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RAINBOW PERSPECTIVES: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS AND
EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN A QUEER FOCUSED SPECIAL INTEREST HOUSING
COMMUNITY

By

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RAINBOW PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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SARAH BETH BAILEY

Dissertation Chair: James Giarelli, Ph.D.

There are more out queer undergraduate students stepping foot onto colleges campuses across the nation than ever before (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006; PFLAG, 2001; Sanlo, 2005). Although the college experience is designed to be a time of great challenge and development resulting in considerable reward, queer students are working towards this reward with added complexity. The importance of visible and easily accessible support networks is heightened as queer students are feeling isolated and alone on college campuses. Campus climate statistics have gone a long way in describing the chilly campus environments queer students face (Rankin, 2003). However, there is not as much information about specific institutional support strategies designed to support and provide awareness about the queer community. Special interest housing communities are one such strategy. This qualitative case study examined the experiences and perceptions of queer students living in a queer focused special interest housing community at a large research extensive university in the northeast United States. The purpose of this study is to provide real voices and stories to campus climate statistics and to inform the practice of student affairs professionals.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to young queer kids that are told through words, action or inaction that they do not fit and they should just “be more normal.” I tell you this: Do not just *be* anything you do not believe. Be honest, be authentic, and write your own story using your own words and everyone else will need to catch-up later.

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To the participants in this study, thank you for sharing your stories with me. I have learned so much through our conversations and I wish you every success in life.

I must acknowledge the wonderful work of educators and advocates across the country who's work supports the queer community. No community is perfect, we have a long way to go, but there are so many doing so much and this should receive more recognition.

Lastly, thank you to my dissertation committee. Dr. James Giarelli, your guidance and direction has been critical to my success. Thank you for being a guiding force through the dissertation process, but also for being a professional mentor. Dr. Catherine Lugg, thank you for helping me begin this paper during a summer independent study several years ago and pushing me past all the tiny questions floating around in my head towards a larger project. Dr. Joseph Ventola, thank you for providing a practitioner scholar prospective and allowing me to learn from your experiences completing your doctorate while working fulltime.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Problem

The college years are a journey of social, personal, and intellectual development. Students are grappling with new concepts, meeting new and different people, and adapting to new environments, all while working towards successful degree completion. Many students are asking themselves difficult questions about who they are and who and what they want to become throughout these experiences. While this time of self-exploration is challenging to all students, there is an added complexity for queer students who are developing into the people they will become while working through the realities of how they may be negatively perceived and treated as a result of their sexual identity (D'Augelli, 1993).

More college students than ever are openly identifying as queer before they step foot onto campuses across the nation. In the past 30 years the approximate age of an individual *coming out* – the process of questioning and/or revealing their sexual identity (Evans & Broido, 1999) - has dropped from 19-22 years old to 13-16 years (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006; PFLAG, 2001; Sanlo, 2005). This reality demonstrates the need for better understandings of the issues that queer students encounter and more thoughtful policies and intentional strategies that colleges and universities can use to support them.

Queer students also report feeling isolated and alone on campus (Evans, 2001). In addition, queer students describe experiences of oppression on campus such as harassment, fearing for their personal safety, and concealing their sexual orientation to avoid intimidation (Rankin, 2003). Thus, queer students must then balance the development of their personal identity, which may be perceived as deviant or abnormal, while working to be successful in

academic and social settings (D'Augelli, 1993). Findings indicate these chilly or hostile college or university campus environments lead queer students to have difficulty focusing on learning inside and outside the classroom (Lucozzi, 1998).

One difficulty higher education institutions have in supporting queer students involves identification. Students need to self-identify with the queer community to be visible to the college or university and some may not feel ready or comfortable identifying in this way. Additionally, there are very few institutions that have systematic mechanisms in place through the admission process or other methods where students can report their identification with the queer community even if the student would like to self-identify. Queer students are largely an invisible population on campus specifically in regards to institutional data (Sanlo, 2005). As the use of data becomes more important in higher education as a basis for allocating resources and defining priorities, the lack of data puts institutional support efforts for queer students at a great disadvantage (Sanlo, Rankin & Schoenberg, 2002).

Some colleges and universities are now beginning to recognize the basic presence of queer students on campus and their most fundamental needs, but there is still a long way to go to fully supporting this population. For example, of the approximately 5,500 total higher education institutions in the United States 206 have a dedicated lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Resource Center. An LGBT Resource Center is defined as a university staff position (at least 20 hours per week) with primary responsibility of providing LGBT services (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2012, paragraph 2). Having a campus LGBT Center is considered a "best practice" to support queer students (Sanlo et al., 2002), so this is a reasonable measure of how many resources a college or university is willing to allocate to support queer students.

LGBT Resource Centers are not the only support systems being used by colleges and universities nationally to support queer students and raise awareness of queer issues. In fall of 2011 the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing program was opened at a large research extensive university in the northeast United States. Special interest housing is described as, “a living experience in a floor or wing of a campus residence that is centered on a particular theme that students have a common interest in and can live work, play and study together” (Herbst & Malaney, 1999, p. 107). Rainbow Perspectives is a section of on campus student housing in a residence hall explicitly labeled to be “ideal” for students interested in expanding their knowledge of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and ally (LGBTQQIA) issues. The community is designed to be welcoming and provide opportunities for students to connect to others, and participate in programs, dialogues, and community projects (Center of Social Justice and LGBT Communities, 2012, paragraph 1). Researchers and practitioners have reported for years that living in residence halls is a significant part of the college experience and students building community together is essential to these environments (Boyer, 1987; Chickering, 1974; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Yet, “while special interest residential areas are certainly not new, there is a dearth of literature on the subject and no research that investigates either the perceived or actual value of such a designated space. (Herbst & Malaney, 1999, p. 107).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to examine the perceptions and experiences of undergraduate students who have self-selected to participate in the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing program and explore how students’ perceptions of their own sexuality or gender identity have been influenced by participating in the program. My

intention is to contribute to the lack of information about special interest housing, specifically for queer students, as an institutional strategy for support and awareness to inform practices that support queer undergraduate students by student affairs professionals.

Research Questions

This study will examine the following questions:

1. How do Rainbow Perspective students perceive and experience the special interest housing program?
2. How have perceptions of students' own sexuality or gender identity been influenced by experiences or elements of the Rainbow Perspectives program?
3. How can institutions and student affairs professionals improve practices that support queer undergraduate students based on this research-based evidence?

Discussion of Terminology

It is important to dedicate time and attention to the words utilized in this study. Researchers and study participants in the scholarly literature in this domain, use a variety of different terms to identify sexual and gender identity. Since human identity is complex, personal, and highly politicized (Rankin, 2005), identifying definitions for sexualities and gender identities is difficult. I will combine categories of sexualities (lesbian, gay, bisexual) and gender identities (transgender, gender queer, gender fluid) and use *queer* to include the diverse and personal sexualities and gender identities commonly and not so commonly recognized to describe identities outside the heterosexual and binary gender categories. It is important to note that although *queer* is widely utilized, there is not full agreement within the field of higher education or the queer community to embrace this term. For my purposes, *queer*, is far more inclusive than a list of terms that may or may not capture the sexualities and gender identities of

undergraduate students. It is my belief that individuals should have the freedom to self-identify however they would like regardless of stipulated definitions. Thus for the purpose of this study ‘queer’ will be used as an inclusive term for a wide range of sexual and gender identities.

To better understand the words that study participants used to describe their own gender identity, sexuality, and experiences and researchers and scholars have employed to inform this topic, I have provided a list of definitions in this section. It must be noted that although these definitions are helpful in providing baseline knowledge to readers about gender, sexuality, and realities impacting the queer community, this is not an all encompassing list and each term or phrase may be interpreted differently based on context and individual experience. The list below is living language that is changed and updated based on human experiences and cultural realities and should not be interpreted as universal truth. The information in this section serves as a key on a map that points the reader in a particular direction, but as the terrain and environment change, evolve, and is interpreted by a variety of perspectives so must the words we use to describe and navigate it.

Ally. “Someone who confronts heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexual and genderstraight privilege in themselves and others; a concern for the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people; and a belief that heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are social justice issues” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 1).

Asexual. “Person who is not sexually attracted to anyone or does not have a sexual orientation” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 1).

Bisexual. “A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may

be a preference for one gender over others” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 2).

Butch. “A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 2).

Cisgender. “The term describes someone who feels comfortable with the gender identity and gender expression expectations assigned to them based on their physical sex” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 2).

Demisexual. “A person who does not experience sexual attraction unless they form a strong emotional connection with someone, more commonly seen in but by no means confined to romantic relationships” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 3).

Coming Out. The process of questioning and/or revealing one’s sexual identity (Evans & Broido, 1999). Being ‘out’ is the reality that an individual has revealed their sexual identity to themselves or others.

Gay. “Term used in some cultural settings to represent males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic and/or emotional sense. This term used to refer to the LGBTQQAI community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 3).

Gender identity. “A person’s sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 4).

Genderqueer/Genderfluid. “A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often

includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 4).

Heteronormativity. “The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 4).

Lesbian. “Term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 6).

LGBTQQAI. “A common abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, ally/asexual and intersex community” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 6).

Preferred gender pronouns. “A pronoun an individual chooses to identify with and would prefer others use when talking to or about that individual” (MSU LGBT Resource Center, Preferred Gender Pronouns: A Guide for Faculty, Staff, and Allies at Michigan State, 2014, p. 1).

Queer. “An umbrella term that embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively- heterosexual-and-monogamous majority. Queer includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transpeople, intersex persons, the radical sex communities, and many other sexually transgressive explorers. Also, a reclaimed word that was formerly used solely as a slur but that has been semantically overturned by members of the maligned group, who use it as a term of defiant pride. ‘Queer’ is an example of a word undergoing this process” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 7).

Transgender man. “An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as females.” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, page 9).

Transgender woman. “An identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexuals to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as males” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 9).

Woman loving. “A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to individuals who identify as women” (UCLA LGBT Center, LGBTQI Terminology, 2014, p. 9).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research that informs this study was reviewed in six sections – university community and campus climate, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity development models utilized in higher education, a life span approach as an analytic tool, queer theory as an analytic tool to inform practice, queer students experiences living in college residence halls, and special interest housing for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students.

In the first section, I discuss the principles that define the kind of community which every college and university *should* strive for (Boyer, 1990) and the valuable campus climate studies demonstrating the contrasting realities for queer individuals on college and university campuses today. I also highlight the strengths and limitations of large national campus climate data sets. The second section demonstrates the strengths and limitations of stage and life span models for queer identity development. The third section reviews empirical studies that use D’Augelli’s (1994) life span approach as a conceptual framework providing insight into queer students as leaders and spiritual beings. This section provides strengths and limitations of lifespan models as a conceptual framework. The next section discusses queer theory as an analytic tool to contribute to the conceptual framework of this study and provide examples of how queer theory has been used in other studies in higher education. Next, I review scholarship that describes student experiences coming out and existing in college residence halls. This builds a foundation to understand the realities queer students face when living in college residence halls. Finally, the sixth section provides in depth review of the only study published exploring any aspect of a special interest housing program for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students.

This overview points to gaps in research surrounding special interest housing programs for queer students, identifies stage and lifespan approaches to LGB development in conjunction with queer theory as three analytic tools that frame the study, and highlights the need for further research indicating the significance of this study.

University Community and Campus Climate

Every college and university has distinct aspects of community. Indications of the community may even be apparent the moment an individual steps foot onto campus. Through surveying college and university presidents across the nation six principles for community on college campuses were developed that define the kind of community which every college and university *should* strive to embody (Boyer, 1990). These six principles are

- Building a purposeful community where faculty and students share goals and work together to foster rich teaching and learning
- Creating an open community where freedom of expression and civility is valued
- Constructing a just community where the importance of the whole person is recognized and diversity is aggressively pursued
- Forming a disciplined community of individuals that accept and embrace their rights and responsibilities
- Fostering a caring community where individual well-being is supported and service to others is a priority,
- Embracing a celebrative community in which the history of the institution is remembered and tradition is embraced (Boyer, 1990, p. 17).

Although these principles are embraced in higher education, campus climate information focused on the realities of queer individuals reveals communities devoid of many of these principles on campuses across the nation.

Campus climate is defined as “the overall ethos or atmosphere of a college campus mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, and engagement within the environment and value as members of the community” (Renn & Patton, 2010, p. 248). The chilly and sometimes even hostile campus climate faced by queer students on college campuses has been well documented since the mid-1980s (Rankin, 2003). Several large-scale campus climate studies provide evidence identifying and describing the environments for queer students on college and university campuses. In a study of over 1,000 queer students at 14 universities, more than 36% experienced harassment within a year period, 22% of respondents feared for their physical safety because of their sexuality or gender identity, 51% concealed their sexual orientation to avoid intimidation, and 60% felt that queer students were likely to be targets of harassment on campus (Rankin, 2003).

The 14 universities surveyed were not representative of most higher education institutions in the United States since all the institutions surveyed had a LGBT Resource Center and most had queer-friendly nondiscrimination policies. Although this study is the second largest campus climate survey focusing on the experiences of queer students ever published, only 14 out of the 5,500 colleges and universities in the United States were represented in the study.

Similar findings were reported more recently in a campus climate study with more than 5,149 students, faculty, and staff respondents at colleges and universities in all fifty states and representing all the Carnegie Basic Classifications of Institutions in Higher Education. It is the most comprehensive national research study of its kind to date. The findings show queer

respondents were significantly more likely (23%) to experience harassment when compared with their heterosexual identified counterparts. Additionally, queer respondents were more than twice as likely to be targets of derogatory remarks (61%) and stared at compared with their heterosexual counterparts (29%) (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazier, 2010). These findings reinforce Rankin's (2003) study and demonstrate the pervasiveness of discrimination and oppression of queer students on college and university campuses today. This study also provides further detail into the campus climate for queer students, faculty, and staff by providing comparisons with heterosexual identified participants.

Campus climate studies can be useful in providing generalizable data about the experiences of and attitudes towards queer people. These types of data are reported to be effective when advocating for creating, improving, and expanding queer programs and services on college campuses (Sanlo, et al., 2002). Although useful to make a case for increasing or creating resources for queer individuals in higher education, drawing broad generalizations about the experiences of queer individuals nationally on college campus cannot completely and authentically represent the rich and nuanced individual realities, identities, and experiences of queer students on campus. My study using qualitative research strategies is intended to provide deeper insight into lived experiences of students at a large research extensive university in the northeast United States in the Rainbow Perspectives program. This lived phenomenological evidence used in conjunction with national campus climate data will provide a more comprehensive research base for understanding the needs of queer students on campus.

LGB Identity Development Models Utilized in Higher Education

There are several prominent models of queer identity development employed by student affairs professionals to help understand and serve this student population on college campuses.

In the last thirty years professionals working in students affairs have accepted psychological models of sexual orientation identity development (Cass, 1979, 1984) and relied on other scholars that have endeavored to describe LGB identity development in higher education settings (D'Augelli, 1994). These prevalent approaches can be divided into two categories - stage models and life span approaches. Cass (1979, 1984) offers a stage model for "homosexual" identity formation. The model was created during "several years of clinical work with homosexuals" (p. 219) in Australia and was designed for application with both gay and lesbian individuals. Although created for use in clinical psychology settings with adults and based on a small same sample of only men, student affairs professionals have adopted the model in an attempt to describe LGB identity development in higher education settings (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).

Cass (1979) outlines a six-stage model including:

- Stage one - identity confusion
- Stage two – identity comparison
- Stage three – identity tolerance
- Stage four – identity acceptance
- Stage five – identity pride
- Stage six – identity synthesis

The model begins by describing stages in which the individual attempts to deny or resist the recognition of homosexual feelings. This may have negative consequences for psychological health. Next, a gradual acceptance of same-gendered feelings is realized and experimentation and exploration within the queer community may take place. Finally, Cass's stage model describes "a growing sense of personal normalcy" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 26). As an

individual moves through the stages there is an emergence of accepting non-heterosexual personal feelings and LGB identity begins to be viewed as a positive part of the individual. The stage model primarily assumes the queer identity development process occurs in stages and an individual moves through these stages in a linear pattern and they are not complete until they work through all stages. Although Cass (1979; 1984) helps student affairs professionals conceptualize queer identity development in a way that can be understood and applied to the college setting, it ignores individual differences – gender, race, ethnicity, and culture. Stage models are rooted in Eurocentric concepts of culture, sexual orientation, and gender identity that do not align with the realities and experiences in a non-western context (Espin, 1993).

Additionally, stage models are not able to provide the fluidity that is needed to account for human development that is specifically important when studying college students (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).

An alternative psychological model to stage theories employed by student affairs administrators is a life span approach. D'Augelli's (1994) life span approach to lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity development was based on D'Augelli (1991) empirical study of gay men in college and earlier work with queer populations in and outside of the higher education setting. D'Augelli (1994) describes six identity interactive processes that affect LGB identity development. The processes are not ordered stages and may even occur concurrently depending on environmental and biological factors. This allows for fluidity within the model that can account for human growth and environmental and biological factors. This framework is inclusive of issues such as person's self-concept, relationships with family, and connections with peer groups and community (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). The six processes include - exiting heterosexual identity, developing a LGB identity status, developing a LGB social identity,

becoming a LGB offspring, developing a LGBT intimacy status, and entering a LGB community. Individuals may be developing in one process more than another based on the realities of their life.

The life span model describes LGB identity development as a life long process recognizing the importance of individual choice and the context in which development takes place. As such, the model includes consideration of a wider range of experiences including, racial, ethnic, gender, or religious. This flexibility provides a framework that allows representation of multiple dimensions of identity and their relationship to queer identity. Although the model focuses on LGB development, which is a major limitation, it has been utilized for understanding the formation of transgender identity. Bilodeau's (2005) findings reveal that that transgender-identified participants described their individual gender identity in ways that are consistent with the six processes of the model. Additionally, these models still ignore the realities of almost all women. Although the language prescribed is limiting, the tool has been used in several empirical studies demonstrating justification the model (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005).

A Life Span Approach as an Analytic Tool

Many of the realities that queer students face are not represented in large scale campus climate studies. In response, there is a research literature that studies the diverse experiences of queer students and how these relate to queer identity. The role of queer student involvement on campus in LGBT identity development was explored in a select group of college students in a longitudinal study of seven student leaders affiliated with the 2002 Midwest Bi-, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Allies College Conference. The participants consisted of three white women - one identifying as pansexual and two as lesbians, one African American lesbian women, one

international transgender person (race or ethnicity was not identified) and one white gay man. Findings suggest that student communities matter in and outside of institutional structures. Two students report peer relationships at work and in the residence hall setting contributed to them getting involved as leaders. Findings also promote student leadership should be viewed as a way to develop identity (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005).

The study also used the six interactive processes of D'Augelli's (1994) model as a conceptual tool, and found it "generally captures the diverse experiences of student leaders who identify with a variety sexual identities" (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005, p. 68). The need for updated terminology to include transgender students was noted, but Renn & Bilodeau find merit in D'Augelli's model through emphasis on interactive processes rather than developmental stages.

Spiritual experiences of lesbian and gay college students have also been explored using D'Augelli's (1994) model as a theoretical framework. This inquiry provides insight to another aspect of student identity and focused on spiritual identity and sexual identity and how the participants experienced interactions between these two dimensions of identity. The study consisted of 7 lesbians and 5 gay college students. Race and ethnicity were not factors studied given the racial homogeneity of the participants. Findings demonstrate the complex relationship between multiple dimensions of identity, specifically spiritual and sexuality. This complexity "inevitably leads to a breakdown in linear development models" (Love et al., 2005, p. 207). This provides justification for D'Augelli's life cycle model of LGB development since it provides for flexibility and fluidity in the sexuality identity development process.

The findings in both of these studies show justification in D'Augelli's (1994) life cycle model of LGB development to understand queer identity and influencing factors. Renn and Bilodeau (2005) specifically highlight community as an important aspect of the queer student

leader experience and demonstrate the model is useful when looking at formal and informal campus communities. Although, D'Augelli's life cycle model of LGB development is more appropriately focused on individual development and both understanding the social construction of identity as well as recognizing the reality of choosing or not choosing the interactive process that affects identity formation than stage models (Cass, 1979, 1984), the normative presumptions of heterosexuality remain. D'Augelli states,

A revision of our operational definition of sexual orientation must occur, allowing for study of the continuities and discontinuities, the flexibilities and cohesiveness, of sexual and affection feelings across the life span, in diverse contexts, and in relationship to life and culture. (D'Augelli, 1994, p.331)

The call for reframing sexual identity theory has been made, but “most gay identity development theories have presumed a fixed non-heterosexual identity fitting within the binary distinction between “normal” or heterosexual, and “different” or homosexual; one is either heterosexual or one is gay (or lesbian or bi-sexual)” (Dilley, 2002, p. 36). Both stage models and life span approaches to queer student development depict students as queer first or developing only one identity in a specific way. But what about the different ways to be human that psychologically based approaches to queer identity do not capture? Additionally, stage and lifespan models do not account for heterosexism that reinforces heterosexual privilege. Not recognizing the complexity and diversity of human identity in this study would inhibit the illustration of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

Queer Theory as an Analytic Tool

Since this study seeks to understand students' experiences and perceptions within the Rainbow Perspectives program on a university campus utilizing stage and lifespan models of LGB identity development as analytic tools helps inform the problem of practice. Yet, it is important to employ a lens that allows students to illustrate who they really are. Stage and

lifespan approaches provide insight into the knowledgebase of many college student affairs administrators, but in seeking to understand student experiences and realities of being queer on campus I must recognize there are different ways to be human and queer than are outlined in stage and lifespan models of LGB development. In this study, I offer queer theory as a component of the conceptual framework and analytic tool to examine and understand the experiences and perceptions of students in this case study. Queer theory is not the only theory that can support the study of queer students on a college campus, but it is an important piece to include so authentic dialog can be allowed and encouraged.

