Rather than expelling/firing Simon, the administrator apparently told him, “I don’t agree with the university’s position on homosexuality and you should be able to date whoever you want to date...but if you wish to continue working here you’re gonna have to be more careful about the way you conduct yourself.” After voicing his support for Simon but cautioning him against his public behavior, the administrator then had Simon’s desk moved away from his own—ostensibly protecting both Simon and himself by physically and symbolically distancing their association. Simon, who loved the school, chose to comply with the institutional

mandate of silencing and secrecy, posting images selectively on Facebook, and decided to “just be smart” about how he conducted himself.

Diffuse networks of power (Foucault, 1975) maintaining institutional silencing thus shaped both student and employee behavior. The administrators and faculty who support gay students in these subtle or significant ways are negotiating institutional norms and dictates in a changing culture, as their advocacy or public support of the student could have personal consequences, and fragment a unified institutional front. Like students, employees who work in Christian colleges are typically required to sign lifestyle covenants, affirmations of beliefs, behavior contracts, or similar documents when hired. Those documents align with institutional values and the doctrine of the institution’s denomination that sponsors and funds the school, and govern behavior and speech during employment. Given these policies and practices, several participants reported seeking signs of open attitudes among faculty or expressed feelings of relief to experience moments of support and recognize possible allies in the system. Students seemed to experience such gestures of support—moving a desk but keeping a job, dialogue with counselors—as if they and the college employees were allies in institutional subterfuge that enabled them to beat the system to continue their education and work. However, the same allies who protected participants at key moments, and functioned as symbols of resistance to institutional power, also perpetuated their own silencing as allies and of gay students who experienced the steady circulating gaze of cultural and institutional surveillance. What these administrators and students experienced as important acts of support that reflect their ambivalence about college policies and created fissures in institutional norms might nevertheless reproduce rather than interrupt hegemony.

As staff/faculty negotiated conscience, beliefs, discourse and policy on an individual basis, they essentially remained “in the closet” as allies to gay students, leaving students to furtively seek and collect allies one by one, rather than disrupting institutional silence and hegemony. Christian colleges may be particularly driven to silence queer subjects and their administrative supporters as they grapple with parishioners’ conflicting messages and feelings, a changing cultural climate, and the need to maintain enrollment. Institutions need subjects of all kinds to stay in business in an increasingly privatized neoliberal and competitive marketplace in which “customers” and “headcounts” matter in preserving faith-based schools. For this reason, the institutional default of silence around queer identity serves to preserve the diverse symbolic and reproductive functions of the Christian educational space.

Long Lasting Reverberations

The surveilling mechanisms of the Christian colleges they attended and the profound culture of silence they inhabited reverberated well after graduation (e.g. Foucault, 1975). Indeed, Simon, who eventually “came out” and worked in a Christian college at the time of his interview maintained close control on his relationships, and was vague in describing them, saying he is “careful” about where he goes and who sees him there, introducing dates as “one of my friends” in public. Nathan described his process of identifying as gay “in small amounts,” and only consistently after he graduated from college and moved away from the Midwest. Even after graduation and moving away, when friends asked him, he avoided answering the question about his sexual identity directly and left them to maneuver through a series of questions that through a process of elimination identified him as gay. He said, “I didn’t really, I wouldn’t really, self-identify or be comfortable calling myself gay to anybody until about a year and a half ago...I came out to myself, and I started dating. About a month after that I came out to my family and

friends.” Others are quick to subvert and fragment their sexual identity as secondary to rather than constitutive of other identities. For example, Joshua, who does some work with his local church, described that it is important to him to “always make sure that I let my theology show first before my rainbow.” This phrasing suggests that Joshua was invested in having others recognize his understanding of faith and the divine before they know he is gay, perhaps as a superordinate masculine identity category as a good Christian man (Sumerau, 2012).

There were other lasting reverberations as well. For example, at the time of the interview Nathan was actively involved in leadership of an organization calling for more acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in his denomination. He described feeling depressed and isolated in his college and church, saying, “I think part of staying in the church is not just being a glutton for punishment, but I hate the idea of just running out and abandoning the next generation who are going to find themselves to be gay in that environment.” In reflecting on his time in a Christian college, Alex said, “It caused me so much pain, so much turmoil, but I mean I did grow strong from it. It did impact my life in so many ways... it sort of propelled me to do my own work with LGBTQ people.” Ethan describes the lasting effects for him in terms of his interactions with Christians, saying, “I think a year or two ago I realized how very judgmental I had become of Christians, conservative ones in particular. My response was really swift, just an instant change... As soon as they said [they were Christians], you know, my armor was up. Armor was up, and weapons were out.”