Queer theory critically analyses the meaning of identity emphasizing the political nature of language, power, and difference. Through this analysis, the intersectionality and social construction of sexuality and gender is evident (Wilchins, 2002). Elements of the foundation of queer theory are rooted in the post-structural theories of Derrida (1967/1978) and Foucault (1976/1978) (in Abes & Kasch, 2007). Derrida focuses attention on language and its relationship to power and privilege and explores gender as a language system. As language is a system of definitions that provides meanings, symbols, and rules to entire societies, it is apparent how much power can be exercised with its use (Wilchins, 2004). “Derrida pointed out that Western thought has always overvalued or *privileged* language – so much that we mistake language for the Real. What is named is real, and what is not has no existence” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 38). But there are no words that are commonly accepted for how some individuals identify their gender and or sexual identity, so these individuals are denied the ability, the words, and the language to tell their story. This means individuals are not able to authentically convey and describe how they are human. Utilizing queer theory as an analytic tool for this study raises the consciousness of language in relation to queer identity and provides a space for individuals to employ their own

vocabulary. This is essential as I am asking college students to share their experiences and perceptions. As it relates to practice, queer theory is an essential tool to employ to challenge student affairs administrators to move beyond LGB identity development models when conceptualizing the needs of queer undergraduate students.

As Derrida (1967/1978) focuses on language, Foucault (1976/1978) draws attention to who is utilizing the language and in what settings and thus highlighting the power of discourse – not just a dialog or a conversation between two people, but how society makes meaning through everyday practices and interactions (Wilchins, 2004).

The central issue [...] is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex [...] but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issues [is] the way in which sex is put into discourse.” (Foucault, 1978, p. 11)

Foucault (1976/1978) emphasizes the power of discourse by defining it as rules that guide what type of information is discussed in society. The discourse on gender says is only makes sense to talk about “two kinds of bodies” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 59) or two genders. This does not align with individual realities, but the discussion of the third gender is considered far-fetched and ridiculous (Wilchins, 2004). These judgments are the result of how society makes meaning through discourse. Through being mindful of the power of discourse, in this study I hope to learn important lessons about the rules that guide the type of information that is circulated and interpreted by college students in the Rainbow Perspectives program by what they say, what they do not say, and who they feel does the talking and where they sit.

Through the discussion of language and the power of discourse it becomes clear that a tenet of queer theory is the argument that gender identity is not unequivocally linked to biological sex assigned at birth, but is formed through the complexities of social interactions and

inequitable institutionalization of power (i.e. language, discourse). The framework takes aim at the binary male or female construction of gender, (Butler, 1990; Wilchins 2002). Butler moves this argument forward through showing how defining and forming our politics based on who belongs to what gender is problematic and even reinforces the very issues political organizations and advocates contend they are fighting against.

[T]he identity [gender] categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics [...] in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit...in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is suppose to open up. (Butler, 1990, p. 147)

Butler serves as one of the founders of queer theory as she challenges the typical categories used to define identity – gender, sex, sexual orientation, and race (Wilchins 2004). Embracing this important tenet of queer theory is integral to this study. This study will be cognizant of the forced categorization of identity and work to show the limitations of this reality.

Stage and life cycle approaches to LGB identity development utilized by student affairs professionals seek to normalize queer student development, but Warner (1999) dedicates time and attention to detailing the danger and *trouble* with this ideal embraced in every facet of society that “heterosexual desire and romance are the very core of humanity” (p. 47). This is celebrated in every element of cultural including film, television, and media and demonstrates a “loathing for queer sex and gender nonconformity” (p.48). These realities are important to account for in this case study as I seek to, “understand the real-life phenomenon” (Yin, 2009, p. 18) of students living in a queer special interest housing program in depth while taking into account *contextual conditions* the study participants are living in and this study is being constructed within (Yin, 2009). Using queer theory as an analytic tool to understand and describe students’ experiences and perceptions and context is essential to telling the entire story and providing a venue for students’ true voices and experiences. Employing student

development approaches devoid of discussing the tension of language, power, and difference within these models would inhibit the reach, application, and honesty of this research.

Examples of using queer theory as an analytic tool.

Recently, there has been a call for higher education researchers to employ queer theory as a framework for design, analysis, and interpretation. The call encourages researchers to move beyond psychological and sociological studies of LGB identity development and incorporate queer theory as a meaningful framework that supports more contextual and less categorical study, exploration, and discovery related to queer students (Renn, 2010). Elisa Abes (2009, 2007) is cited as the best example of a researcher using queer theory to better understand student identity in the college setting (Renn, 2010). Abes and Kasch (2007) introduce queer theory through a case study of one lesbian student exploring perceptions of her own multiple identities. The study tells of the developmental narrative of this student by describing how she navigates her sexuality, religion, gender, and social class. The study demonstrates how identities are constantly forming and reforming and highlight the heteronormative assumptions of student development theory and the challenges associated. The study specifically focuses on the idea of self-authorship and encourages student affairs professions to refocus practice around students' agency and resistance (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Although this study only focuses on telling and analyzing the story of one student it underlines the potential and practical applications of queer theory in higher education.

Using Abes and Kasch (2007) as a foundation, Abes (2009) emphasizes the possibilities and potential for using queer theory in conjunction with constructivist theories in higher education to challenge inequitable power structures in student development theory. Challenges related to this partnering of contradictory ideas are cited as – “the politics of representation and

personal and professional implications for the researcher who partners theoretical perspectives” (Abes, 2009, p. 141). Abes reminds us that, “all theoretical perspectives that guide research are incomplete” (Abes, 2009, p. 141). Traditional compensations researchers make due to this reality are to align all remaining aspects of the research process with the theoretical framework, but Abes advocates *experimenting with choice* and partnering several conflicting theoretical perspectives to discover new ways of understanding and representing data. This freedom brings together multiple theoretical perspectives and enables new opportunities and ways of knowing.

Dilley (2002) serves as another higher education researcher pairing both LGB student development approaches and queer theory as a conceptual framework or analytic lens in a qualitative ethnographical study of fifty-seven men who were undergraduates between 1945 and 2000. The research seeks to provide a new viewpoint on male sexual identity by focusing on how non-heterosexual males and their identities can be understood through their college years and question, “existing notions of what we know about ‘gay college students’: their experiences, their identities, and their history” (p. 4). Dilley argues for an alternative viewpoint of non-heterosexual male college students explained and clarified by sharing his personal connection to the argument and topic, the framework he is working from, methodologies employed, voices of study participants, historical context, and connections to practice. Important incongruity, problems, and disagreement with terminology, definitions, and understanding of current ideas of sexual identity and identity development related to college students are highlighted. This emphasis on incongruity demonstrates support and deep personal understanding for why pulling from different and conflicting bases of knowledge to frame queer identity research in higher education is useful and valid.

Historical and empirical works concerning non-heterosexuals on college campuses, student identity theory, gay identity development theory, and queer theory as essential elements of his framework are discussed and detailed. Dilley's findings call into question the validity of the dominant developmental models for non-heterosexual males utilized in higher education and the ramifications of this on practice, while advocating for a multi - lens approach to the study of queer identity development in higher education.

If identity development theorists do not incorporate the incongruities of this student population [non-heterosexual students], not only will these theories not be as valid as they could (and should) be but what theorists teach educational practitioners, programmers, and administrators will continue to be disconnected from the reality of non-heterosexual students, perpetuating the problems of representation and education.

(2002, p. 14)

As Dilley clearly identifies problems with stage and life-cycle approaches being utilized in higher education he also clearly outlines a model for future researchers to incorporate a multi-lens approach, including queer theory, to understand the experiences and perceptions of queer college students to consider meaningful and intentional institutional support strategies.

Queer Students Experiences Living in College Residence Halls

There are many types of communities on a college or university campus, but very few hold as many possibilities for student development as residence halls and on campus housing facilities. "Residence halls have the potential to challenge and educate students as they connect their learning to their living realities" (Schroder & Mabel, 1994, p. 1). On campus students spend a significant amount of time their time living, interacting, learning, and working in their residence hall (Herbst & Malaney, 1999). It is important to recognize that queer student have

specific living realities as highlighted through examining the coming out process of 10 men and 10 women living in college residence halls (Evans & Broido, 1999).

Although not all queer students' experiences in residence halls are the same, findings identify coming out to a roommate to be an area of particular challenge for students due to feelings of vulnerability. If a roommate was not comfortable with the queer student's sexuality queer students conveyed concerns about being potential victims of harassment or at least an uncomfortable living environment due to the close proximity of living arrangements in residence hall living. The strong influence of environment on a student's decision to come out was another theme identified. Specific factors of environment reported discouraging students from coming out include, lack of community in the residence hall, lack of support perceived in students and staff, and blatant hostility seen and/or experienced in residence by students (Evans & Broido, 1999).

Additionally, participants demonstrated a high level of awareness of the complexities of life (Evans & Broido's, 1999). Evidence displays students engaging in thoughtful consideration and contemplating questions such as, "Am I being harassed because I am gay, or because they don't like me for other reasons?", or "Is it better to come out or remain closeted?" (Evans & Broido, p. 664). It is not surprising that students are having these considerations, but is important to state and restate the complexity of emotions, realities, and developmental processes that students are working through about their sexuality and gender identity.

Using this same data set, Evans and Broido, (2002) sought to provide greater insight into the experiences of specifically lesbian and bisexual women living in college residence halls and provide insight into how to best support queer students in the residence halls. Students stressed the importance of awareness and education about queer student issues in residence to combat

harmful stereotypes that inhibit strong communities and relationships. Additionally, queer students report wanting to be seen and heard and felt there was lack of visibility.

Recommendations for creating positive residence hall climates include intentional student and professional staff trainings about queer student development, specific needs, and support strategies. Inclusive programming and dialog should also be encouraged.

Special Interest Housing for GLBT Students

Special interest housing or “theme” housing has been in existence for many years (Herbst & Malaney, 1999). The first and only study examining special interest housing for students interested in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues was conducted at the University of Massachusetts examining the perceived value of the special interest housing program, 2-in-20. The evaluation study focuses on both students and staff affiliated with the program and provides a historical record of the program and uses Boyer’s (1990) principles for community on college campuses to frame the study – shared learning, openness, justness, discipline, caring, and a celebration of tradition and heritage (Herbst & Malaney, 1999).

The 2-in-20 program was developed in 1991 and approved for implementation in 1992 after one unsuccessful attempt for approval. At the time of approval the community was marketed to those students interested in gay, lesbian and bisexual issues. In April of 1994, ally and transgender were added to description of the program and the charter and constitution for the floor were completed. At this time 32 residents were living in the community. The charter laid out clear focus areas for residential programming and stated requirements for residents and staff. For example, “both the resident assistant and the resident director should be strong “out” members of the GLBT community” (Herbst & Malaney, 1999, p. 111). The historical

background provide in the study demonstrates the many considerations when institutionalizing such a program.

Regarding the value perceived by residents and staff affiliated with the 2-in-20 program, findings indicated that both students and staff valued the program positively. Staff members were more pleased with the program than the residents. A possible rationale noted for this finding was that staff was doing significant work to keeping the program in operation, so they hoped it was well received. Students expressed appreciation and value in the program, but they also reported feeling like there they are, “under a microscope, being closely watched by administrators” (Herbst & Malaney, 1999, p. 115). Herbst and Malaney also argue that since the program was relatively new at the time of the study there were constant conversations about how to improve the program. Although not noted in the discussion of the study to provide insight to this finding, student participation in this particular study could have contributed to students feelings of being under a microscope if this was one more type of evaluation in which students were asked to participate. This is an important consideration for future studies.

Students reported feeling safe on the residence hall floor, largely supported by staff members, but were evenly divided in the area of “working together to end homophobia.” (Herbst & Malaney, 1999, p. 113). Students reported the communities meet most of their expectations, but reported being disappointing in the lack of community on the floor. Some students noted there should be more social programming and attempts to help students get connected to others on the floor.

Herbst and Malaney’s study is only one example of a special interest housing communities for those interested in GLBT issues, so it is difficult to draw larger conclusions about its value and impact. Although additional studies do not exist, specific housing programs

for queer students have been suggested as strategies to foster environmental inclusiveness for queer students (Rankin et al., 2010; Schueler, Hoffman, Peterson, 2009). This demonstrates the need for further study and inquiry regarding special interesting housing for queer students.

Summary

The research reviewed highlights the principles for community on college campuses (Boyer, 1990) that should be tirelessly pursued while illuminating the harsh realities of the oppression and discrimination that queer students face. These experiences may include realities such as being a student leader or identifying as spiritual. The discussion of stage and lifespan student development models and queer theory provides a theoretical framework that allows for fluidity and flexibly taking into account self-concept and connections with peer groups and community when discussing the needs of queer students. Furthermore, the literature provides insights into the experiences of queer students living in residence halls on campus and challenges of coming out and simply existing in these spaces. Finally, the lack of scholarship in all of these areas, specifically in the area of special interest housing, highlights the importance of this study and learning more about special interest housing programs to support queer students on college campus.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This research study sought to understand the how Rainbow Perspectives' students perceived and experienced the program, how perceptions of their own sexuality or gender identity was influenced by the program, and how higher education institutions and student affairs professionals can improve practices that support queer undergraduate students. I used qualitative methodology to examine the experiences and perceptions of Rainbow Perspectives students to provide individual voices to individual experiences not represented in the literature (Creswell, 2009). Specifically, a multiple case study research design, meaning that it included more than one case - this was fitting for this study because I wanted to understand "real-life phenomenon in depth" (Yin, 2009, p.18) by recognizing contextual realities as an important element. Utilizing a multiple case study design allowed me to capture and honor the authenticity of meaningful events and characteristics of real-life events that informed my findings (Yin, 2009). Additionally, multiple case study methods allow me to gather a deep understanding of the experiences of students in queer special interest housing. There is much complexity when discussing sexuality and gender identity and this type of study accounted for multiple meanings of students' experiences shared through rich description. To allow for this description, I conducted, two semi-structured individual interviews with each participant during the 2013-2014 academic year, utilized participant-observation, and analyzed documents associated with the program.

Research Site Selection

Research for this study was conducted at a large public research extensive university with three campuses and a student population of over 50,000 students. Over 15,000 students live in on-campus housing. The university operates one of the largest college housing programs and bus networks in the country. Research took place at the main campus. The Office of Social Justice and LGBT Communities in conjunction with University Housing coordinates the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing for LGBTQQAI students. The program launched in the fall of 2011 in the wake of the suicide of a freshman student in September 2010 that received national news coverage. The student jumped off the George Washington Bridge after discovering his roommate, in his on campus residence hall, secretly used a webcam to stream video of him and another man in a romantic scene over the internet. The University responded in part by implementing on campus gender-non-specific housing and the Rainbow Perspectives program (Foderaro, 2012).

Rainbow Perspectives is located in the traditional style residence hall, meaning student rooms are single and double occupancy and bathrooms are located outside of student rooms and are shared by the entire community. There are single sex and gender-neutral bathrooms available for student use. The community is contained on two floors of a four-story building. The other parts of the building are open and used to place students not in the program. There is an undergraduate Resident Assistant RA (for) the community in addition to other students living in the building. The RA is employed by the Office of Residence Life and is a resource for students about any issue they may be experiencing. The RA has responsibility for enforcing policies and procedures in the building, creating programming for all students, and the authority to submit incident reports. The RA reports to a professional Residence Life Coordinator that lives on campus and reports to the Office of Residence Life. The RA has no additional or

specific training for the placement in Rainbow Perspectives program. Two undergraduate Peer Mentors live in Rainbow Perspectives (one on each floor). The Peer Mentors are undergraduate students employed by the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities. Their role is designed to support students and create meaningful programming and dialog for Rainbow Perspectives students.

The hall in which Rainbow Perspectives is located is open to students from September through May. While students are not required to stay on campus during Thanksgiving, winter and spring breaks the option is available. This location was specifically chosen to support students that do not have a safe or comfortable home to go to during the time periods the university housing is traditionally closed due to lack of acceptance or support of their sexuality or gender identity by family members. Rainbow Perspectives is closed during the summer (June-August). The housing complex has no physical identifies (e.g. signage) labeling it as the Rainbow Perspectives program so students can live there without disclosing their membership in the community to family or friends.

Rainbow Perspectives is a housing option open to any undergraduate student eligible to live on campus. Students in the program need to meet on campus housing requirements such as being in good judicial and financial standing with the University, being up-to-date on all state required vaccinations, and pay the costs associated with living in on campus housing. Students identified interest in the program by checking a box on the electronic university housing application. This data is sent to Rainbow Perspectives program staff who make email or phone contact with students confirming their interest and understanding and support of the program. After contact is made students are provided with an application they need to complete to be considered for the program. If students do not report interest on the housing application they can

also apply directly through The Office of Social Justice and LGBT Communities. If contact is not made by program staff with the interested student and/or if there is not a mutual understanding of program goals and objectives the student will not be assigned to the Rainbow Perspectives community by University Housing. Additionally, Rainbow Perspectives is used as emergency housing for students experiencing challenges (such as bullying or isolation) in on or off campus housing or a difficult home situation due to their sexuality or gender identity. This means there are student spaces intentionally left vacant to house students in this type of a need, this maybe short term or long-term housing for these students. Students are able to choose a known roommate of any gender identity or be placed with another student interested in living in the community.

Rainbow Perspectives is described as a vibrant community providing opportunities for students to connect with each another through participation in regular programs, dialogs, and a community project. Through these opportunities students are encouraged to explore through multiple lenses how race, nationality, religion, ability, socio-economic status and politics impact sexuality and gender identity. Requirements for students living in the program are attendance at all section meetings, programs, and projects; being an active presence in the floor/hall community; assisting with and/or organizing at least one major project or program each semester; actively contributing to and participating in recruitment and selection activities; abiding by all rules, regulations, policies, and procedures outlined by the Office of Residence Life. These requirements are listed on the application for the program and also on the “contract” that each student signs when they move into the community.

Additional support mechanisms in place for queer students at the University are the Center for Social Justice Education and LGBT Communities, faculty/staff liaison program for

LGBT students, specific freshman orientation program for queer students (Community), ten university recognized student organizations, a queer focused Greek Letter Organization - Delta Lambda Phi, a lavender graduation ceremony, a LGBT student scholarship program, gender non-specific housing options and sexual orientation and gender identity are included in the nondiscrimination policy for the university. Additionally, I chose this site for the study because until spring 2013 I was staff member. This close relationship and proximity to the University allowed for convenient access to the student population and site. Additionally, program staff members were willing to grant me permission to this population of students for this case study.

Sample Selection

I used purposeful sampling to select participants. Purposeful sampling is to specifically and intentionally consider – whom to select, the sampling strategy, and the size of the sample (Creswell, 2013). This sampling strategy supports the selection of cases, “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the research” (Patton, 1990, p. 230). I selected cases that show different perspectives and experiences of students living in Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing (Creswell, 2013).

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through direct emailing. Following IRB approval, I requested a list of names and university emails for all students living in the Rainbow Perspectives program during the 2013 fall semester from The Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities. I sent all 39 students living in the community an email (Appendix A) inviting them to participate in this study. Each email provided a link to a preliminary questionnaire. I sent an e-mail reminder to all students on the list that did not fill out the questionnaire a week after the first email was sent out (Appendix B).

As an inducement to participate in the study, all students who submitted a completed preliminary questionnaire had the chance to win a Barnes and Noble gift card worth 200.00 dollars. Additionally, students who were purposefully selected and completed each individual interview received 25.00 dollars in cash as financial compensation for completing each interview. The private sector traditionally provides financial compensation or incentives for participation in interviews or focus groups. This practice has been adapted by some educational researchers (Patton, 2002). There are conflicting opinions on if researchers should compensate participants as they inform findings and practice, but the practice of reciprocity, is an ethical concern that takes precedence in this study.

Patton (2002) challenges researchers to be mindful of what the interviewee is being provided with or taking away from the experience of being a part of a research study. Reciprocity does not mandate financial compensation, but based on the difficulty I faced recruiting students for the pilot study it was essential to pay participants to boost participation in the study. College students face significant financial obstacles and although I do not know what students spent the money on I needed them to know their time and perspectives were valuable to my research and I believe financial compensation for individual interviews in part achieved this.

Budget. The total cost of the financial incentive provided to student participants in the study was 850.00 dollars. I conducted 26 individual interviews providing each student with 25.00 dollars after each interview. I used 650.00 dollars of my own money for this incentive. The Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities provided the 200.00 dollar Barnes and Nobel gift card for the preliminary questionnaire raffle to demonstrate their support of the study and off-set my financial burden.

Data Collection

Yin (2009) maintains that case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence. Thus, I employed several different data collection techniques - a questionnaire, two individual interviews with each student (one in the fall semester and one in the spring semester), participant-observation, and document analysis.

Preliminary questionnaire.

I designed and utilized an electronic questionnaire (Appendix C) to collect background and demographic data from the participants. Students expressed their interest in participating in the study by completing the questionnaire. In addition to gathering background/demographic information about students in the Rainbow Perspectives Program, I used the questionnaire to purposely select the cases for the study. 24 students filled out the questionnaire and noted interest in participating in the study. 13 participants were selected based on the information provided in the questionnaire – self-identified gender identity, self-identified sexuality, self-identified race, class year, number of years in the Rainbow Perspectives program, and enrollment type (freshman/transfer). This number of participants allows for redundancy and saturation and “reasonable coverage of the phenomenon” (Patton, 202, p. 246). This allowed for sufficient opportunity to identify themes as well as conduct cross-case analysis.

Individual interviews.

The purpose of interviewing is “to find out from them [interviewee] those things we cannot directly observe” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Individual interviews were used to gain insight into the individual experiences and perceptions of students in Rainbow Respective and how they perceived the program influencing their gender or sexual identity. Prior to beginning the first individual interview (Appendix D) in fall 2013 students read and agreed to the information outlined in the informed consent form (Appendix E). Second individual interviews (Appendix F)

took place in the spring 2014 semester. All interviews will took place at a private quiet location on campus that was convenient for the student.

Participant observations.

Participant - observation, “a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observer,” (Yin, 2009, p. 111) were used in this study to learn about the culture and context of the Rainbow Perspectives program. I attended the Rainbow Perspectives opening activity, Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities Welcome Reception, and two staff meetings to learn about Rainbow Perspectives through the course of the study. I attempted to engage in casual social interactions with students in these types of settings to learn more about the Rainbow Perspectives program as a community of individuals living together. Participant-observation will helped me gain understanding of the social norms and realities of students living in the Rainbow Perspectives program. To maintain my credibility as a researcher, I only attended events that were open to me or I had been invited to since I do not want to intrude into the housing community inappropriately. Additionally, I will took notes to document important things I noticed after the event so I do not set myself apart from the other attendees at events, but while also documenting important interactions and observations.

Document review.

Yin (2009) states, “the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 103). I reviewed documents as an approach to gaining supplemental data to inform the study and learn more about the program. I reviewed the Rainbow Perspectives application, website, and contract provided to each student in attendance at the Rainbow Perspectives opening activity. These documents were useful in understanding how the program is represented to potential students and the requirements and expectations laid

out by the Office of Social Justice and LGBT communities. I used document review to learn about the background and foundation of the program while designing interview protocols and informing participant-observations to compare and contrast what students described the program to be with descriptions of the program on public documents reviewed.

Data Analysis

Through qualitative data analysis looked for emerging regularities, irregularities, and patterns to sort the data into categories. This process of data analysis involved careful review and reading of the data (Merriam, 2009). First, all individual interview transcripts, participant observation notes, and documents will be converted into word processing files and uploaded to Dedoose. This process occurred on a rolling basis as data was collected to allow interviews and observations to be informed by the data that had already been collected. Interview questions were generated from earlier trends, possible themes, and the general sense of the information after reading through the data and notes several times.

Second, I checked the interview transcripts for accuracy and provided the individual interview transcript to the student participant in another effort to confirm accuracy. Once all data from the individual interviews was transcribed and checked for accuracy, interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were organized and coded. I began to explore the data by reading through it several times, writing memos about potential themes and categories, and developing ideas for potential codes. This was the beginning of developing a qualitative codebook (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). As I developed the codebook, notes and memos were written and reflected on to inform future steps. Creswell (2009) describes the process of qualitative data analysis as, “making sense out of text and image data” (p. 183). The codebook played a significant role in understanding and making sense out of the data. After initial ideas

for the codebook were established the data was coded. Codes were expanded and refined as was necessary to respond to information revealed by the study participants. The codes were grouped, counted, categorized and sorted to reveal larger themes. Inductive and deductive coding was utilized.

While I worked to make sense of the data, I was cognizant of the dominant heterosexist and heteronormative research and cultural paradigms that limit and misrepresent the lives, lived experiences, and perceptions of queer students. I coded the data while being mindful of the myriad of ways to be authentically human and critically think about queer identity. I did not manipulate my data into a prescribed model or way of thinking, but allowed the words and experiences of the students to speak for themselves through detailed data analysis. As language, power, and difference are political and contribute to the social construction of sexuality and gender I paid particular attention to how students authentically self- identify, describe, and interpret themselves, their communities, and their world. “As an individual never repeats actions precisely the same; identity is therefore always changing” (Abes, p. 148, 2009). Thus, I recognized the fluidity and changing nature of the students’ identities, experiences and perceptions.

Themes, quotes, and gaps in the data will begin to tell the story of students’ experiences and perceptions in the Rainbow Perspectives program. I represented findings through creating a profile for each case or participant and represent cross-case analysis highlighting perceptions of students in Rainbow Perspectives that spoke to resounding themes or findings.

To ensure the validity of these findings I utilized member checking (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Participants were provided with a summary of the study’s findings and asked if they feel they accurately reflect their experiences. Additionally, other peers were asked to

examine the data. Lastly, since I am employed multiple research methods I triangulated the data to increase reliability. Triangulation always entails finding common themes in patterns in multiple sources (Yin, 2009).

Researcher's Role

In this study I was not strictly an outside researcher. I worked at the University that was used as the research site for four years and left in spring of 2014. I am still actively engaged in the queer community on campus by attending university programs and events even though I am not longer an employee. Although, I did not have a relationship with any of the study participants, my professional role at the university may have influenced my role as a researcher. I worked to mitigate this challenge by reassuring students that I would represent their perceptions and experiences as they conveyed them and that students would suffer no consequences for whatever they choose to share and their name would remain confidential. Additionally, I identify as queer and have a personal connection to this research. I went through the difficult developmental process of coming out during my time as an undergraduate student. Although this provides me with insight into this topic, I recognize my bias and was conscious not to assert my opinion or experiences over my findings.

Limitations

As with any research study, there are limitations that need to be addressed. As Patton (1990) notes, "There is no perfect research design. There are always tradeoffs" (p.162). This study only focused on one special interest housing program at one institution. The study would be stronger if looked at several programs at different institutions to compare and contrast the programs. Another limitation of the study is the short time frame in which it was conducted - one academic year, limited this study. This limited the amount of individual interviews and

participant observation that could be conducted. I was also the sole interpreter of the study, which limits the amount of perspectives involved in the research and analysis process.

Additionally, in this study I was not strictly an outside researcher. I worked at the university chosen to be the research site and am actively engaged in the queer community on campus through attending university programs and events. Although, I did not have a relationship with any of the study participants my professional role at the University may have unconsciously shaped my role as a researcher. To mitigate this I worked to build trust with the participants, so this could be interpreted as strength as well. Moreover, I identify as queer and have a personal connection to this research as I went through the difficult developmental process of coming out during my time as an undergraduate student. Although this provides me with important insight into this topic I also was mindful not assert my opinion or experiences over my findings by recognizing this bias.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This study utilized a multiple case study methodology to describe and analyze student perspectives and experiences of a queer focused special interest housing community. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do Rainbow Perspective students perceive and experience the special interest housing program?
2. How have perceptions of students' own sexuality or gender identity been influenced by experiences or elements of the Rainbow Perspectives program?
3. How can institutions and student affairs professionals improve practices that support queer undergraduate students based on this research-based evidence?

This chapter provides demographic information for each participant and 13 individual profiles (or cases). Each profile was compiled with information shared by students through individual interviews and the online questionnaire. Each profile was organized to respond to the research questions outlined above and showcase students' real life experiences to provide possible answers to the research questions.

Participant Summary

Detailed demographic information is provided on the following page.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Sexuality	Race	Class Year	Semesters in Program	Enrollment Type
Alex	Ciswoman	Queer	Biracial	Sophomore	2	Transfer
Benjamin	Male	Gay	White	Freshman	2	Freshman
Bill	Man	Straight	White	Senior	6	Freshman
Chase	Man	Bisexual	White	Sophomore	2	Freshman
David	Genderfluid	Demisexual	White	Senior	3.5	Transfer
Delouise	Genderqueer/ Gender fluid	Queer	Multiracial	Freshman	1.5	Freshman
Harry	Transgender Man	Woman Loving	Multiracial	Sophomore	2	Freshman
Lenore	Woman	Questioning	White	Junior	2	Transfer
Nora	Female	Queer	White	Senior	6	Freshman
Robert	Male	Gay	White	Senior	6	Transfer
Sky	Female	Butch Lesbian	White	Sophomore	2	Transfer
Soloman	Male	Bisexual	African American	Sophomore	2	Freshman
Sophia	Transgender Woman	Queer	Multiracial	Sophomore	2.5	Freshman

Note. Semesters In Program = number of semesters students participated in Rainbow Perspectives at the end of the 2013-2014 academic year. This was the academic year the study took place. Enrollment Type = Freshman (entered as a first time freshman student in the fall and has never attended another higher education institution); Transfer (entered in a fall or spring semester from another higher education institution where they earned credit). The gender and sexuality represented in the table represent how students identified during the second individual interview in spring 2014. Some students identified their sexuality and gender identity differently than they did during the first individual interview.

The 13 participants were asked to self identify demographic information to ensure they had the room to express their multiple identities in language that made sense to them without reinforcing societal norms. This was facilitated through allowing students to provide this information in “open box” format in the online preliminary questionnaire instead of using prepopulated identity groups in which students had to select. In individual interviews I followed-up with students about the demographic information they provided in the preliminary questionnaire. Specific attention was paid to gender identity and sexuality to ensure I understood the language they provided and we discussed how they arrived at identifying with these terms. Most students in the study shared in the interviews that they did not feel a great connection to any of the terminology or words they provided and shared they wished they did not have to identify their gender and sexuality as specifically I was asking them to because it felt arbitrary or outdated. One student stated on the online preliminary questionnaire, “gender and sexuality is a social construct I no longer ascribe to, but I understand the importance of demographic information for research.”

To ensure participants were provided the room to authentically represent their gender identity they were asked their preferred gender pronouns. Participants preferred gender pronouns are represented in Table 2 and are used in the participant profiles to authentically represent each participant.

Table 2

Participants' Preferred Gender Pronouns

Participant	Preferred Gender Pronoun
Alex	She, her, hers, herself
Benjamin	He, him, his, himself
Bill	He, him, his, himself
Chase	He, him, his, himself
David	They, them, their, themselves
Delouise	They, them, their, themselves
Harry	They, them, their, themselves
Lenore	She, her, hers, herself
Nora	She, her, hers, herself
Robert	He, him, his, himself
Sky	She, her, hers, herself
Soloman	He, him, his, himself
Sophia	She, her, hers, herself

For the purpose of the study and understanding who is comprised in the sample, I summarize the demographic make-up of the participants (or cases) below, but this should not be interpreted as hard and fast information. There are an infinite amount of ways to be human and things like power, identity, language, and difference cannot be captured in a list of terms and percentages (Wilchins, 2004).

The 13 participants were living in the Rainbow Perspectives during the fall and spring of the 2013-2014 academic year. 8% (1) of the participants lived in Rainbow Perspectives for approximately one and a half semesters, 54% (7) two semesters, 8% (1) for approximately two and a half semesters, 8% (1) for three and a half semesters, and 23% (3) for six semesters. 23% (3) of participants entered mid-semester due to reasons that will be explained through the participant profiles and 77% of participants entered during the traditional fall move-in. Of the 13 participants 15% (2) were freshman, 46% (6) sophomores, 8% (1) juniors, and 31% (4) seniors during the time of the study. A majority of the participants (62%) entered the University as first time freshman students in the fall and have never attended another higher education institution and 38% entered in a fall or spring semester from another higher education institution where they earned credit.

The following breakdown provides a snap shot of the multiple identities that participants identified with at the end of the 2013-2014 academic year. A majority of the participants (62%) identified their race as white and 38% identified as non-white (bi-racial, multi-racial, or African American). Participants' gender and sexuality is represented in Table 1 using their own words. It should be noted that two participants shared during the spring semester interview that they self-identified their gender and sexuality differently than they did during our interview in the fall semester and would like to update their demographic information in the study. The information in Table 1 represents the information students confirmed or updated in the spring 2014 interview.

Of the 13 participants 39% (5) identify as male or man, 31% (4) as woman, cis-woman, or female, 15% (2) as transgender (1 participant as transgender man and 1 as transgender woman), and 15% (2) as genderqueer and/or gender fluid. Participants also identified their sexuality using their own words. Four (31%) participants self-identified their sexuality by using

the word queer, 2 (15%) participants used the word gay, 1 (8%) participant used the word straight, 2 (15%) participant used the word bisexual, 1 (8%) participant used the word demisexual, 1 (8%) participants used the words woman loving, 1 (8%) participant used the word questioning, and 1 (8%) participant used the words butch lesbian.

Next, I present 13 individual participant profiles or case studies. In the profiles there is detailed information about how each participant perceives and experiences the Rainbow Perspectives Program, how perceptions of participants' own gender of sexuality have been influenced by the program, and information that may inform the issue of how higher education institutions and the people that work there can support queer students.

Individual Participant Profiles

Alex

Alex was a sophomore transfer student from a mid-sized private university in New York City in Fall 2013. She was a new student and new to living in Rainbow Perspectives. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year she lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. She self identified her gender as ciswoman, sexuality as queer, and as biracial. She learned about Rainbow Perspectives after the tragic suicide of a queer freshman student attending the research site in 2010 through national news coverage. She was considering attending the research site as a freshman, but said she was "scared away" when she heard about the student's suicide and circumstances surrounding it. Also through news coverage, she learned how the research site responded to the tragedy and said it was "less intimidating" to attend since she knew Rainbow Perspectives existed. When Alex made the decision to transfer to the research site, living in Rainbow Perspectives seemed to be a natural step. "They [the University] made a point to try, so

I thought I should live there.” She applied through the Enrollment Pathway and was accepted into the program.

She was not out to her mother and father during the fall semester, but was during the spring semester. She did not tell her mother and father she lived in Rainbow Perspectives, but her mother “figured it out” on her own in a visit to her residence hall room. Some students had rainbow flags or pins on their doors or simply dressed or expressed their gender identity or sexuality in ways that lead people to make assumptions about them being part of the queer community. Alex thought this is how her mother put the pieces together that she lived in a queer focused residence hall. Alex was not bothered by her mother finding out because she felt it was important for students to put whatever they wanted on their doors and present however they were most comfortable. Alex said, “my mother hates it, absolutely *hates* it [her living in Rainbow Perspectives]. She thinks I ostracize myself from everyone that is not in the queer community.” Again, Alex knew her mother did not approve of her sexuality or living situation, but felt she “reached an age where I don’t care what she [her mother] thinks.”

Alex’s expectation of the program was that it would be a “safe” place to live and go to school.

The biggest thing I was worried about was living in a dorm. This is a state school, so there are a lot of different types of people here and I had heard bad stories [...] I was like, you know what? I don’t even want to allow myself to be in that situation. Being here [Rainbow Perspectives] is just nice because [...] you can trust everyone. Everyone is here for a reason. Everyone intentionally signed up for this type of an environment.

She felt this was ironic because people assume she is straight based on her physical appearance so she typically does not have to “worry” about anyone “saying anything to her.” Alex conveyed this was bittersweet because instead fellow students said things like, “You do not look gay” and even though this may not be intended to be negative it was hurtful to her.

Alex described Rainbow Perspectives like a family; even though not everyone was close, there was a shared understanding and care for each other. She made three of her best friends through the program and shared was hard to explain Rainbow Perspectives because was different than she thought it would be. There was not a community project or programming students are working on together as the program description conveys, but it was more about supporting each other. “There are people living here [in Rainbow Perspectives] that have dealt with things that not everyone our age deals with. Not everyone at 19 or 20 has dealt with self-harm, suicidal ideations, depression, eating disorders, making decisions to start hormones or having surgeries.” Alex has gotten to know students that battled these issues while being in the program and although it is a lot for any student to handle she believed it spoke to the need for the Rainbow Perspectives program.

Alex’s favorite experiences in the program were just hanging out in her friend’s room on a Saturday night around 11:00 p.m. and they decided on a whim to drive into New York City and just drive around. She showed her friends that were not as familiar with the city all her favorite places and it “just felt fun and free.” She said there were not many specific experiences that she recalls from Rainbow Perspectives. What she valued most was the ability to have conversations she had never had before about gender, sex, and mental health, all topics she has never been able to discuss openly in depth.

Through being a part of the program Alex has learned that gender identity and sexuality does not always have to be labeled as specifically as she once thought. “I always hated people who were like, ‘I don’t like labels’ because I do like labels.” She was proud to be part of the queer community and in the past was proud to say she was a lesbian, but now she is dating someone that identifies as a transgender man and she better understands there is fluidity in

gender identity and sexuality. Alex now identifies her sexuality as queer because the term lesbian no longer made sense as she is emotionally and physically attracted to a person that does not identify as a woman. Being part of Rainbow Perspectives has expanded how she thinks about gender identity and sexuality, but also the words she uses to describe her own identity. Alex is also more confident in talking about her sexuality. She has always had pride in whom she was, but now she feels more confident talking about it.

Alex would make the decision to live in Rainbow Perspectives as a new transfer student again, but is disappointed in the lack of connectedness there is between the students. “Being queer is not enough to bring people together.” There needs to be additional components of the program to keep students connected and learning from each other. She felt safe in the community and an implied understanding between the students, but after the first couple weeks of everyone getting along well, strong cliques formed and students went in their separate directions. She knew some of this was natural, as it would be difficult for 40 people to hang out all the time, but felt what also contributed to this was a lack of staff involvement. She wished that staff were more involved in the community and specifically the RA was better prepared to support students working through gender and sexuality identity issues. Alex has had multiple experiences where students in Rainbow Perspectives were having “really intense, almost out-of-body, self-hate” experiences that would last hours. Alex felt like there was no one to support these students so students had to “deal with it” on their own. She was frustrated because, “we cannot save each other all the time.” Alex knew that the Peer Mentors were also supposed to be a resource for students, but “I do not get the point of them. They are just kind of there and get paid, you rarely see them.” In general, Alex felt there were ways the program could be improved to support students. She did not plan on living in Rainbow Perspectives next year.

She thought it was a great experience for freshman or first-year transfer students, but not something she wanted to do again. She has chosen to live-off campus in fall 2014.

Benjamin

Benjamin was a freshman student in Fall 2013. It was his first year in college and first year living in Rainbow Perspectives. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year he lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. He self identified his gender as male, sexuality as gay, and race as white. He learned about Rainbow Perspectives after attending ‘Accepted Students Day’ in April of 2013. This was a University sponsored event where accepted students came to campus to learn about the University to help them decide if they would like to attend. The research site was not his first choice school, but he attended Accepted Students Day to take one last look before he made his final decision to attend another school. His mom saw in the program of events for the day the “LGBT Open Chat Room.” Benjamin’s mom nervously said to him, “Uh, like, do you want to do that?” Benjamin said, “we may as well check it out” and they went to the session together. Benjamin describes session as an, “ah-ha moment.” At the session he picked up flyers for queer focused programming on campus, met the Director and Assistant Director for the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities, and learned about the queer new student orientation (Community) and Rainbow Perspectives. Before this time, Benjamin had not taken into consideration how queer friendly a campus felt in his college choice process, but now he was thinking about the importance of having a visible and accepting queer community at the school he selected.

He went home after the Accepted Student Day and searched the website of his first choice school for information for queer students. He could only find one school website with resources for queer students and it contained dead links and looked like it “had not been updated

in years.” After this realization, Benjamin decided to attend the research site and live in Rainbow Perspectives because he perceived the community as being welcoming and accepting of the queer community. He applied for the Rainbow Perspectives through the Enrollment Pathway and was accepted.