Limitations and Future Directions

Given the weight and prescience of the narratives offered by the nine men in this study, more research is needed. The present study was subject to a number of limitations. Most notably, our sample was almost entirely White, and was entirely comprised of gay cisgender men. This

undoubtedly limits our analysis and the implications of this study. Although we described in our findings some of the visible operations of hegemonic masculinity, this would likely operate differently among trans and nonbinary students, and would likely interact with women differently from men. Further, these participants were White men operating within spaces that systematically privilege White male bodies. Notably, all participants attended institutions with student enrollments exceeding 90% White. Others have written extensively about the intersections of race and sexuality (Brockenbaugh, 2016), race and masculinity (Fields, et al., 2015), race and Christianity (Harvey, 2016), and the triple intersection of race, sexuality, and Christianity (Lassiter, et al., 2017; McQueeney, 2009; Pitt, 2009). Future research on Christian college environments including CCCU institutions should focus on the experience of minoritized individuals and the full spectrum of sexual and gender identities. We also recognize a limitation in the age range of our participants, all of whom reflected retrospectively on their college experiences. Future research involving currently enrolled students, while more logistically challenging, would provide additional valuable insights. Future research can also more closely explore how faculty, staff, and administrators at CCCUs make sense of, enact, and counteract policies that marginalize and exclude LGBTQ identities and individuals.

Conclusion

“while other people...don’t necessarily...have lots of secrets to disclose, [being gay] was a really dark hidden secret.” (Nathan)

For people who belong to marginalized groups, safety is temporary or illusory in many higher education spaces, but processing an unfolding sense of identity as gay in a Christian college renders spaces of safety particularly fragile and uncertain. Identity is hardly a definitive category, and, as queer theorists have explored (Sedgwick, 1990) the available categories for

articulating identities do not adequately represent the range of embodied desires, practices, identifications, and alliances on the spectrum of how people understand themselves as sexual and gendered beings. Some youth refuse the confines of limiting identity categories altogether (Mayo, 2013). Yet, context shapes conceptions and experiences of sexuality in significant ways. We argue that while economic imperatives as well as changing public attitudes have opened up possibilities for LGBTQ students in varied educational sites, they have also, through fragmenting distinctions between “identity” and “behavior,” enabled in some Christian college spaces the intelligibility of particular and limited gendered and sexual subjectivities. Through specific policies for same-sex and opposite-sex interactions, and networks of power that fuel silence and surveillance, Christian colleges can create, shape and maintain particular conditions of possibility. While our research emphasized common threads students experienced, future research needs to take into account diverse and context-specific traditions and practices in varied Christian institutions.

The distinctions among sexual identity, behavior, and attraction represent real struggles within faith-based institutions and churches to interpret sexuality through scripture. All participants describe their sexuality as the tension or source of suffering most salient for their experiences on a Christian campus, and the norms animating their Christian upbringing, faith, and college context shaped how they made sense of their gender and sexuality. Men who performed non-hegemonic expressions of masculinity, felt desire toward other men, or acted on those feelings were gay and sinners. The data from this study indicated that these gay men needed to find a way of fitting their sexual feelings, identity, and/or expression into existing norms on their college campuses—or rejecting them altogether—rather than entertaining a

greater conceptual spectrum of sexual identities enabled through queer theorizing or stretching the parameters and practices of what a Christian college might become.

In fact, none of the participants described advocating for changes in the schools they attended during their college years; none described marching, resisting, or mobilizing their rights as individuals, as consumers, as recognizing themselves as a member of a community of LGBTQ persons, or as members of families who had attended the school as entitling them to a place in the “community.” All shared, in fact, efforts to hide, survive, or engage in moments of subterfuge while performing adherence to institutional norms and covenants until they graduated. No one felt empowered to rupture and critique in overt ways. Several men entered college in hopes that the Christian space would in fact exert such profound institutional power that it would wash their gay feelings away. As Jason said, “I think when I got to [Christian college] I went in under the impression like ‘oh this will be a great spiritual walk I can pray the gay away, um, if I’m just surrounded in a Christian environment.’” And Ethan mentions that his parents, decades after coming out, are likely “still waiting for the day that I call to say I found the right girl.”