Benjamin came out as gay during his senior year in high school, but coming to college he was “uncomfortable” with his sexuality. “I had anxiety thinking about, what if my roommate is homophobic and [...] I honestly did not know any other gay people or any queer people of any category and I wanted to throw myself into the culture and community.” He made the choice to live in Rainbow Perspectives because he wanted to “come to terms” with himself. His parents were supportive of his sexuality and his choice to live in Rainbow.

Benjamin describes Rainbow Perspectives as “interesting [...] it is very accepting and very open [...] and a lot of the people here are so comfortable with themselves and just talking about anything.” Benjamin enjoyed getting to know people in the community and the “no judgments” feel of the community. He especially appreciated getting to know students that on the first day were so nervous and “red-faced” (like himself), but were now more comfortable and open.

One of Benjamin’s most memorable experiences was during the first two weeks of school when “all of us would pile into my friends room, we brought mattresses in from different rooms, and would watch TV and movies and of course talk about things that I have never talked about before.” These experiences made Benjamin feel comfortable and empowered. Although he liked getting to know everyone during the first couple weeks, as the year progressed the larger group divided into smaller exclusive groups and it began to feel very “cliquey.” This is why he explains it as an “interesting” experience, because it was “half a welcoming and accepting vibe”

and the other half made up of “fortified” small groups that did not associate with each other. Although, he did not enjoy the “cliqueiness” of the community he made two close friends. The community was different than what he thought it would be. There were events for queer students each day during the first week of classes and he went to all of them, but there were only five other students in attendance and they were the same students at each program. He knew there is a larger queer community, but would have liked for it was more active and visible outside of Rainbow Perspectives.

Benjamin came to Rainbow Perspectives seeking self-acceptance and felt like he found this. “I am now very open talking about these things [being queer] that I was kind of ashamed to talk about before [...]. I am more comfortable with myself and I can approach people without having any worries.” During the fall semester Benjamin dyed his hair blue and wore nail polish for the first time in his life. During the spring semester he got his eyebrow pierced. These were all things he never would have done in the past for fear of judgment. “This is me saying I do not care what people think, this is something I want.” Benjamin explained that he felt, “satisfied, relieved, and much less stress” because he was not worried about what others thought about him. Although, Rainbow Perspectives had challenges Benjamin “dove into the queer community” head first and was proud of himself for doing this.

Benjamin would make the decision to live in Rainbow Perspectives as a freshman again, but looked forward to a different experience during his sophomore year. He found it difficult to commute to his classes because he was an Engineering student and these classes were on a different campus than where Rainbow Perspectives was located. The research site consisted of five campuses that made the main campus. Also, the entire Engineering freshmen class had the option to live in Engineering special interest housing together on the campus where the

Engineering school was located. Benjamin chose to live in the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing, but this meant it took him further away from the Engineering community where students easily helped each other with homework, engaged in study groups, and simply got to know each other.

Benjamin was also disappointed there were not more programmatic aspects of Rainbow Perspectives. “I remember reading there would be monthly community discussions and programs, but there just hasn’t been since the first week. There does not seem to be anyone pulling this program together.” Benjamin felt like these types of activities and more staff involvement would bring people together and make the community stronger, instead of being, “a bunch of fortified groups.”

Benjamin thought he made a good choice to live in Rainbow Perspectives, but wished he could have been closer to his Engineering classes and classmates. He planned to live in Rainbow Perspectives again because he wants to live with his friend whom identified as a woman and there are only specific places on campus that men and women are permitted to live together. Rainbow Perspectives is one these options, and their lottery number was not “good enough” to get into the other locations that were closer to their academic buildings. Although Rainbow Perspectives was not his first choice housing option he was glad he would be able to live with his friend.

Bill

Bill was a senior student living in Rainbow Perspectives in Fall 2013. He entered the University as a freshman in Fall 2010 and began living in Rainbow Perspectives in Fall 2011 as a sophomore when it was created and opened its doors. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year he had lived in Rainbow Perspectives for six semesters. He self identified his gender as

man, sexuality as straight, and race as white. He learned about Rainbow Perspectives in the spring 2011 semester of his freshman year. He had a tough experience in his freshman residence hall. There were lots of loud parties, vomit on the floor in the hall at least once a week, and he found fellow students to be in general childish and inconsiderate. He and his good friend, that identified as a woman, wanted to live in the same residential hall on a particular campus, but that campus did not have much housing that was open to men. This was also the campus where New Gibbons (the hall that houses Rainbow Perspectives) was located.

He remembers receiving an email blast from the Director of the Center Social Justice and LGBT Communities promoting this new living option (Rainbow Perspectives) and it was located on the campus in which they wanted to live. Since there was an application process and not a lottery system this would guarantee that he and his friend could live close assuming their applications were accepted. Bill “ saw it [living in Rainbow Perspectives] as an opportunity to be a part of a community with like-minded people while staying on the campus we both wanted to live.” Bill was interested in the queer focus of the community because he had always considered himself an “ally” and someone that “cared about LGBT issues.” “I had a lot of gay friends in high school and the queer community is just something I have always been exposed to.” He and his friend filled out the application through the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities and they were accepted into the program.

Bill’s family knew he lived in Rainbow Perspectives and thought it was a great opportunity, except a few strange looks they have given some residents on move-in days. Even then, Bill says his family and friends are very open-minded. Bill’s expectation of the program was that it would be a “selective” place to live because you had to fill out a specific application to be considered to live in Rainbow Perspectives. He was hoping that the people living in the

community would be more mature and committed to the queer community than those living in a “freshman residence hall.” He was also hoping to feel “a sense of community and talk with students” more than he did in his freshman residence hall.

For the most part his expectations were met the first year and he “met a lot of friends.” Most of my best friends in college now, I met in Rainbow Perspectives.” He explains his most memorable experiences in the programs as simply always having someone to go to the dining hall with or just engage in “real” discussions. Bill is a pre-health student and has appreciated the ability to walk out of his room after studying and just engage with interesting people about things far removed that what he was studying.

He decided to return for second year (Fall 2012) because he had a good experience the first year. Bill’s second and third year in the program have brought positive experiences, but also frustration that there is not more investment in the program from staff. He was disappointed in the selection process and performance of the Peer Mentors in the community. He believed the mentors were supposed to help students stay connected and build community within Rainbow Perspectives, but each year there are programs and activities during the first couple weeks and then nothing specifically planned for the community for the remainder of the year.

Bill valued the wonderful conversations and relationships he built with students living in the community, but had hoped for more. He wanted to work on a social justice initiative together and make an impact on the University community. He returned each year because he liked the “open and safe atmosphere” that existed in the community and he enjoyed living with his friends, but felt the program never reached its full potential.

I think the way they advertise the program makes it seem more organized and has more of a purpose than it actually does. All three years at the first meeting, they make you sign a contract saying, ‘I’m going to do this many things per month, per semester, blah blah

blah.’ Each year the program has gotten progress less organized and lacks institutional investment.

Through being a part of Rainbow Perspectives Bill felt he was more comfortable with his sexuality and feels more confident talking about queer issues because he “met so many people and seen so many things that don’t fit into neat categories.” Bill believed he had never met an out transgender person before living in Rainbow Perspectives. Living in Rainbow has made him reflect on his own gender and sexuality “more than any other straight person. You would have to be dead not to reflect on your sexuality and gender identity and live here.” Bill thinks living in Rainbow has made him a better and more informed, “ally”. He feels more comfortable speaking up against heterosexism and homophobia because of his own self-reflection and experiences in the program. “It has been eye-opening learning about so many different types of people.”

Bill wants to be a medical doctor and thinks his experiences in Rainbow Perspectives will make him more sensitive to all his patients because he has heard about some of the terrible experiences queer people have had with medical professionals. Additionally, he has seen queer students struggle with mental health issues while living in Rainbow. He wrote about the lessons he has learned in his medical school personal statement and plans to attend medical school in fall 2014. Bill did not plan to return to Rainbow Perspectives because he planned to graduate in May 2014.

Chase

Chase was a sophomore student in Fall 2013 living in Rainbow Perspectives for the first time. He enrolled as a freshman at the research site in Fall 2012 and lived on campus. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year he lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. He self identified his gender as man, sexuality as bisexual, and race as white. He learned about Rainbow Perspectives in the spring 2013 semester around the same time University housing

applications were due. He was supposed to live with a group of friends, but at the last minute his friends let him know there was not room for him in their housing plan. Chase felt lost because he did not know whom he was going to live with and felt the housing lottery process was confusing and burdensome. His friend that was in the queer fraternity on campus, Delta Lambda Phi, told him about Rainbow Perspectives and that he was planning to live there in the fall. Chase thought, “perfect, I need housing and I fit in.” He applied directly through the Office of Social Justice and LGBT Communities and was accepted after the housing deadline. Chase was excited about this opportunity because he did not know where else he was going to live, but he also, “didn’t really have any other queer friends” except for the friend that told him about Rainbow Perspectives. Chase said he “could use a community that kind of understands.” He was out to his most of his family and friends and they know he lives in Rainbow Perspectives and are supportive of him and his decision. He is not out to his father and grandfather and has no plans to come out to them or tell them about Rainbow Perspectives. He describes them as “homophobic and closed minded.”

Chase did not have many expectations of Rainbow Perspectives coming into the program. He was simply grateful to have on campus housing and be live with other queer people. “It is a welcoming environment and there are people I enjoy being around, that is really all I need and that’s all I thought it was [...] we are all very unique in our own pretty awesome way.” Chase felt his freshman dorm was chaotic and the students living there were very immature. He was relieved not to be in the environment anymore.

Chase described Rainbow Perspectives as a “really really great program and it gives a lot of people a nice and safe space to be. For me in particular, going somewhere else wouldn’t be that difficult at the moment, I’m currently dating a female. So I appear to be straight [...] but for

some of my friends it wouldn't be easy." Chase described some of his friends' terrible experiences in high school (e.g. bullying, close-minded teachers) and describes Rainbow Perspectives as, "a beacon [...] a kind of fortress, this safe community where people can kind of be themselves without fear of being judged."

Chase's favorite experiences in the program were just hanging out and having conversations that he had never had before. Chase said, "I have met people from different walks of life, backgrounds, experiences, and it is all mixed up in one. You do not have conversations like those outside of Rainbow Perspectives." Chase believed he had never met an out transgender person before living in Rainbow Perspectives. Chase reflected on the "big celebration" he had for his friend that started testosterone treatments. If he had not lived in Rainbow he does not believe he would have ever engaged in that "human experience."

Through being a part of the program Chase was, "a lot more comfortable with it [his sexuality]" and it broadened his perspective. He now sees sexuality as, "just a big fluid thing." Chase did not fully accept himself until he lived in Rainbow Perspectives and "it makes me more comfortable with who I am, having other people that are also queer in my life." In general, he thinks that living in Rainbow has made him more accepting of his, "strengths, flaws, and just becoming comfortable in my own skin."

Chase has applied and was accepted to live in Rainbow Perspectives for the 2014-2015 academic year and hoped he could convince one of his friends not living in the program to apply and be his roommate. Chase hoped to return because enjoyed being part of the community and it was close to all of his classes, so it was the best of both worlds. He also hoped to take advantage of more of the programming. He knew it existed, but just had not had the time to attend. He also

found the housing lottery process overly cumbersome, so this choice allows him to not go through that process with thousands of other students.

David

David was a senior transfer student from a community college in the same state as the research site. Before this they attended another four-year public institution in the same state. David transferred to the research site in Fall 2012 and moved into Rainbow Perspectives in mid-October of 2012. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year David lived in Rainbow Perspectives for approximately three and a half semesters. David's self identified gender during our first interview (fall 2013) was transgender man, sexuality was demisexual, and race was white. During the second interview (spring 2014) they self identified their gender as gender fluid, sexuality as demisexual, and race as white.

David began transitioning as a freshman at their previous institution. David described being a student at their previous institution. "A lot of my experiences during my freshman year were not pleasant." David described the difficulties of transitioning without institutional or familial support and being a victim of sexual assault related to gender identity. David asserts they were "kicked-out" of the previous four-year institution for being "suicidal" and ended up at the community college during the transitional period before attending the research site. Although, the research site was not David's first choice school they are glad they ended up here. David is in treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and intensive counseling on and off campus.

David became a student at the research site, at the beginning of the fall 2012 semester and was commuting from home. They moved into Rainbow Perspectives in mid-October when the relationship with their family had deteriorated to a point that they were not longer able to live

at home. David met with the Director of The Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities to talk about the possibility of living in Rainbow Perspectives and that same day they were provided with a space in the community. David knew about Rainbow Perspectives through attending other events on campus and visiting The Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities regularly. They did not know anyone else that lived there, but was comforted to have, “a queer safe space, and more importantly a trans-inclusive, queer safe space.” David’s family knew they live in Rainbow Perspectives, but are not supportive of many aspects of their life. David was also open about where they lived with friends.

David’s expectations of Rainbow Perspectives were impacted by the realities that brought them to the community. David explained the following expectations of Rainbow Perspectives during fall 2013 semester.

I’ve been homeless [...] I’ve been in really bad home situations, and I’ve been in environments that were just so unsafe and so unbearable. I have other friends who have attended schools in other states and they’ve had death threats against them, and they had to drop out because they had nowhere else to go [...] I’m just thankful to have this space that I like [...] there is no way I was going to be disappointed with having this safe place to live.

Again, in the fall David, for the first time, felt safe to walk alone at night, wear on eyeliner in public, dress in drag without fear of physical violence or harassment, and walk with their shirt-off on the way to and from the shower. David explained that Rainbow Perspectives was not without drama, students “hooking-up” with another and then dealing with the emotional fallout, cliques within the community that badmouth each other, and roommates having disagreements, but David did not feel that any these issues took away from how important it was to have Rainbow Perspectives.

David described Rainbow Perspectives as a home that was more than a place. They said Rainbow Perspectives is “where you can be yourself.” This was important to David as they

described the unfriendly looks from fellow students on campus and ignorant comments from professors. Rainbow Perspectives served as an escape from these realities. David's most memorable experience from the program was super storm Sandy and how much fun all his friends had in Rainbow Perspectives when the power was out. David said it was scary, but it was comforting to go through it as a community. David said they had great conversations and really got to know each other quickly through the natural disaster and days after without power. Another favorite experience David talked about was going to *Rocky Horror* and dressing up. David felt empowered by, "seeing fellow residents embrace all aspects of their gender identity through drag."

Rainbow Perspectives shaped David's gender identity by making it okay to see gender as fluid. "It has helped me embrace the feminine aspects of my identity, even though I wanted to, I felt it would compromise my identity." In the past, David felt if they presented with any femininity they, "would not be seen as a guy anymore. Now I realize Rainbow Perspectives has played a role in me moving so far past that and realizing it just doesn't matter. Now I wear eyeliner a lot and I started bringing from home some of my old girl wardrobe."

In the spring semester David shared a completely different experience living in Rainbow Perspectives. David had grown close with another Rainbow Perspectives resident and they were confiding in each other about many personal things and David shared that they still had suicidal thoughts. David thought the friend would keep the information they shared in confidence, but the student was worried about David and brought the information to a University staff member that moved the incident up the leadership chain. David was mandated to go for physiological evaluation and the police and ambulance came to the residence hall. David perceived this disclosure of their personal information to the University as a clear violation of trust and

interpreted it as being singled out and even discriminated against/oppressed due to a mental health condition. David was able to stay in the Rainbow Perspectives community after the evaluation, but this completely changed their view of Rainbow Perspectives community as a “safe space.” Even though David’s view of Rainbow Perspectives has changed dramatically they still contend Rainbow Perspectives is “important.”

As uncomfortable as I am right now, and even though there are days when I say to my roommate, ‘I fucking hate that I am here. I cannot wait to leave. I don’t feel comfortable,’ I still know that I would be that much more unhappy if I were living in a building full of straight, cisgendered people. [...] I have to remember that no matter how miserable I may be some days at Rainbow Perspectives, I would not actually trade it. I have nowhere else to go.

When all of this transpired David was led to believe by fellow Rainbow Perspectives students that due to the “trouble” that they caused and their continued mental health issues, Rainbow Perspectives maybe dissolved as a program because the University was fearful that students “like” David lived there. When David finally conveyed the rumors students were sharing with them to a staff member in The Center for Social Justice and LGBT communities their fears were put to rest, but this added to the turmoil David felt about the program. Although David was a senior they did not have enough credits to graduate. David did not plan to return to Rainbow Perspectives, but instead live with friends off campus and take the classes needed to graduate while working. David said, “Every facet of daily life, I am dreading because I won’t be facing it with this queer space and support group by my side....it terrifies me. Honestly, I have no idea what I will do after graduation.”

Delouise

Delouise was a freshman in Fall 2013. It was Delouise’s first year in college and first year living in Rainbow Perspectives. Delouise did not move into Rainbow until half way through the fall 2013 semester. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year Delouise lived in

Rainbow Perspectives for one and a half semesters. Delouise's self-identified gender is genderqueer and gender fluid, sexuality is queer, and race is multiracial. Delouise learned about Rainbow Perspectives before attending the research site. They saw it as a housing option on the Enrollment Pathway and read about it on The Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities website and was very interested in the program, but concerned that during move-in their grandparents would find out they were living in a queer focused housing community. Delouise's grandparents are "queer-phobic," and are footing the bill for tuition, housing, and all other expenses. Delouise did not want to jeopardize the financial lifeline and was, "worried that there maybe a sign on the building that said, 'Rainbow'."

Delouise selected the same residence hall where Rainbow Perspectives was located as their first choice housing preference on the housing application through the Enrollment Pathway, "hoping to get someone gay." They did receive a housing assignment in their preferred residence hall, but not a queer roommate. Delouise's roommate was cisgendered, male, and straight. Delouise shared, "I am very queer, my expression is not heteronormative [...] it was very strange trying to be myself and living among people who really didn't get it at all." Delouise did not face any physical aggression from their roommate, instead they dealt with consistent microaggressions and was not "comfortable" in the space. Delouise's roommate would say things like, "Are you putting on make-up?" When Delouise would say 'yes' the roommate would never say anything back, but Delouise could "obviously tell he had a problem with it, but was not saying it out loud." When Delouise would wear a dress, students on the floor would say things like, "What the fuck" under their breath as they walked by. Delouise emailed the Assistant Director for the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities to disclose information about the situation and a room change into the program was approved. The next

week Delouise moved into Rainbow Perspectives. All of Delouise's friends and family (except grandparents) know they live in Rainbow Perspectives and are supportive.

Delouise's expectations of Rainbow Perspectives have been met in terms of "safety for my identity and me being me, but it really didn't meet my expectations far as a social justice understanding goes." Delouise was concerned about the lack of knowledge and importance placed on the intersecting identities such as race, gender, and sexuality. Delouise believed there should be an academic social justice course associated with Rainbow Perspectives that all students that live in the community should be required to enroll. Delouise has, "experienced some instances where people were just ignorant about certain things." Delouise made it clear they had not heard anything "hateful," but some students in Rainbow Perspectives were more "social-justice minded" than others.

For example, my pronouns are "they" and "them" and people have trouble with that. I noticed that a lot of times they [students living in Rainbow Perspectives] don't have trouble calling people who are female assigned at birth, "they" and "them," but they have trouble calling me "they" and "them" because I'm male-assigned at birth and I look more male. Also, there is a racial dynamic and lack of understanding around race as related to gender and sexuality.

Additionally, Delouise wished there were more organized ways the program built community, so they could get to know more people. Although, Delouise sees flaws in the program, "we all have that mutual respect for each other and have fun together." Delouise described one of his favorite experiences as winning the costume contest at the *Rocky Horror* event. It was experiences like these that Delouise knew they may not have been able to have without Rainbow Perspectives. Delouise said, "I just feel freed" by being part of Rainbow Perspectives. Delouise specifically described living with "queer people of color" as what they value most about the program.

Being a part of Rainbow Perspectives has allowed Delouise to think about their sexuality and gender identity, "in a more meaningful way, explore, and feel healthier about it." In the past

Delouise dealt with depression and being in a queer affirming environment has made them “happier.” Delouise valued the room for exploration in Rainbow Perspectives. “I wear different kinds of make-up, I wear things that are considered masculine one day and feminine on other days. I make out with people.” Delouise would not feel comfortable doing these things without the support of Rainbow. Delouise also shared,

I have learned that my gender is more fluid than I had thought before, not even more fluid, just different than I thought it was. I actually noticed now that I am with Richard I find myself more comfortable calling myself, ‘a boy’ with him and it being a queer male relationship. But when I am with certain other friends, specifically my trans friends, I’m definitely more girl, more womanly. I still think about taking hormones someday.

Delouise believed he has grown a lot during the year and was looking forward to living in an apartment with friends next year. They was looking forward to living in an apartment, but feels comforted that Rainbow Perspectives will be available for them to come back to the new living situation does not work out.

Harry

Harry was a sophomore in Fall 2013. Harry lived on campus as a freshman outside of Rainbow Perspectives and started living in Rainbow Perspectives in fall 2013 as a sophomore. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year Harry lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. Harry self-identified their gender during the first interview (fall 2013) as a woman and sexuality as lesbian and as multiracial. During the second interview (spring 2014) they identified their gender as a transgender man, sexuality as woman loving, and as multiracial. Harry learned about Rainbow Perspectives through being a student worker at The Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities. Harry became interested in the program and their best friend, Jonah, was planning to live in the program the next academic year. At the time, Harry identified as a woman and Jonah identified as a man so living in Rainbow Perspectives would

allow them to live together when traditional University housing would not allow men and women to be roommates. Harry said, “I just wanted to live in a place that was very accepting and where I could meet other people from the LGBT community.” All of Harry’s friends knew they live in Rainbow Perspectives, but their mom did not. Harry’s mom knew they were “gay” and “doesn’t mind.” Harry shared, “she just doesn’t want me so involved in the community.” For example, Harry’s mom was glad they had an on campus job, but she does not like that it was at the Center for Social Justice LGBT Communities. She did not want Harry to put this job on their resume. Harry thinks this maybe because she does not want any employer to discriminate against them because they are a member of queer community, but thought this could also be because they are applying for an internship at their mom’s place of work and she did not want people that she works with to know Harry is queer.

Harry’s expectation of Rainbow Perspectives was that they would meet, “a lot of great queer people and hang out together.” Harry has met, “a lot of great people, but we do not all hang out together.” Harry has met people that they will remain friends with for a long time, but they are not as close with others in the community as they would have liked. Even though Rainbow Perspectives was not as close knit as Harry would have liked, they feel comfortable being authentically themselves. Some of Harry’s most memorable experiences in the community were at the beginning of the semester. “I just like the simple things. Like when we put on music and just dance around and sing, running around in the rain, and smoking cigarettes on the porch with random strangers.” Harry said there was not just one memory that stood out. It was just the feeling of community and being able to go in and out of each other’s rooms and know people wanted to talk to you and get to know you. Even though Rainbow Perspectives was not exactly what they thought or hoped for, Harry shared they learned an important lesson. “People forget

that just because we are in the same marginalized community that doesn't mean we're all going to like the same things or we're all going to be best friends [...] We're just all still people and some people don't click." Harry thinks that Rainbow Perspectives students would be closer if there were more planned activities and structured introductions when new individuals come into the community.

Through being a part of the program Harry has become more self-assured with their gender identity and sexuality. In the fall semester Harry started to change their "look." Harry cut their hair shorter than it had ever been and started to wear "men's" clothes because this was how they were most comfortable. Harry said these changes made them, "a lot more comfortable with myself and I started figuring out who I am a little but more." In the spring semester Harry started taking "T" (Testosterone) and begin to identify as a transgender man to begin transitioning from female to male. Harry shared that transitioning and starting hormones was something they had been thinking about for over a year, but they were concerned about what their mom might think, but she has been supportive although she still needs sometime to continue to work through it. Harry was glad they had Rainbow Perspectives for support and guidance. "People in Rainbow are also on hormones and are in different stages. Their support has been very important to me."

Harry would make the decision over again to live in Rainbow Perspectives as a sophomore, but for 2014-2015 they planned to live in an apartment on campus. Harry was excited to live in an apartment, have their own bathroom, and continue their transition. Harry plans to stay in contact with some of their closest Rainbow Perspectives friends, but knew some they would "drift" from. Harry says, "friendships end. Some people are only supposed to be there for a short period of your life and I'm okay with that."

Lenore

Lenore was a junior transfer student from a community college in the same state as the research site in Fall 2013. She was a new student and new to living in Rainbow Perspectives. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year she lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. She self identified her gender as woman, sexuality as questioning, and race as white. She knew she wanted to live on campus for at least one year, but was concerned she would be placed in a freshman residence hall because she knew that transfer students get housing “left overs” and she did not want this to happen. She learned about Rainbow Perspectives through the Enrollment Pathway and it sounded interesting and so she filled out the application. She thought that living in Rainbow Perspectives could be a win-win; not living in a freshman residence hall as a junior or an undesirable location and exploring “LGBT issues.” Lenore said, “ I wanted to be able to explore my sexuality and not be judged for it.” Lenore’s whole family knew she lived in Rainbow Perspectives but, “they don’t seem to understand why I live here. I have told them I am pretty sure I am not 100% straight, but they keep saying, ‘you’re not gay, we just need to find you a boyfriend.’” Lenore was close with her family and does not feel like they are not supportive, but just in “denial.”

Lenore’s expectation of the Rainbow Perspectives was, “I could just be myself and not get judged for it.” Lenore “had no friends” coming to the research site so she wanted to connect with other students and start to build a friend group. She thought Rainbow would help her connect more quickly. Some of Lenore’s expectations were met and some were not. “I did have a bigger group of friends at the beginning [of the semester], and then the first couple months wore off and now I have two really good friends in Rainbow.” She was glad she made these close friends and realized her initial thought that everyone in the program would be friends and

hang out may have been a bit unrealistic. Lenore described Rainbow Perspectives as a “judgment free zone.” Even though not everyone was friends, Lenore says, “I feel like I can breathe here.” She described living at home and the intense pressure of her parents’ expectations and “putting on a happy face.” Lenore did not feel she was able to cry at home, but in Rainbow Perspectives she felt “safe to be myself.” Lenore battles depression and living in the Rainbow Perspectives made her realize it is important to reach out and get support. This led her to talk about her dissatisfaction with the Peer Mentors in the Rainbow Perspectives. She wished the peer mentors would have stayed out of the drama of the group and be better resources to all students. She said, “I wish I felt more comfortable talking with them. I have found support on campus, but not through them.”

Lenore’s favorite experience in the program was just “talking.” Her favorite times in Rainbow Perspectives were when some of her friends would be in her room and they would talk about things she had never discussed before – “real stuff”.

I know it is kind of weird, but I am the type of person that everything needs to be questioned. Like, that is why I self identify as questioning. I am asking questions; I am trying to figure it out. Then coming to Rainbow I meet all these people that have known forever they were gay and I’m just like how? How did you know that? We talk endlessly for hours.

Through being a part of Rainbow Perspectives Lenore felt like “not being straight” and questioning her sexuality was really “okay.” At the beginning of the semester she was afraid to talk about her sexuality. As the year progressed and the more conversations she had, “it’s just helped me become okay with it within myself.” She feels she has benefited from not having the noise of living at home with family or dealing with a freshman residence hall to “teach me that there are people out there who accept it, believe it and are okay with it.”

Lenore would make the decision to live in Rainbow Perspectives as a new transfer student again, but was disappointed in the lack of community and activities provided. She applied to be a Peer Mentor next year because she wanted to be part of changing Rainbow Perspectives and making it into a stronger and more active community. She also wanted all students in the community to feel supported by the Peer Mentor, not just the ones in which they were friends. If Lenore does not get offered the Peer Mentor position she will live off campus due to financial realities. She can live off campus for less money and than living on campus with a meal plan. Lenore said, “even if I do not get the Peer Mentor job maybe it just means I am ready to move on. Maybe I need to end this chapter and start a new one.” Either way Lenore looked forward to a fresh start next year, maybe in Rainbow Perspectives or maybe starting a new adventure off campus.

Nora

Nora was a senior in Fall 2013. She was a freshman at the research site in 2010 and starting living in Rainbow Perspectives as a sophomore in fall 2011. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year she lived in Rainbow Perspectives for six semesters. She self identified her gender as female, sexuality as queer, and as white. She learned about Rainbow Perspectives when she received an email from her school dean promoting the launch of the new program in fall 2011. She was immediately interested in the program because she want to be part of a community that was “united.” She found her freshman residence hall to be disconnected and chaotic and was looking for another type of experience. At the same time she understood it was queer focused and this appealed to her. Nora said, “the University definitely needed something like this and I figured if more people signed up for it, it would be something that would happen [...] the higher the numbers - the more likely it is to stay for people who need this sort of living

situation.” When the program was being promoted to students in spring 2011 she remembered students making jokes about the concept of the program and there was chatter that some students might take advantage of the program by “boyfriends and girlfriends” using it to live together without their parents knowing. This train of thought did not make much sense to Nora, but she chalked it up to a lack of understanding of the queer community and was not upset by it. She applied to the program and was accepted and has lived in Rainbow for the past three years.

Nora’s family knew she lived in Rainbow Perspectives, but she did not find herself talking about her living situation very much. She said, “if anyone asked, I would feel comfortable telling them.” Her parents are supportive, but they have discussed Rainbow Perspectives minimally. Nora’s expectation of the program was that it would be a “safe place” to live and it has met her expectation as this. “Everyone can be comfortable walking around the halls and not have to worry that something is going to happen.” Nora does wish Rainbow Students actually worked on a community project or least there was some “learning aspect” to Rainbow Perspectives. Each year she has lived in the program she has understood the program expectation that community members would need to work together on a project, but this has never actually happened. She thinks if there was an academic course attached to living in Rainbow Perspectives this expectation might be more easily reached. Nora said about the program, “I think intentions are great, but somebody needs to step forward and say we absolutely need to do this.”

Nora described Rainbow Perspectives as a place where queer people can exist without being afraid that someone will not want to live with them or say or do something negative. She said, “it is a place where I can live among people that I see eye-to-eye with in at least some ways – in a social justice way.” Nora believed that Rainbow Perspectives is important to the entire

queer community, but especially for transgender or gender non-conforming students. She said, “I actually see differences between how trans students are treated compared to gay students. I almost think a safe space is more important for people that are trans because there is still a lot of violence against the trans community.” She also describes the community as “dis-jointed.” Although, she is happy to live in Rainbow Perspectives not everyone gets along and she wishes there was a more united community. Nora said about the program, “some people will use it to socialize and have a more community-like setting and others will just use it as a safe and quiet space they can retreat to.” Nora thought both of these views of the community are fine, but there is an impact on the cohesion of the community.

Nora’s favorite experiences in the program were “just speaking with people.” Nora said, “I tend to have better conversations with my neighbors than I have with people in my classes. We seem like we are totally different pages.” She shared that in her classes students were not social justice focused and that she has been offended by comments made in her courses. These comments have never been directed at her, but were simply ignorant. She specifically talked about a professor making fun of the deficient number of women in science. The professor was trying to be funny, but came off as offensive instead.

Through being a part of the program Nora’s feelings about her sexuality and gender identity have not “changed.” She has met more people that understand what she means when she says that she identifies her sexuality as queer, but this did not impact how she felt about herself. Nora feels strongly that you should not have to “announce” your sexuality or have to identify with one particular label. Living in Rainbow Perspectives has made her more secure in this mindset, but also better understand why others like “labels.” Nora said, “There is a sense of

pride in what someone is, and I think that is a good thing. Not everyone is proud, so it is great that people here are proud of who they are.”

Nora was graduating, so she did not have the opportunity to live in Rainbow Perspectives again. She valued having the opportunity to live in Rainbow Perspectives for six semesters, but believed there were ways to maintain the excitement and community that is created in the first few weeks throughout the entire year. She thought there should be more Rainbow Perspectives specific programming and staff should “check-up” on the group more often. After graduation Nora’s plan was to “get a low-end car and job.” She will miss the diversity of the community and all her friends, but she was ready to take on the world beyond Rainbow Perspectives.

Robert

Robert was a senior student living in Rainbow Perspectives in Fall 2013. He was a transfer student that entered the University and Rainbow Perspectives in fall 2011. He transferred from a small college in rural Pennsylvania. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year he lived in Rainbow Perspectives for six semesters. He self identified his gender as male, sexuality as gay, and as white. Robert described the school he transferred from as, “not diverse at all.” He believed he was one of only five out queer students on campus at the time he was a student. At his previous institution he experienced many challenges as a result of being an out gay man. He encountered homophobia in his freshman residence hall and at campus events and there were no recognized queer student organizations or specified staff members designated to support and foster community for queer students on campus. Robert founded a student dance team on campus during his freshman year and became an orientation leader his sophomore year. Despite his efforts to become an active member of the community, the lack of visible institutional support for queer students made him feel isolated and alone. The final incident that

solidified Robert's need to transfer was during his sophomore year, he was targeted on campus due to his sexuality and assaulted with a knife. Robert's terrible experience at this institution was published in a national newspaper. In the article, he stated that he would like to transfer to the research site.

Unfortunately, Robert was not admitted to the research site as a transfer student for fall 2011 admission. When he did not get accepted, he really did not know what he was going to do in the fall. He knew he was not returning to his old institution and he was contemplating attending community college. In a serendipitous turn of events, the article Robert was featured in made its way to the Senior Dean of Students at the research site who followed up to see if the student was actually going to attend. Through this follow up it was learned that Robert was not admitted to the research site. The Dean had Robert's admission portfolio re-reviewed and although he was initially denied admission he was extended an offer of admission for fall 2011 after the second review. Robert said, "I was so happy and my family was so happy we were crying and yelling and so thrilled when we found out." In a way Robert said he is glad everything happened to him at his previous institution, "not in the sense that I love what happened to me, but because I know if it would have been any other of those gay students at school, they would not be alive today. I had a strong mentality and I could just take it, but not everyone is able to do that."

Since Robert was admitted as a transfer student and admitted late there was no on campus housing available for him. He learned about Rainbow Perspectives from an acquaintance in Delta Lambda Phi, the queer fraternity on campus. He met with the Director of Social Justice and LGBT Communities and was admitted to the program during the summer. Robert said, "I was a little apprehensive, but I was also super excited, because it was like, wait, there's going to

be a dorm where there's all gay people?" Robert was also just "grateful to have a roof over his head" as well because there is not typically enough housing for transfer students at the research site. Robert's family and friends all know he lives in the community and are incredibly supportive.

Robert's expectation of the program was that it would be a community within a community. "[Y]ou're at [the research site], in the LGBT community, and living in a house centralized around these issues. I just thought it would be a relaxed and free environment, almost like fluid and it is." Overall, Robert believed the program was a great experience. "You do not have to be gay or even identify under the spectrum to live here. There are so many allies in the building." Robert described the program as a great place to learn, "but not even learn like, book learn, just learn from other people's stories, where they've come from [.] [I]t's just a whole new experience besides the classroom experience. It's learning to live independently and also cohabitating with all these other people that might even be in the same position you are."

Robert felt that Rainbow Perspectives was a community, but there were no mandatory meetings and programs as he was under the impression there would be. He said the most frustrating aspect of the community was that "no one seems to take responsibility" for the program. Robert shares, "If they [administration] say there is going to be programs and a vibrant community they should ensure that happens." Each year Robert lived in Rainbow Perspectives he felt the program has gotten better in some ways (more students living in the community, better room and bathroom layout, more responsive Peer Mentors), but also each year the community got further disconnected as the semester progressed. Robert attributes this to the lack of intention in planning to create and sustain relationships and community in the program.

Robert's most memorable experience in the program during 2013-2014 was when many of the students took a tour of NYC and learned about important queer aspects of the city. Robert shared that it was great to see students interacting outside of Rainbow Perspectives and learning more about the queer community in NYC and the impact of queer leaders in the movement. In general, over the past three years he just remembered all of the people he has gotten to know that were able to, "come out and just really love themselves" while living in Rainbow Perspectives. Robert will never forget the impact the community has had on himself, but also others.

Through being a part of the program Robert has learned more about the gender identity and sexuality as a spectrum. Robert still feels strongly that he is, "gay and that is it." But he did not understand the fluidity of gender and sexuality before living in Rainbow Perspectives. He talked about now being familiar with the Kinsey scale, preferred gender pronouns, and just learning to be a more effective and knowledgeable advocate for the queer community by being more mindful. "Before I lived in Rainbow I really felt like 'queer' was a bad word, but now I understand how it can be more inclusive and empowering." Rainbow Perspectives really opened Robert's eyes to the diversity of the queer community. Robert, said, "I've really grown, from being that sad, silenced kid at [his previous institution], and now, being empowered and knowledgeable about queer social issues and political issues."

Robert would make the decision to live in Rainbow Perspectives again. Even though he was disappointed in the lack of cohesion in the community over the past few years. He cannot imagine living anywhere else. "I am very happy that I came here and I got to experience everything I did, because I would have *never* had an experience like this outside of Rainbow." Robert said he, "feels ready to take on the world" and looked forward to taking the experiences

he had in Rainbow Perspectives into the world beyond his undergraduate experience. Robert is not living in Rainbow Perspectives next year because he is graduating.

Sky

Sky was a sophomore transfer student from a small private university in Connecticut in the Fall 2013. She was a new student and new to living in Rainbow Perspectives. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year she lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. Sky self identified her gender as female, sexuality as butch lesbian, and as white. Sky talked at length about her gender identity. She identified as female during the study, but thinks transgender man might be closer to her gender expression. She shared that she, “is still figuring it all out”. She first learned about Rainbow Perspectives and programs like it after attending a queer focused college fair in Boston in 2011. She went with her parents to the college fair and they were impressed with the amount of resources at the research site for queer students. Sky has been out since she was 12 and struggled in junior high and high school to fit and feel comfortable. She experienced harassment regularly. Sky’s parents were very proactive in her college search because they wanted to show her that “it gets better.” They wanted her to see that if she could get through high school successfully there was a whole other world that was more accepting. Sky did not attend the research site because her high school grades did not allow her to gain admission so she attended a small private university in Connecticut. Sky described this institution as, “lacking queer community.” There was a queer student group on campus, but “it was a majority of straight allies.”

Sky transferred in fall 2013 to the research site and attended the queer focused student orientation, Community, during the summer. She had not signed up for on-campus housing before this time, but at the orientation she met several students living in Rainbow Perspectives.

Sky said, “once I saw faces of people that were in it [Rainbow Perspectives] and that I enjoyed their company I decided I wanted to be part of it.” Sky’s family and friends all know she lives in Rainbow Perspectives and they are supportive.

Sky describes Rainbow Perspectives as a queer friendly living space and has really enjoyed meeting different kinds of people. She said, “I have met people that identify along the lines of so many identities that I hadn’t even heard of - I love that exposure.” Sky believed she would not have had these types of experiences anywhere else. Also, the gender-neutral bathrooms are important to Sky. Many times people read her gender as male, so using public restrooms are a source of anxiety for her. In Rainbow Perspectives, she does not have to worry about this. In some ways Rainbow Perspectives has met her expectations, but she wished there was more community involvement and a stronger connection to the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities in Rainbow Perspectives. As a new transfer student she met some people in Rainbow Perspectives that she is friends with, but wishes people were more open to connecting. She thought living in a freshman residence hall may have been a better option for her socially because she perceives freshman as being more open to making friends and meeting new people. Although, she also understood that if it was important for her to be part of a queer friendly space a freshman residence hall would not have been the best option.

Sky’s favorite experience in the program was meeting her girlfriend that also lives in Rainbow Perspectives. Even though she does not have “a lot” of friends she has found a small group of people in Rainbow Perspectives in which she enjoys spending time. Sky said, “we just have a good time.”

Being a part of the program reinforced for Sky that, “people within the GLBT community are judgmental of what you identify as.” She felt pressure to go on hormones if she identified as

a transgender man. Sky said, “if you are not transitioning, you’re almost not really trans enough to identify as that.” This was an attitude she felt in the queer community before entering Rainbow Perspectives and she still feels those attitudes and beliefs inside Rainbow Perspectives. Although she believes Rainbow Perspectives is a queer friendly space it is not a utopia immune to the realities that exist in and outside of the queer community. Rainbow Perspectives made Sky feel the same way about her gender identity and sexuality as she did before she entered Rainbow – like she does not fit. Sky believed that although the Rainbow Perspectives program is important that it will never take away the complexity of her sexuality and gender identity. Sky said, “I realized that the GLBT stuff wasn't that big of a deal, and I will feel more comfortable wherever I am if I'm more comfortable with myself.”

Sky would not make the decision to live in Rainbow Perspectives as a new transfer student again. She wished she would have lived in a freshman residence hall and felt like she could have met more people in that environment and gotten more involved in the University community. Sky realized that she preferred hanging out with cisgendered straight men and it has been difficult making connections with these students while living in Rainbow Perspectives. Sky said, “it would be nice to go outside and throw and football around or something, but no one in Rainbow wants to do that.” Also, not only did she not have the same interests as many students living in Rainbow Perspectives the lack of community and activities overall was disappointing to her.

Sky hopes to transfer to a mid-sized public university in the same state for fall 2014. She would like to commute from home next semester and this change would mean her commute would be a short 20 minutes.

Soloman

Soloman was a sophomore in Fall 2013. He lived on campus as a freshman and started living in Rainbow Perspectives in fall 2013 as a sophomore. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year Soloman lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two semesters. Soloman self identified his gender as male, sexuality as bisexual, and as African American. He learned about Rainbow Perspectives through living in the Social Justice Living and Learning Community his freshman year at the research site. He chose that specific housing experience because even though it was not “an LGBT community” he thought there would be “open-minded people” that lived there. He was not out to his friends during his freshman year.