Significantly, as Barton (2012) found in her study of Bible Belt gays, students experienced moments of support from other students, as well as occasionally from faculty and staff, that enabled some to stay in school and complete their degrees. Such supportive interactions may have been liberating for individuals, yet, those interactions ultimately enabled through broader institutional silence the public institutional performance of an anti-LGBTQ stance necessary for maintaining some stakeholders’ commitments to Christian colleges. The constitutive silencing essentially protected institutions from acknowledging the presence of vulnerable young gay people on their campuses that could have fractured their cohesive institutional messaging. This normalized silencing as an acceptable practice foisted the emotional

labor involved in coming to terms with being gay fully on the shoulders of individuals without access to a supportive and visible community. Further, normative conceptions of gender, complementarianism, and binary sexuality have such strength in the context of these particular men's experiences that they came to understand themselves as gay within those ontological frames. To provide a supportive climate for LGBTQ people on campus requires faculty and staff to shift from individual, secretive moments of support to overt institutional mechanisms of support that draw from the lived experiences of LGBTQ people who attend or have attended Christian colleges.

As mentioned previously, some Christian colleges emphasize the important protective role their institutions can provide in contrast to those supported by public funds. A question posed in one Christian college's marketing brochure, "is the low price worth the high cost?" underscores the message that the threats to morality public institutions might enable are far more costly than the higher tuition a family might pay at a small private school. Despite widespread social and legal changes in gay rights during and after the period the participants in this study attended college, campuses, including CCCU institutions, continue to struggle with how to address the presence of LGBTQ students. On August 30, 2017, a group of more than 150 Evangelical Christian leaders released a document termed, "the Nashville statement," that framed LGBTQ people as immoral, demonstrating the continued intensity of debates with implications for Christian Colleges. Participants in the present study graduated prior to the most monumental period of these shifts in public opinion, but many attended during a time of increased attention to and visibility of LGBTQ issues in the late 2000s. In the midst of dramatic shifts in the sociopolitical landscape, CCCU institutions must simultaneously negotiate declining enrollments, competition for students, and the important symbolic traditions for which Christian

colleges stand to appeal broadly to constituents. However, as Rockenbach & Crandall (2016) also found, the individual narratives also reveal that participants found tools of scriptural support in their contexts helpful for coping with their unique experiences. Although several of the participants describe variously dealing with “dark places” through “substance abuse”, “crying my eyes out”, and “going to a really dark place emotionally”, they describe their present lives in very different ways. In these dark times, participants narrated the “unexpected support” they received as vital to navigating their identities, even while the silencing of both staff assistance left broader external messaging and institutional norms intact.

We recognize the narrow limitations and constraints in which faculty and staff on Christian colleges find themselves. The diffuse and circulating surveillance experienced by students is also likely sensed by employees. This may be part of why the support offered by college faculty and staff was tenuous, fragmented, and secret. However, as we suggest above, this form of support leaves intact institutional norms and places each successive class of students in the position to relocate and renegotiate those tentative and fragmenting sources of support. Future research should explore ways in which faculty, staff, and administrators can offer more ongoing, visible, and meaningful support for LGBTQ students on their campuses, while recognizing the confines in which those employees work.

Finally, these findings have implications for educators and researchers working outside of Christian college settings. There is some role for external sources of support, advocacy, and understanding. Those working outside Christian colleges can provide those sources of support, and can provide meaningful advocacy and accountability for how Christian colleges (especially those receiving public support through state and federal funds including student aid) variously support, ignore, affirm, and dehumanize queer people. Future research should seek to understand

the complex interactions among doctrinal positions, denominational imperatives, personal beliefs, and queer students' experiences on these campuses, while educators and researchers should work to understand the complex and nuanced dynamics of these educational spaces and students' choices in attending them. Moreover, most of the men we interviewed at some point interacted with, enrolled in, or worked at another college campus. When students move from educational experiences such as those documented in this study to new environments, their new colleagues, peers, supervisors, advisors, even counselors can prove pivotal figures in navigating complex understandings of self and identity. As such, it may be important for those working in education outside of Christian colleges to form a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics in order to support students and peers emerging from those colleges.

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Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Graduated	Major	Current Career	Current Region	Current Faith	Age Range
David	2005–2010	Performance Arts	Information Tech	Northeast	Atheist	25–30
Nathan	2005–2010	Humanities	Visual Arts	Midwest	Same	31–35
Joshua	2005–2010	Communications	Visual Arts	Southeast	Evangelical	31–35
Jacob	2005–2010	Language	Health Care	Midwest	Agnostic	25–30
Simon	2005–2010	Visual Arts	Information Tech	Southeast	Catholic	25–30
Jason	2005–2010	Health	Health Care	Southeast	Christian	25–30
Ethan	1980 – 1985	Performance Art	Performance Art	Midwest	Buddhist	50-55
Alex	2005 – 2010	Behavioral Science	Health Care	Midwest	Agnostic	25-30
Andrew	2000 – 2005	Behavioral Science	Mental Health	Southwest	Same	25-30

Note. All participants had changed denominational affiliation since beginning their undergraduate work, except for Nathan, Andrew, and Simon.