He learned about Rainbow Perspectives during his freshman year from a friend that lived there. It was not his plan to live in Rainbow Perspectives his sophomore year until he went through the housing lottery and did not get any of his preferences. At this point he was frustrated “and just wanted guaranteed housing.” Soloman knew that guaranteed housing would not ideally be the primary reason motivating him to live in Rainbow Perspectives, but for him this was integral to his decision. Soloman thought he would “feel safer [in Rainbow Perspectives] and it's easier to be out, because last year, I wasn't out.” He applied to the program directly through the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities and was accepted into the community. Soloman was not out to his family and never plans to be as he believes they would disown him due to their cultural and religious values. His mom has explicitly said she is “anti-gay” and he fears his family would discontinue his financial support if they knew he identified as bisexual. His family does not know he lives in Rainbow Perspectives, but most of his friends do know.

Soloman's expectation of the Rainbow Perspectives was that it would allow him to express his sexuality in a “safe environment.” He also thought living in Rainbow Perspectives would help him “learn more about LGBT issues in general.” In these ways Soloman's

expectations of the program have been met. He said, “I have learned more about trans issues specifically. I knew nothing before and now I even have trans friends.” The aspect of Rainbow Perspectives that has not met his expectations is the lack of connectedness of the students. Soloman said, “I thought it would be more like a family setting.” He describes the students being very divided and cliquy. Soloman attributes this in part to be about race. He describes the groups as being divided by “whites and non-whites” and says there is a clear lack of representation of people of color in the community.

Soloman’s most memorable experiences in Rainbow Perspectives were not just events or programs. He said, “I just liked the chance to talk with other gay guys about their lives and their experiences. I have never had that experience before.” He enjoyed talking with others about their future – what their families would look like, adoption, jobs, and where they would live. Soloman said he enjoyed taking the trip to New York, but it was the informal conversations that he will remember the most and had the most impact.

Through being a part of Rainbow Perspectives Soloman has become more self-assured in his sexuality.

I stopped questioning my sexuality. I stopped thinking about it as doing something wrong. I now know there are people with me. [K]nowing there are other black gay people make me think, maybe this is normal. I should know it’s normal, but I really didn’t know other gay black (straight acting) people before I lived in Rainbow Perspectives.

Soloman believes Rainbow Perspectives allowed him to truly be himself and this “relieved some stress and some burden” from him.

Soloman’s experience in Rainbow Perspectives was not perfect, but it did influence him. He felt strongly that a “normal residence hall is more united” than Rainbow Perspectives.

Soloman attributes the lack of unity to a lack of effort from the Peer Mentors. He felt the Peer

Mentors should have provided more specific programming and opportunities to connect for Rainbow Perspectives students. Soloman felt strongly that in the administration of the community there should be more of a focus on race as an intersecting identity that students are working to navigate. He felt the program ignored this element of his identity. To be part of making these changes he applied for the peer mentor position from the 2014-2015 academic year. He has many ideas that he felt will bring the community closer together. Even if he does not receive the peer mentor position he plans to live in Rainbow Perspectives during the 2014-2015 year.

Sophia

Sophia was a sophomore student in Fall 2013. She lived on campus freshman year at the research site in the Social Justice Living Learning Community. In the middle of the spring 2013 semester Sophia moved into Rainbow Perspectives due to an “emergency room change.” At the end of the 2013-2014 year Sophia lived in Rainbow Perspectives for two and a half semesters. Sophia’s self-identified gender in the first interview (fall 2013) was male, sexuality was gay and queer, and race was multiracial. During the second interview (spring 2014) Sophia self-identified as a transgender woman, queer, and multiracial.

Sophia became familiar with Rainbow Perspectives as a freshman while living in the Social Justice Living Learning Community and working in the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities, but did not become a resident until an emergency room change moved her into the community. Sophia’s roommate came home drunk late one night and verbally and physically assaulted her. Sophia knew her roommate was homophobic, but “he kind of kept it quiet.” After the assault happened Sophia was told she needed to move out because she filed the complaint. Sophia was placed in emergency housing in Rainbow Perspectives for the remainder

of the spring semester. Sophia did not spend any significant time in the community due to having friends in other buildings, but used it as a “safe place” to sleep. Sophia then decided to live in Rainbow Perspective during her sophomore year (2013-2014). Sophia and her good friend decided to live there together. Sophia’s parents and friends knew she lived in Rainbow and were supportive.

When Sophia moved into Rainbow Perspectives in Spring 2013 she did not make attempt to be part of the community. Sophia moved in at midnight on a Friday with no help from anyone and the only person that introduced themselves to her was the Peer Mentor. Sophia saw there were already established friend groups and had no interest in trying to break into these.

When Sophia moved into the community in fall 2013 she was excited to meet new people and invest in the community. Sophia explained the feeling at the beginning of the semester in Rainbow Perspectives was, “we’re so privileged to have this community let’s all be one happy family,” but this attitude toward the community did not continue. Sophia credits this deterioration of community to “stereotypical queer drama.” The drama typically, “revolves around sex, queer politics, and views on social justice.” Even though the community was not everything she had hoped for Sophia felt safe in the community and really valued things like, “walking around the hallway in my heels and no one batting an eye.” Sophia grew tired of “stupid drama” during the fall semester and thought it was important for people to understand, “just because people are queer doesn’t make us all like each other[.] It is only one aspect; it does not define us in everything. Within the queer community there’s diversity in politics, views, and interpretation.” When asked in the fall semester if she would make the decision to live in Rainbow Perspectives again she said no, but in the spring semester Sophia was more positive about her experiences and perceptions of the program.

Sophia said, “It’s like we all lowered our expectations a bit or maybe we became more realistic.” Sophia enjoyed her time in Rainbow much more during the spring semester. Also, Sophia came out as transgender in the spring semester and said, “Rainbow was the perfect place to come out.” Sophia said coming out as trans to students in the community was empowering and very positive. All the students were congratulating her and very supportive. She also appreciated the gender-neutral bathrooms in Rainbow Perspectives more than she did during the first semester.

Sophia’s favorite experience in the program was attending a party in the spring with Rainbow Perspectives students for the first time as “Sophia.” She went to the party with people she did not typically hang out with, but had a great time. They had fun at the party and she enjoyed being introduced to everyone as Sophia for the first time. After the party they went and got food. Sophia said, “we have started connecting more now that I have come out.”

Sophia learned a great deal in relation to her gender identity and sexuality while in Rainbow Perspectives. Sophia shared that living in the community, “helped me express myself in a different way.” During the fall semester, Sophia was exploring wearing make-up and wearing high heels. She was doing this exploring through the support of Rainbow Perspectives students. “One person helped me learn how to do make-up and another helped me learn how to walk in heels. These little things really impacted my life greatly.” Also in the fall semester she learned she was attracted to “both cisgendered men and people on the trans spectrum.” This made Sophia realize she identified her sexuality as not just gay but also queer. Sophia said, “I am just being exposed to more and accepting more about myself.” Sophia said, “I feel a lot more at peace with myself [...] I still don’t have everything figured out, obviously, and I don’t think anybody has all the answers.” Even though there is uncertainty Sophia has also found peace.

Sophia is not living in Rainbow next semester because she wants to have the experience of living in an apartment by herself, but she valued the time she spent in the community and believed Rainbow Perspectives was an important program for the queer community on campus. She will take her newfound peace and friendships with her and cherish the time she had in Rainbow Perspectives.

The next chapter presents an analysis of the perceptions and experiences of students in the special interest housing community, perceptions of students' own sexuality or gender identity influenced by experiences or elements of the Rainbow Perspectives program, and implications for institutions and student affairs professionals to improve practices that support queer undergraduate students. The 13 profiles (or cases) have been presented individually in this chapter. In the next chapter, a cross – case analysis is presented using the three research questions and the literature reviewed in chapter two as an organizing framework. The intention is to construct general explanations that fit the individual cases (Merriam, 2009).

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A review of literature highlighted six key areas of research informing the environmental realities, guiding theory, and creation and administration of queer special interest housing communities: (1) university community and campus climate (Boyer, 1990; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, Weber, Blumfield & Frazier, 2010), (2) LGB identity development models utilized in higher education (Cass 1979, 1984; D'Augelli 1994), (3) a life span approach as an analytic tool (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Love et al., 2005), (4) queer theory as an analytic tool (Abes 2009, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Butler, 1990; Derrida 1967/1978; Foucault 1976/1978; Dilley 2002), (5) queer student experiences living in college residence halls (Evans & Broido, 1999, 2002), and (6) special interest housing for LGBT students (Herbst & Malaney, 1999). The review of literature revealed a need for deeper analysis of the lived experiences of undergraduate college students living in a queer focused special interest housing community in order to generate implications for practices to support queer students on college campuses. This study's findings are presented in three sections aligning with each research question. This chapter provides findings to respond to each research question while suggesting congruence, dissonance, and gaps in the knowledge base presented in the literature review in Chapter two.

Research Question One: How do Rainbow Perspective students perceive and experience the special interest housing program?

The first research question will be treated in three sections - motivation to enroll in the program, participant descriptions of the program, and participant experiences in the program. By analyzing and presenting findings in these three areas, student perceptions and experiences can

be viewed from multiple perspectives to provide rich student descriptions of the Rainbow Perspectives Program.

Motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives.

Participants' motivation to enroll and experience of the program was informed by their prior perceptions of the program. Table 3 summarizes the motivating factors students reported for enrolling in the Rainbow Perspectives.

Table 3

Motivating Factors Influencing Rainbow Perspectives Enrollment

Motivating Factor	Number of Participants Reporting Motivation
Wanted to live in an environment supportive or affirming of queer identity	14
Experienced negative perception of queer identity previously on a college campus or at home (e.g. experienced physical violence and/or microaggression due to queer identity, no longer welcome in family home)	5
Less than ideal experiences in traditional residence hall as a freshman student (e.g. loud, lack of community, party behavior)	4
Wanted to meet other queer people/learn about or be a part of the queer community/live with like-minded people	4
Did not secure housing during lottery process/did not have friends to live with	3
Perceived, but did not personally experience negative perception of queer identity on a college campus	3
Take advantage of a resource offered by the University	2
Wanted to live with students of a different gender that is prohibited or made difficult by University housing policy	2
Ability to receive housing as a transfer student	2
Accessibility of gender neutral bathrooms to avoid negative perception of queer identity that comes with using single sex bathrooms	1

NOTE. Most participants noted multiple factors influencing their motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. The researcher did not designate a primary reason for each student. All motivating factors are included on the table, not one per participant.

While there is a wide range of motivating factors, the evidence demonstrates that all participants were attracted to Rainbow Perspectives because they perceived the program would be supportive or affirming of queer identity signaling the importance of this reality. A majority of participants in this study also reported having experienced or perceived negative perceptions of queer identity to be a motivating factor influencing their decision to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. This evidence is consistent with Rankin (2003) and Rankin, et al., (2010) findings presented in the Chapter two that helped construct a picture of a sometimes-hostile campus climate faced by queer college students. This at times unwelcoming climate stemmed from queer students experiencing harassment, fearing for their physical safety, and concealing their queer identity to avoid these and other actualities faced by queer students. These are some of the same and most frequent factors participants in this study reported as motivating them to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives providing deeper insight into the lived experiences of queer college students.

Beyond the importance of the number of participants who experienced or perceived negative perceptions of queer identity qualitative research allows closer examination of the meaning of these experiences in the lives of the participants. For example, Delouise describes the reality of experiencing microaggressions from their freshman roommate and fellow residents in a traditional freshman residence hall. “I am very queer, my expression is not heteronormative [...] it was very strange trying to be myself and living among people who really didn’t get it at all.” Delouise did not face any physical aggression from their roommate, but rather consistent microaggressions and was not “comfortable” in the space. Delouise’s roommate would say things like, “Are you putting on make-up?” When Delouise would say ‘yes’ the roommate would never say anything back, but Delouise could “obviously tell he had a problem with it, but

was not saying it out loud.” When Delouise would wear a dress, students on the floor would say things like, “What the fuck” under their breath as they passed in the hall. It is experiences like these that influenced Delouise’s motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives to avoid negative reactions toward their queer identity in the future.

Several other participants report being victims of physical violence on a college campus due their sexuality or gender identity influencing their motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. One of these same participants also reported no longer being welcome to live with their family as a factor that influenced their motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. Some participants were motivated to live in Rainbow Perspectives because they perceived, but did not personally experience negative perceptions of their queer identity on a college campus. Again, this evidence is consistent with the research literature presented in Chapter two.

Evans and Broido’s, (1999) findings identify coming out to a roommate to be an area of particular challenge for queer students due to feelings of vulnerability about how the roommate will react and possible negative repercussions. Evidence from this study portrays similar participant feelings. For example, Alex describes potentially coming out to a roommate as influencing her motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. “The biggest thing I was worried about [being a new student at the research site] was living in a dorm. This is a state school, so there are a lot of different types of people here and I had heard bad stories [...] I was like, you know what? I don’t even want to allow myself to be in that situation.” Alex describes living in Rainbow Perspectives as a preventative step against being in a situation where she may experience negative perceptions of queer identity from a roommate. Benjamin describes a similar experience, “I had anxiety thinking about, what if my roommate is homophobic.”

Moving beyond taking preventative steps due to trepidation about roommate perceptions of queer identity, Sky describes the politics and necessity of having access to gender-neutral bathrooms as a motivating factor to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. Sky tries to avoid single sex assigned bathrooms on campus altogether to escape any “wide-eyed looks when I walk into a bathroom.” She was motivated to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives to always have gender-neutral bathrooms at her disposal in her residence hall to avoid single sex bathroom anxiety. She even describes not drinking liquids in class so she doesn’t have to use single sex bathrooms in academic buildings at all.

When discussing campus housing and residence halls as a significant element of the campus experience, Schroder and Mabel (1994) contend that residence halls as a tool, have the capacity to be an important part of the education experience and help students make meaningful connections between in class learning and living reality. This may in fact be the case, but evidence from this study demonstrates that the mainstream campus residence hall experience is not working for all students, specifically students that would be attracted to living in a queer focused special interest living community. For example, several participants explained they had less than ideal experiences in traditional residence halls as freshman students and their experience in a tradition freshman residence hall influenced their motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives because they were looking for another type of experience. Nora explained living in a traditional residence hall her freshman year.

It was actually kind of a party dorm. People weren't always very nice. I tried to be nice to people, but I mean, you know, freshman year is a year for testing the waters, I guess, and I feel like everybody was just trying to see what they could get away with. You know, there is no sense of unity or anything. Rainbow Perspectives seemed like something that I wanted to do, because it was a community, first off--- so, something that was different from what I was experiencing in the freshman dorm.

Bill described a similar experience, “in my freshman dorm, no one was really friends with each other; everyone just did their own thing. Also, it was just gross sometimes. There was vomit in the halls from people drinking too much.” Although residence halls maybe a potential educational tool, 31% of the students in this study reported living in traditional residence halls as less than ideal experiences and a motivating factor for enrolling in Rainbow Perspectives. The evidence may not diminish the potential for residence halls as an important tool for expanding classroom walls, but it clear shows there is work to be done for this to be a reality for all students.

As some participants’ previous experiences in residence halls influenced their decision to seek out different on campus living options, it was the potential of the Rainbow Perspectives program that also influenced some students’ motivation to enroll in the program. Some participants, wanted to meet other queer students, learn about or be a part of the queer community, and/or live with like-minded people. Ben describes his motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives, “I honestly did not know any other gay people or any queer people of any category and I wanted to throw myself into the culture and community.” Bill shared that he thought living in Rainbow Perspectives would be, “an opportunity to live in a community with like-minded people.” The evidence shows students are looking for queer friendly communities on campus to help them learn about themselves and others.

A majority of participants reported more administrative considerations influenced their motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. These considerations include, not secure housing during the lottery process, not having friends to live with, wanting to live with a friend of a different gender that is prohibited or made difficult by housing policy, being savvy enough to know their ability to receive housing as a transfer student was not guaranteed and Rainbow

Perspectives would secure them a housing assignment, and the desire to take advantage of a resource offered by the University. The two participants that were motivated to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives to utilize this campus resource provided by the University described their rationale. Nora said,

I feel like we're taking a step in the right direction in the world and that the University definitely needed something like this [Rainbow Perspectives] and I figured, if more people signed up for it, it would be something that would happen instead of, you know, something that would be put on the back burner. The higher the numbers, the more likely it is to stay for people who need this sort of living situation.

Alex also shared, “They [The University] made a point to try [by creating Rainbow Perspectives], so I thought I should live there.” The two students report their motivation being influenced by the concept that this program is somehow a step forward or effort being put forth by the University in support of queer students so why not take advantage of this resource. But this also suggests students may be fearful that if the resource is not utilized the University could cease new efforts to support queer students because it would show there is not a need.

Overall, there were a range of factors that participants reported influencing their motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives, but all participants reported being motivated to enroll in the community to live in an environment supportive or affirming of queer identity signifying the importance of queer friendly spaces in the student experience. Furthermore, evidence from this study aligns with Rankin (2003) and Rankin, et al., (2010) findings that depict a sometimes-hostile campus climate for queer college students. Participants reported realities such as harassment, fearing for physical safety, and concealing queer identity to avoid these realities on campus. Participants also reported navigating roommate relationships and coming

out to a roommate as an area of specific motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives. This evidence is congruent with Evans & Broido's, (1999) findings that identify coming out to a roommate to be an area of particular challenge and anxiety for students.

Although, there is significant alignment between the evidence from this study and research literature on this topic there is also divergence. Schroder and Mabel (1994) assert that residence halls can complement and enhance the college academic experience, yet, evidence from this study shows the campus residential experience also has the potential to negatively impact student experience in ways that may detract from a positive and productive educational experience and that the current residential experience is not working for some students, specifically students that would be attracted to a queer focused living community.

Findings from this study that were not represented in the research literature include the significance of administrative realities that influenced participants' motivations to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives - campus housing lottery processes, availability of gender neutral bathrooms, university policies not allowing roommates of different genders, and the availability of campus housing for transfer students. These administrative realities may be exacerbated when students are also balancing their desire to secure housing that they perceive as supportive or affirming of queer identity. Additionally, not previously represented in the research literature was how students interpreted the University's motivation to provide the Rainbow Perspectives as a resource. If the community did not fill would the University have discontinued this program? The evidence indicates that students are mindful of the position and resources the University dedicates to supporting queer students. Through examining participants' motivation to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives important connections can be made to practices that support queer students on campus in and out of residence halls.

Participant Descriptions of Rainbow Perspectives.

To further respond to the first research question, how do Rainbow Perspective students perceive and experience the special interest housing program, participants were asked to describe Rainbow Perspectives in their own words in the fall and spring semesters during individual interviews. There were two dominant areas of description of the program that were conveyed by participants consistently through the spring and fall. Table 4 represents frequent words and statements used by participants to describe the Rainbow Perspectives.

Table 4

Participants Descriptions of Rainbow Perspectives Program

Dominant Description	Frequent Words and Statements Used by Participates to Describe Program	Number of Participants Reporting Description
Safe and accepting community	Like a family, shared understanding, care for one another, support for one another, accepting, open, loving, judgment free, safe, welcoming, where you can be yourself, relaxed, free environment, a place to learn, community, queer friendly living space	12
Lacking community	Not connected, cliquey, lack of unity, small fortified groups, dramatic, drama filled, lack of understanding around race	12
Unsafe	Not longer feeling safe or accepted	1 (only noted in the fall semester)

NOTE: The table includes participant descriptions from the fall and spring semesters.

All of the participants (13 out of 13) described Rainbow Perspectives as safe and accepting in the fall semester. In the spring semester 92 % of participants (12 out of 13) participants described Rainbow Perspectives as safe and accepting, while 92 % (12 out of 13)

also reported a lack of community within the program in the fall and spring semester. This is of particular note since it might be assumed that a living environment cannot be overwhelming reported as safe and accepting without having a strong community resolve. Boyer's (1990) six principles of community discussed in Chapter two, include some of these same ideas, shared learning, open and just environment, acceptance, and caring and support of others. Yet, even with these principles present in Rainbow Perspectives the participants report that the program still lacks community.

For example, Lenore described Rainbow Perspectives as a "judgment free zone" and a place she can breathe more easily and feel safe to be herself. Yet, as she continued she described Rainbow Perspectives as, "lacking community and wishing more people were friends or connected in someway." David reported a similar sentiment.

It's queer-friendly [...] a safe space. [...] I found it to be a very loving community and I know there are people like me who wouldn't want to be anywhere else. They need this space, and if they had to live somewhere else on campus, it would really make their experience uncomfortable. [...] I do feel like there's some people who get caught up in drama that happens, [...] people hook up with each other, and then they don't talk to each other after, and then it creates cliques and people badmouth each other. But none of that really matters. We are a community.

Delouise described Rainbow perspectives as a place where they, "just feel freed. [...] we all have mutual respect for one another and have fun together." Yet, Delouise also reports, "a racial dynamic and lack of understanding around race as related to gender and sexuality" within the community.

These descriptions of Rainbow Perspectives suggest the complexity of community such as Rainbow Perspectives. There was a shared perception and experience that all participants felt safe and accepted in some way, but there were also realities that took away from the overall community although not completely damaging the safe and accepting environment. These

findings align with Herbst and Malaney's (1999) findings that describe participants in the 2-in-20 program feeling safe on the residence hall floor, but also being disappointed in the lack of community on the residence hall floor. Evidence from this research study that was not conveyed through Herbst and Malaney's (1999) findings was the existence of a racial dynamic and lack of understanding around race as related to gender and sexuality in Rainbow Perspectives. This is an important difference and demonstrates the complexity of human identity and intersecting identities. The descriptions that participants shared in this study will be analyzed more pointedly and in depth to inform the third research question, how can institutions and student affairs professionals improve practices that support queer students based on this research based evidence.

Participant Experiences of Rainbow Perspectives.

To understand how Rainbow Perspective students perceive and experience the special interest housing program, participants were asked to discuss their most memorable experiences in Rainbow Perspectives during the fall and spring semesters during individual interviews. Although participants were only asked the question in fall 2013 and spring 2014 in this study, participants that had been living in the Rainbow Perspectives program for additional semesters were asked to reflect on their entire time in the program. This question was asked in several different ways (e.g. replacing the word "memorable" with meaningful, valuable, and/or important) to provide each participant with the space to talk about what stood out to them about their experiences. Participants had the flexibility to discuss as many experiences as they wished; they were not limited to one. Table 5 presents participant experiences in Rainbow Perspectives that they felt like they were important enough to share.

Table 5

Participant Experiences in Rainbow Perspectives

Experience Participant Described as Memorable	Number of Participants Reporting Experience
Meeting close/best friends	13
Authentic dialog and space sharing (e.g. being with others, having conversations about gender, sexuality, and “real life”)	8
Drama/breakdowns in community	4
Gender play (e.g. dressing up, drag)	4
Meeting queer people of color	2
Coming out as transgender	2
Queer history tour in NYC (i.e. event administered by Rainbow Perspectives Program)	2

NOTE. Some participants noted multiple memorable experiences in Rainbow Perspectives. The researcher did not designate a primary experience. All memorable experiences are included on the table, not one per participant.

All participants described making close friends as what stood out to them when considering their experiences in the Rainbow Perspectives program. Lenore shared, “I’ve never had as close friends as I’ve met in Rainbow.” Bill shared a similar sentiment.

The friends are the most memorable. I would have never met them if I hadn’t lived here. Our paths would have never met, but because we lived in Rainbow it was a catalyst to being friends. Even if I did meet these people, not living here, it wouldn’t have been as easy to just walk across the hall to go hang out like it is here.

A majority of students also reported they wished they had made more friends, but the friends they did make they considered close or best friends.

A majority of participants reported simply being with others and having conversations about gender, sexuality, and “real life” with other students in Rainbow Perspectives to be memorable experiences. For example, Benjamin reported his most memorable experience was

during the first two weeks of school when “all of us would pile into my friends room, we brought mattresses in from different rooms, and would watch TV and movies and of course talk about things that I have never talked about before.” Nora’s favorite experiences in the program were “just speaking with people.” Nora said, “I tend to have better conversations with my neighbors [in Rainbow Perspectives] than I have with people in my classes. We seem like we are totally different pages.” Soloman similarly said,

I just liked the chance to talk with other gay guys about their lives and their experiences. I have never had that experience before [...] It was so interesting, talking about our future, having kids, adopting kids - I think that would be more memorable than the New York trip, actually just having that dialogue.

Although these experiences are not related to a specific events carefully choreographed by University staff members or an office, the majority of Rainbow Perspectives participants found it important to have the ability to have authentic conversation and be in a space where this was encouraged. These findings may speak to the potential of college residence halls that Schroder & Mabel (1994) assert, but these same conversations that led participants to feel empowered and engaged in the community were tempered when the conversations and relationships led to break downs in the community or as the participants in this study labeled it, “drama.”

Several participants talked about the rise and fall of relationships (sexual and otherwise) and difference of opinions to be important in Rainbow Perspectives because it impacted the experiences of participants. Sophia defined, “stereotypical queer drama” as typically having to do with, “sex, queer politics, and views on social justice.” This could be students dating, no longer dating, having sex, no longer having sex, or just having different opinions in which someone agrees or does not agree. Sophia grew tired of “stupid drama” during the fall semester and this made for negative experiences. Lenore describes student staff (Peer Mentors) getting involved in the drama and this having negative implications on some of her experiences in

Rainbow Perspectives. Lenore said, “I wish I felt more comfortable talking with them [Peer Mentors]. I have found support on campus, but not through them. It is hard when you know they have said mean things about people or know who they are friends with and who they are not.”

Evidence shows that the same comfort that led to authentic conversation and dialog may also lead to “drama.” David describes a specific experience that was his most memorable experience in Rainbow Perspectives. David had grown close with another Rainbow Perspectives resident and they were confiding in each other about many personal things and David shared that they had suicidal thoughts. David thought the friend would keep the information shared in confidence, but the student was worried about David and brought the information to a University staff member that moved the incident up the leadership chain. This led to a series of events that made David no longer feel safe in the community. Although, all participants reported having close friendships with other students in Rainbow Perspectives and a majority reported being with others and having authentic dialog with other Rainbow Perspective students as important experiences these did not come without participants reporting negative experiences when these conversations or relationships ended undesirably.

Study participants also reported positive experiences resulting from friendships and conversations. A handful of participants reported gender play (e.g. dressing up, drag) as a memorable experience. Sophia shared some of her most memorable experiences were in the fall semester when she was exploring wearing make-up and high heels. “One person helped me learn how to do make-up and another helped me learn how to walk in heels.” Having this experience with fellow Rainbow Perspectives students normalized gender play for Sophia. It helped her realize it was “fun and normal,” nothing she needed to hide. David shared one of his most

memorable experiences was going to *Rocky Horror* and dressing up. David felt empowered by, “seeing fellow residents embrace all aspects of their gender identity through drag.”

Gender play was reported as a memorable experience that allowed some Rainbow Perspective students to explore their gender identity, but other participants reported meeting queer people of color as a memorable experience. Soloman said, “[K]nowing there are other black gay people made me think, maybe this is normal. I should know it’s normal, but I really didn’t know other gay black (straight acting) people before I lived in Rainbow Perspectives.” This evidence demonstrates that queer students have other intersecting identities. Queer people are not only queer but have other salient and non-salient identities that make up who they are and what they value. Much of the theoretical framework that student affairs professions draw from to support queer students on college campuses (Cass, 1979, 1984; D’Augelli, 1994) ignores identities such as race, ethnicity, or culture through being rooted in Eurocentric concepts that ignore non-western concepts. This evidence suggests the need to ensure the complexity of human identity is considered in educational practice and theoretical frameworks.

Several participants reported coming out as transgender to be a meaningful experience in the Rainbow Perspectives. Both Sophia and Harry reported coming out in the spring semester as transgender to be a memorable experience in Rainbow Perspectives. Sophia said, “Rainbow was the perfect place to come out.” Not only were fellow Rainbow Perspectives students supportive, but the gender-neutral bathroom as make her feel more at ease. This is important evidence because Evans & Broido’s, (1999) findings that identify coming out to a roommate to be an area of particular challenge and anxiety for students.

Lastly, several participants reported the queer history tour in NYC to be a memorable experience. This was one of the only programs participants noted as being planned and executed

by Rainbow Perspectives staff for Rainbow Perspectives students exclusively yet only two students thought this was memorable enough to mention.

The reported experiences of participants were largely positive and most students reported meeting close friends and having authentic conversations as memorable experiences in the program. This evidence indicates the value of special interest housing communities as a potential tool to support queer students, but there are also other important considerations. Participants also noted drama/break down in community, gender play, meeting queer people of color, coming out, and the queer history tour in NYC as memorable experiences in Rainbow Perspectives.

The evidence from this study is significant because it only the second data set of the experiences and perceptions of students living in a queer focused living community. Herbst and Malaney's (1999) research largely focused on student satisfaction in their experience living in a queer focused living community and lacked in depth descriptions of student experiences. This research study moves towards a deeper understanding of how students perceive and experience a queer focused special interest housing community and signifies the importance of employing theoretical frameworks that recognize intersecting identities of queer students.

Research Question Two: How have perceptions of students' own sexuality or gender identity been influenced by experiences or elements of the Rainbow Perspectives program.

To inform research question two, participants were asked in the fall and spring semesters how living in Rainbow Perspectives influenced perceptions of their own sexuality and gender identity. Students that lived in Rainbow Perspectives for more semesters than fall 2013 and spring 2014 were asked to reflect on their entire time in the community. Responses were not broken down by semesters enrolled in Rainbow Perspectives or identity groups because there

was no significance or themes when this cross analysis was completed. Table 6 represents themes that arose when students were asked to engage in this area of discussion.

Table 6

Influence of Rainbow Perspectives Program on Participants' Perceptions of own Sexuality or Gender Identity

Participants Perceptions of Own Sexuality After Living in Rainbow Perspectives	Number of Participants Reporting Perception
More confident	12
Queer identity perceived as more fluid	8
Better understanding of self in queer community	6
Queer vocabulary to reflect on their own identity and others	5
Reinforced current perception	1

NOTE. Some participants noted multiple ways their perception of their own sexuality or gender identity were influenced by participation in Rainbow Perspectives. The researcher did not designate a primary perception. All perceptions are included on the table, not one per participant.

All participants reported that Rainbow Perspectives had some type of influence on how they perceived their sexuality or gender identity. Most participants reported they were in some way more confident related to their sexuality or gender identity due to their participation in Rainbow Perspectives. For example, Benjamin said, "I am now very open talking about these things [being queer] that I was kind of ashamed to talk about before [...]. I am more comfortable with myself and I can approach people without having any worries." Bill shared because of Rainbow Perspectives he was more comfortable with his sexuality and feels more confident talking about queer issues. As a straight cisgendered man, Bill said living in Rainbow has made him reflect on his own gender and sexuality "more than any other straight person. You would have to be dead not to reflect on your sexuality and gender identity and live here." Through being a part of the program Chase said he was "a lot more comfortable with it [his sexuality]." Chase did not fully

accept himself until he lived in Rainbow Perspectives and “it makes me more comfortable with who I am, having other people that are also queer in my life.” Chase thinks that living in Rainbow has made him more accepting of his, “strengths, flaws, and just becoming comfortable in my own skin.” Lenore similarly shared that at the beginning of the semester she was afraid to talk about her sexuality, but as the year progressed and the more conversations she had, “its just helped me become okay with it within myself.” Soloman reported through being a part of Rainbow Perspectives he has become more self-assured in his sexuality, “I stopped questioning my sexuality. I stopped thinking about it as doing something wrong. I now know there are people with me.” Sophia said, “I am just being exposed to more and accepting more about myself. [...] I feel a lot more at peace with myself [...] I still don’t have everything figured out, obviously, and I don’t think anybody as all the answers.”

One participant shared that her perception of her sexuality and gender identity was not made more confident, but reinforced by her participation in Rainbow Perspectives. Sky said,

I do not fit. I am not really interested in taking hormones so I am not trans enough to say I am transgender, but I do not really identify with being a woman [...]. Yes, Rainbow is accepting and I like it here, but there is still pressure and bias within the GLBT community so this does not change how I feel about myself. I realized GLBT stuff wasn’t that big of a deal, and I will feel more comfortable wherever I am if I’m more comfortable with myself. [...] Rainbow cannot do that for me.

Sky did not report that Rainbow Perspectives made her more confident or comfortable, but that she was more secure in what she already knew which was that the queer community is not perfect and has issues within the community.

A majority of participants reported perceiving queer identity as more fluid through living in Rainbow perspectives. Alex said, “I always hated people who were like, ‘I don’t like labels’ because I do like labels. Being in Rainbow has taught me that you don’t need to be so like, concrete and hard on yourself about it. It just is what it is.” Bill shared similarly that through his

participation in Rainbow Perspectives he “met so many people and seen so many things that don’t fit into neat categories.” Rainbow Perspectives influenced David’s perceptions of gender identity by making it more acceptable to see gender as fluid. “It has helped me embrace the feminine aspects of my identity, even though I wanted to, I felt it would compromise my identity.” In the past, David felt if he presented with any femininity they, “would not be seen as a guy anymore. Now I realize Rainbow Perspectives has played a role in me moving so far past that and realizing it just doesn’t matter. Now I wear eyeliner a lot and I started bringing from home some of my old girl wardrobe.” Delouise also shared, “I have learned that my gender is more fluid than I had thought before, not even more fluid, just different than I thought it was.” Chase said it broadened his perspective. He now sees sexuality as, “just a big fluid thing.”

This evidence is particularly noteworthy for several reasons. First, there is no other study that presents participants descriptions of how a queer focused special interest housing community influenced how they felt about their gender identity and sexuality. Second, when considering the developmental theories that student affairs administrator’s employ to support queer students on campuses across the nation it is clear that flexibility and fluidity are essential. Cass (1979,1984) provides little flexibility in the “six-stage identity development model” for fluidity in sexuality and ignores gender identity. D’Augelli’s (1994) lifespan approach to LGB identity development does account for some fluidity through an interactive development process, but provides a limited set of language to describe and inform this process and does not account for the tensions (individual and community) within the development process. Queer theory provides focused attention on the power and significance of language so individuals are able to authentically tell their story.

Almost half of participants reported a better understanding of the queer community through living in Rainbow perspectives. Bill thinks living in Rainbow has made him a better and more informed, “ally”. He feels more comfortable speaking up against heterosexism and homophobia because of his own self-reflection and experiences in the program. “It has been eye-opening learning about so many different types of people.” Robert said, “I’ve really grown, from being that sad, silenced kid at [his previous institution], and now, being empowered and knowledgeable about queer social issues and political issues. I feel like I will be a better advocate for the community because I am more knowledgeable”

Again about half of participants reported being more aware of queer terminology through living in Rainbow perspectives. Alex now identifies her sexuality as queer because the term lesbian no longer made sense as she is emotionally and physically attracted to a person that does not identify as a woman. Being part of Rainbow Perspectives has expanded how she thinks about gender identity and sexuality, but also the words she uses to describe her own identity. Robert said, “before I lived in Rainbow I really felt like ‘queer’ was a bad word, but now I understand how it can be more inclusive and empowering.” Rainbow Perspectives really opened Robert’s eyes to the diversity of the queer community. Again, these findings show the significance of language and the importance of institutions embracing and utilizing language that allows students to share their authentic experiences.

Overall, evidence from this study, unlike any other study found in the research literature, suggests that Rainbow Perspectives has influenced participants’ perceptions of their own sexuality or gender identity by building their confidence, allowing a space to perceive queer identity as more fluid than before, better understanding the queer community and their place in it, providing vocabulary to more authentically represent who they are and the queer community,

and reinforcing current perceptions. This suggests the potential of special interest housing communities as a mechanism to support queer students on campus and provide affirming spaces. Evidence from this study also highlights the power and significance of language and terminology when discussing and showing support for queer identity. Furthermore, evidence suggests that employing theory that acknowledges and allows space for fluidity within identity is important. These are important considerations when seeking to improve practices to support queer students on college campuses.

Question Three: How can institutions and student affairs professionals improve practices that support queer undergraduate students based on this research-based evidence?

There was not only one specific question or line of questioning that students were asked to consider and respond to that completely addressed the breadth of this research question. Findings informing research question three are presented through two areas of analysis. First, findings related more generally to student affairs professional practices to support queer students on a campus at large and second, professional practice related to creating and administering queer special interest housing communities. These two sections unavoidably overlap, as practice at large must inform specific program creation, implementation, and continued administration. Evidence from this study provides a specific picture of a queer focused special interest housing community, but it also begins to examine the context in which programs such as these are created from the onset. This is useful when informing the topic of practice.

Practices to Improve Support of Queer Students Campus Wide.

Boyers's (1990) principles suggests a college campus *should* be - purposeful, open, just, accepting, caring, and celebrative. Renn and Patton (2010) definition of campus climate as, "the

overall ethos or atmosphere of a college campus mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, and engagement within the environment and value as members of the community” (p. 248). Findings indicate that perceptions related to gender identity and sexuality on a college campus at large must be a focus area for practitioners when supporting queer students. All participants in the study reported they wanted to live in Rainbow Perspectives because they were attracted to living in a space that was supportive or affirming of their queer identity and the majority of participants specifically note they were motivated to live in Rainbow Perspectives due to experienced or perceived negative perceptions of queer identity on a college campus. Evidence from this study indicates that queer students are not experiencing the college campus community in a way that meets Boyer’s principles of community, but more realistically align with Rankin’s (2003) research that describes the chilly campus climate that queer students face nationally. These findings signify the need for practitioners to examine and respond to the overall “ethos” of a campus to fully support queer students.

Small queer support programs such as Rainbow Perspectives (40 students or less) are one strategy to support a small number of queer students, but larger efforts must be considered to address the overarching issues of campus community and climate. Evidence from this study provided insight how students experienced campus climate. All participants disclosed that they met their closest or best friends through Rainbow Perspectives. Bill said, “I would have never met them [best friends] if I hadn’t lived here [Rainbow Perspectives]. Our paths would have never met, but because we lived in Rainbow it was a catalyst to being friends.” It is significant that Rainbow Perspectives is a strong mechanism to connect students and allow them to build relationships, but looking beyond the 40 students living in Rainbow Perspectives what is the “catalyst” for student connection and relationships with others outside of a queer focused special

interest community? Nora shared, “I tend to have better conversations with my neighbors [in Rainbow Perspectives] than I have with people in my classes. We seem like we are totally different pages.” Practitioners must be mindful of where connection points for students are within the entire college or university. It was affirming to learn Rainbow Perspectives participants felt they created strong relationships, but practitioners must work to ensure “catalysts” are accessible to all students. This includes curricular and co-curricular realms.

Furthermore, a majority of participants shared that having authentic dialog and sharing space was a memorable experience living in Rainbow Perspectives. Examples shared included, having conversations about gender, sexuality, and “real life” and just being with others. This finding demonstrated the significance of queer spaces (physical and intellectual) that allow for open discussions of queerness. The findings demonstrated these discussions and spaces existed in the Rainbow Perspectives program, but do these spaces exist outside of Rainbow Perspectives? These findings indicate that queer friendly should and must exist as students find them significant. Practitioners should examine and consider what queer spaces (physical and intellectual) currently exist on campus and how to broaden these beyond queer labeled spaces.

Moreover, when considering queer space it is important to consider language and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that allow for and encourage queer spaces. The majority of participants report Rainbow Perspectives influenced perceptions of their own sexuality or gender identity by being more confident and perceiving queer identity as more fluid. About half of participants noted a better understanding of self in queer community and several reported having more knowledge of queer terminology through participation in Rainbow. These findings highlight the importance for practitioners to utilize theoretical frameworks to inform and support their work and thus students that allow for this fluidity and move beyond or at least acknowledge

and make accommodations for the limitations of LGB development stage (Cass, 1979,1984) and LGB life space development models (D'Augelli, 1994). To provide queer spaces students must be able to authentically convey and describe their humanness. This evidence aligns with Renn's (2010) call to researchers to move beyond psychological and sociological studies of LGB development and incorporate queer theory as a meaningful framework that supports more contextual and less categorical study, exploration, and discovery related to queer students.

Another finding that was significant when considering, how to better support queer students campus wide, was the frequency in which participants referenced psychological health challenges throughout the study. A majority of participants disclosed they were dealing with, had dealt with, or had experienced others in Rainbow Perspectives working through psychological challenges, (e.g. depression, gender dysphoria, etc.). Alex shared, "There are people living here [in Rainbow Perspectives] that have dealt with things that not everyone our age deals with. Not everyone at 19 or 20 has dealt with self-harm, suicidal ideations, depression, eating disorders, making decisions to start hormones or having surgeries." Alex went on to state her disappointment and frustration with the lack of attention paid to psychological health and support provided to struggling students in Rainbow Perspectives. She said, "we cannot save each other all the time." Although this theme was specifically talked about in the context of Rainbow Perspectives, the reality of college students facing physiological health challenges is not exclusive to queer students or to Rainbow Perspectives. The evidence suggests that practitioners should take into consideration psychological health support mechanisms when considering how to best support queer students campus wide.

Evidence that informs how to improve support mechanisms for queer students campus wide does not speak to the utilization of specific tool, but serves as a call to practitioners to be

mindful of how students interpret the implementation of the support overall. Several participants shared that they were aware that the research site could revoke any support strategies that were put in place. Rationale the participants provided for believing the research site may do away with Rainbow Perspectives were that students might do something to cause the research site to withdrawal support by participants drawing negative attention to Rainbow Perspectives or that not enough students would take advantage of the resource so the research site would disband the program due to there not being a need. This sheds light on an important reality that any underrepresented or marginalized population or “other” face. This idea that any support that is provided comes at a cost and that it is in additional to what the research site must provide so it could ultimately be taken away. Practitioners need to be mindful of how they can address this reality when supporting queer students campus wide.

Overall, evidence suggests to support queer students on a college campus practitioners must consider the context of community and campus climate, the accessibility of experiences to form meaningful or close relationships, the realities of queer space (physical and intellectual), and psychology health challenges that students may be facing. These ideas not only apply to queer special interest living communities, but also inform how practitioners can support queer students in far reaching and meaningful ways on a campus at large. These findings indicate that employing a queer focused special interest housing community alone cannot support queer students on campus. Larger concepts must be considered to address the needs of queer students campus wide.

Practices to Improve Queer Focused Special Interest Housing Communities.

In this section findings are presented that specifically inform the creation, implementation, and administration of the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing

community. Participants were eager to provide suggestions about how to improve Rainbow Perspectives. There was not one specific question that participants were asked to gather information about improvements, but participants typically shared freely how they felt the program could be improved when they were asked about the benefits and challenges they experienced associated with Rainbow Perspectives. The majority of participants described Rainbow Perspectives as lacking community and that this negatively impacted their experience in the community in some way. Yet, all participants still described Rainbow Perspectives as a safe and accepting community in the fall semester. Evidence indicates there were areas of the program that participants felt could be improved to contribute positively to creating a stronger community within Rainbow Perspectives.

Evidence suggests that more attention needed to be devoted to building community in Rainbow Perspectives. Some participants reported that since many students identified as queer they felt it was expected that they would instinctually be friends and form a cohesive community due to this shared identity or interest. Participants reported this expectation was self-imposed to a certain extent, but also felt it was an unspoken or unwritten expectation of the program from the research site as well. For example, Harry shared, “People forget that just because we are in the same marginalized community that doesn’t mean we’re all going to like the same things or we’re all going to be best friends [...] We’re just all still people and some people don’t click.” Similarly, Sophia shared, “just because people are queer doesn’t make us all like each other[.] It is only one aspect; it does not define us in everything. Within the queer community there’s diversity in politics, views, and interpretation.” This is an important distinction for practitioners to keep in mind. Simply because students in Rainbow Perspectives may come to the program with certain similarities or interests this does not mean that resources and intention should not be

dedicated to building community helping students connect. Table 7 presents the areas of Rainbow Perspectives that participants report needing improvement.

Table 7

Areas Rainbow Perspectives participants' report improvement needed

Participant Reported Improvements	Number of Participants Reporting Improvement Needed
Staffing (e.g. more staff needed, better trained staff)	7
More programming for community members	6
More required aspects of the program (e.g. mandatory credit bearing course, community project)	6
Greater focus on social justice	5
Greater attention paid to intersecting identities (e.g. race)	3
Different location or more locations	3
More organization, institutional support, and accountability	2

NOTE. Some participants noted multiple ways Rainbow Perspectives could be improved. The researcher did not designate one improvement per participant. All improvements are included on the table, not one per participant.

Evidence from this study showed that staffing in the queer focused living community was in need of improvement. The majority of participants reported there was a need for more staff, better-trained staff, and more clearly defined responsibilities of staff. Multiple participants talked about the RA being ill prepared to support members of the Rainbow Perspectives due to a lack of knowledge about the queer community. They also reported the RA was uninvolved with Rainbow Perspectives. It was suggested that the RA for Rainbow Perspectives should have additional training to ensure the student can meet the needs of residents in the community. Additionally, students reported the role of Peer Mentor was poorly defined and lacking

professionalism. Several participants shared that they knew the Peer Mentors were in Rainbow Perspectives to support them, but they did not provide specific programming and had personal relationships with students in the community so they were seen as biased toward students in which they were friends. The lack of confidence in the student staff led students to have a lack of confidence in the professional staff that oversaw Rainbow Perspectives. Participants shared how they knew and liked the professional staff from the Center for Social Justice and LGBT Communities, but they did not see evidence of their investment in the community. Benjamin said, “there just does not seem to be anyone pulling this program together.” This evidence indicates that the staffing structure of a queer focused special interest community is important to the student experience and reflects institutional investment in the program. Herbst & Malaney’s (1999) study briefly mentions that staff in the 2-20 program needed to be visible supporters of the queer community, but the evidence from this research study provides more detailed descriptions about why staffing is important with specific recommendations from students.

About half of participants reported the need for more programming in Rainbow Perspectives. Participants were aware of queer focused programming that was open to the entire campus or that was provided by specific queer student organizations, but felt there was a need for more programming just for students in Rainbow Perspectives so they could more easily connect and get to know people outside their friend group. Participants also reported if these programs were provided they would be a tool for sustaining a more tightly knit community. The lack of programming was found to be one of the most frequently reported reasons as to why participants reported Rainbow Perspectives lacked community. This is important evidence as only one other study, Herbst and Malaney’s (1999), has researched a community like Rainbow Perspectives and the need for specifically tailored programming was not addressed.

Similarly, about half of participants reported there should be more required elements of the program. Several participants suggested a credit-bearing course should be required of all students living in Rainbow Perspectives. Other participants suggested actually following through with the planning and execution of a community project that was specifically referenced in the public description of the program. Nora said when referencing the idea of the community project, “I think intentions are great, but somebody needs to step forward and say we need to do this. I have been a part of Rainbow all three years and we have never worked together on a community project.” Evidence from this study indicates that students may be interested in more firm requirements associated with a queer focused living community and this may have a positive impact on the community created in the program by uniting through a common purpose or learning concepts together.

Another aspect of the program that participants reported as an area of improvement was a need for a more specific focus on social justice and intersecting identities. Delouise shared, “There's a few times when, the people I've become close to who are white who didn't really get something, or maybe said something offensive and didn't understand why. For example imitating a black women in a ‘ghetto’ voice [...] Maybe instead of just having workshops on sexuality, they could have workshops on race too and like, community things on race.” Participants reported they were interested in an emphasis more specifically related to the context of difference, not just the queer community. Evidence suggests, a focus on social justice and intersecting identities is one way to work toward this. This may also allow the community to work towards building stronger community.

Lastly, the administrative aspects of the program should not be overlooked. Several participants reported the location of Rainbow Perspectives or the lack of multiple locations to be

an area of needed improvement. Evidence from this study highlights the reality that students are balancing many different priorities when securing housing – location of classes in relation to housing, work, proximity to friends, etc. Since Rainbow Perspectives was only located on one campus and in one residence hall this did not provide students much flexibility. Evidence suggests location and accessibility must be a consideration by practitioners when building programs like Rainbow Perspectives. The housing community needs to be convenient for students and a desirable living location. The location of the housing community was not referenced in the Herbst and Malaney's (1999) study as being an area of consideration.

Through analyzing the findings related to research question three in two sections, practitioners are presented with research based evidence that informs the creation and administration of a queer focused special interest housing community while also being reminded of important elements that impact the campus climate for queer students. Evidence suggests there are many considerations and important realities that inform practice around supporting queer students campus wide and in special interest housing communities that were not previously discussed in the research literature.

Summary of Findings

Overall, evidence from this research study provides possible answers or general explanations to the three research questions that were presented as individual profiles (cases) in Chapter Four. Some of the evidence aligns with and supports areas and realities presented in previous research literature and studies, while other evidence sheds new light on the realities of queer focused special interest housing communities not currently represented in the research literature.

Evidence related to research question one suggests participants were largely motivated to enroll in the program because they wanted to live in an environment supportive or affirming of queer identity. Providing additional qualitative support to Rankin (2003) and Rankin, et al., (2010) findings, evidence from this study demonstrates the majority of participants were also motivated to enroll in Rainbow Perspectives due to having experienced or perceived negative perceptions of queer identity on a college campus. Similarly, evidence from this study aligns with Evans and Briodo's (1999) findings that identify coming out to a roommate to be an area of particular anxiety and challenge. Participants' experiences in Rainbow Perspectives were congruent with their perceptions of the program before enrollment as they described Rainbow Perspectives as safe and accepting after enrollment. Experiences that contributed to this affirming and accepting description were meeting close/best friends, engaging in authentic dialog and safe space sharing, have the ability to engage in gender play, having a safe space to come out, meeting queer people of color, and participating in a queer history tour of New York City.

Although participant experiences in Rainbow Perspective were positive, evidence suggests Rainbow Perspectives lacked community. Experiences and perceptions of the program that contributed to this were a lack of overall unity outside of small "fortified" friend groups, drama (i.e. breakdowns in previously formed relationships and difference of opinions) and a lack of understanding around intersecting identities specifically race. Herbst and Malaney (1999) findings show a lack of community was also identified as a reality in the 2-20 program, but the importance of recognizing and connecting with other with the intersecting identities, specifically race, was not discussed in the study.

Evidence related to research question two suggests participant experiences in Rainbow Perspectives influenced perceptions of their own sexuality or gender identity. Participants

reported being more confident in relation to their own sexuality or gender identity, perceived queer identity as more fluid, had a better understanding of themselves in the queer community, were more knowledgeable of queer vocabulary to reflect on their own identities and others, or reinforced their current perceptions. This is an important addition to research literature since there is a void of research about queer focused special interest communities.

Lastly, evidence related to research question three, provides students affairs practitioners with concepts to consider to improve support for queer undergraduate students campus wide and specifically in relation to a queer focused learning community. Evidence from this study indicates queer students perceptions and experiences of campus climate to be a motivating factor to enroll in a queer focused special interest housing community. Evidence indicates creating environments that encourage authentic queer dialog and space sharing, utilizing language that allows for gender identity and sexuality fluidity including conceptual and developmental frameworks that acknowledge for this, being mindful of psychological health challenges of all undergraduate students, and being mindful of how students may interpret the creation and implementation of support mechanisms are important considerations to support queer students on campus.

In relation to the implementation and administration of a queer focused learning community evidence suggests a clear focus on community building to be valuable. This includes ensuring there are community building efforts within these programs and not assuming that students will naturally connect simply because they identify as queer or have an interest in the queer community. Specific areas that impact community building were found to be the amount and type of training provided to student staff, focused programming for community members, requiring specific aspects of the program (e.g. credit bearing course or mandatory

community project), greater focus on social justice and intersecting identities (e.g. race), and taking into consideration administrative realities (e.g. location of community). The evidence from this study is significant because it provides a road map of important considerations when seeking to support queer students campus wide, while also detailing areas of particular focus when designing or improving queer focused special interest housing communities.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

This study was prompted by the need for more qualitative educational research examining a queer focused special interest housing community. Although special interest housing communities are not a new-fangled support mechanism employed by student affairs practitioners, there is limited research that investigated ideas such as perceived or actual value, successful practices, and perceptions and experiences of enrolled students (Herbst & Malaney, 1999). Furthermore, queer focused special interest housing communities have been suggested as a strategy to foster inclusiveness for queer students on college campuses (Rankin et al., 2010; Schueler, Hoffman, Peterson, 2009) yet there is little evidence to demonstrate the value of these types of communities and describe the experiences of students enrolled in these programs. To work towards closing these gaps in the research literature, this study was guided by the following research questions: (1) How do Rainbow Perspective students perceive and experience the special interest housing program? (2) How have perceptions of students' own sexuality or gender identity been influenced by experiences or elements of the Rainbow Perspectives program? (3) How can institutions and student affairs professionals improve practices that support queer undergraduate students based on this research-based evidence?

The literature review for this study revealed that a purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative community is what college campuses *should* strive for (Boyer, 1990), yet a great deal of evidence clearly depicts a sometimes hostile campus climate for queer students across the national in so much as students sometimes concealing their queer identity to avoid negative repercussions (Rankin, 2003; Rankin, et al., 2010). This climate extends into campus

residence halls. Students report coming out to a roommate to be an area of particular challenge, anxiety, and vulnerability (Evans & Broido, 1999). Although residence halls hold certain challenges for queer students, the literature also presents residence halls as a place where learning can extend outside the classroom and encourage important connections between course materials and real life (Schroder & Mabel, 1994). Hence, this study provided an in depth look at a queer focused special interest housing community by telling the stories of students that actually lived there from one and a half semesters to six semesters. The stories, profiles, or cases shared in this research study shed light on students' lived experiences to better understand experiences and perceptions, program influence of participant perceptions of their own gender identity and sexuality, and implications for student affairs practice. Specific attention was paid to authentic language that allowed participants every opportunity to accurately and honestly share their story of living a queer focused special interest housing community.

In this chapter, I present the following sections: discussion, implications for practice, and conclusion. This chapter brings main ideas from the study together to present a clear picture of the overall study and its contribution to the research literature.

Discussion

In this section, I will discuss main themes in the evidence from this research study that respond to research questions one and two. Research question three will be discussed in the implications for practice section.

Students' perceptions and experiences of Rainbow Perspectives.

The majority of participants in this research study were attracted to living in Rainbow Perspectives because they perceived the program would be supportive or affirming of queer identity and because they had experienced or perceived negative perceptions of queer identity on

campus. It is clear that participants in this study were looking for and attracted to a queer friendly residential environment. Some participants had tried residential living environments outside Rainbow Perspectives and did not feel comfortable or connected, while others wanted to avoid having a negative experience related to queer identity altogether and avoided situations where they could potentially be vulnerable such as, coming out to a roommate (Evans & Broido, 1999). Hence, some participants enrolled in Rainbow Perspectives as their first on campus residential living experience. Rankin (2003) and Rankin, et al. (2010) similarly report at higher education institutions across the nation, queer students sometimes face a hostile campus climate. This study provides evidence that campus climate is an important consideration when students decide to enroll in a queer focused special interest housing community and that the traditional on campus housing experience is not working for all students. On campus housing may be an opportunity to extend lessons from the classroom (Schroder & Mabel, 1994), but this is not happening universally and evidence from this study shows it is not working specifically for some students that would be attracted to living a queer focused housing community.

Participants' perceptions before they enrolled in Rainbow Perspectives overwhelmingly align with their descriptions of the program while enrolled. A majority of participants described Rainbow Perspectives as safe and accepting with the most frequent descriptors being – like a family, shared understanding, care for one another, support for one another, accepting, open, loving, judgment free, safe, welcoming, where you can be yourself, relaxed, free environment, a place to learn, community, and queer friendly living space. Although, evidence shows that Rainbow Perspectives was perceived and experienced to be safe and accepting by participants, with the same frequency, evidence demonstrates that a community feeling was lacking. Participants described Rainbow Perspectives as not connected, cliquey, lacking unity, being

made up of small-fortified groups, dramatic, drama filled, and lacking understanding around race. Herbst & Malaney (1999) also report a lack of community in the 2-20 program. Although, evidence indicated there was a lack of community in Rainbow Perspectives participants still described the program as safe and accepting highlighting where the program is succeeding while also showing areas for growth and improvement.

Some of the experiences that contributed positively to participants' perception of Rainbow Perspectives were meeting close friends, engaging in authentic dialog and space sharing (e.g. being with others, having conversations about gender, sexuality, and "real life"), gender play, meeting queer people of color, coming out as transgender, and the queer history tour of NYC. Many of the experiences that contributed negatively to participants' experiences in Rainbow Perspectives were categorized as drama or breakdowns in community. This evidence shows the positive impact of a queer focused special interest community while also illuminating ways the program can be improved.

Students' perceptions of queer identity influenced by Rainbow Perspectives.

Evidence from this study indicates that Rainbow Perspectives influenced how participants perceived their sexuality or gender identity. The majority of participants expressed they were more confident and perceived their sexuality or gender identity as more fluid. Other participants reported a better understanding of self in the queer community and queer vocabulary to reflect on their own identity and others. For example, Benjamin shared, "I am now very open talking about these things [being queer] that I was kind of ashamed to talk about before [...]. I am more comfortable with myself and I can approach people without having any worries." Similarly, Sophia shared, "I am just being exposed to more and accepting more about myself.

[...] I feel a lot more at peace with myself.” This evidence demonstrates the value of this type of a support mechanism for queer students on a college campus.

Implications for Practice

This section is dedicated to the third research question guiding this study focused on how institutions and students affairs professionals can improve practices to support queer undergraduate students. Looking across all of the evidence from this study I will present six themes that inform practice – campus climate, space, theory, language, administration and future research. These themes can be applied to a queer focused special interest housing community, but may also useful when looking to support queer students across campuses.

Campus climate.

Evidence from this study informs practice when considering what type of campus community a University seeks to intentionally create. Boyer (1990) contends a purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative community is what college campuses should strive for and the majority of participants described Rainbow Perspectives as safe and accepting, but this is only approximately 40 students at a campus of over 50,000 students. Evidence shows several of the most meaningful aspects of Rainbow Perspectives reported by the participants were meeting close friends and having authentic dialog and space sharing. These realities contributed to the safe and accepting vibe in Rainbow Perspectives, but again may not represent the experiences of students living outside of the program and begs the question are there these opportunities outside of Rainbow Perspectives? When designing and implementing a queer focused housing community the entire campus climate must be considered while also considering what students are being reached by the housing community and what students are not.

Space.

This study investigates the realities of a physical space – a queer focused special interest housing community located in two sections of two floors of a residence hall, but through this investigation evidence suggests that physical space is related to intellectual space and having the freedom to think, feel, and question openly. Delouise said, “I just feel freed” when explaining Rainbow Perspectives. Lenore said, “I feel like a can breath here.” A majority of participants noted authentic dialog and space sharing to be their most memorable experiences. This is the second most frequent response after meeting close friends and signifies the value of having queer identified physical space to open up queer friendly intellectual space. A college campus consists of all kinds of physically structures (academic buildings, residence halls, student activities centers, athletic facilities, etc.), but at its very core higher education is about intellectual growth. For students to grow intellectually and fully grapple with any issue there has to be accessible space for this growth to occur. Rainbow Perspectives opened up queer friendly intellectual space that some participants had never experienced; this was one of realities of living in Rainbow Perspectives. Queer intellectual and physical space must be a consideration when supporting queer students. Not every student can live in a designated “queer space” or go to class in a designated “queer classroom” so administrators must consider how to open up queer friendly intellectual space when physical space may not be available or realistic.

Theory.

Evidence from this research study aligns with Renn’s (2010) call to researchers to move beyond psychological and sociological studies of LGB development and incorporate queer theory (Abes 2009, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Butler, 1990; Derrida 1967/1978; Foucault 1976/1978; Dilley 2002), as a meaningful framework supporting all students. Evidence from this study suggests researchers and practitioners employ more contextual and less categorical

models. An examination of Table 1 detailing how each participant identifies their gender identity and sexuality is evidence supporting this assertion. It is important to note many of the self-identified identities (queer, demisexual, genderfluid, genderqueer, transgender man, transgender women, woman loving, and butch lesbian) are not represented in the LGB development stage model theories (Cass, 1979,1984) and LGB life space development models (D'Augelli, 1994). Additionally, several participants shared the importance and prominence of their intersecting identities (e.g. race) as essential to who they are and their identity. This complexity and richness is not represented in stage and lifespan LGB development models. For practitioners and the institutions they represent, to provide queer friendly spaces students must be able to authentically convey and describe their humanness. The foundation of student affairs practice must also embrace and account for this humanness through the theory that guides the work.

Furthermore, participants reported they wanted to see a greater emphasis of social justice and intersecting identities when thinking about how to improve the program. This evidence suggests the consideration of multiple and interacting identities as important when supporting queer students. Students are not simply queer or queer first. When considering how to best support queer students it is important to recognize all facets of identity.

Language.

Language has been an important focus in this study. I wanted to ensure that participants were able to authentically talk about who they currently are, who they have been, who they think they will be someday, and everything in-between. This means that as a researcher I needed to learn new words, points or view in which I was unfamiliar, and consider new experiences. For example, asking participants to self-identity their preferred gender pronouns and use “they” as a

singular pronoun in my writing. This was something that I had to make an effort to do, but was essential in providing the participants the ability to authentically express who they were and open up queer friendly space. This may mean at times the reader needs to reference the “discussion of terminology section” or research an idea to become more knowledgeable about it, but to support queer students and all students, practitioners must commitment to authentic language.

Evidence from this research study also indicated that participants felt Rainbow Perspectives allowed them to learn more about language and queer vocabulary to reflect on their own identity and others’. For example Alex said, “I always hated people who were like, ‘I don’t like labels’ because I do like labels. Being in Rainbow has taught me that you don’t need to be so like, concrete and hard on yourself about it. It just is what it is.” Bill shared that he learned that things, “don’t fit into neat categories.” This evidence speaks to the importance of language in effectively supporting the queer community.

Administration.

The best way to summarize this theme is to convey that *administration matters* when considering practices that support queer students. Yes, I am an administrator so I do bring my bias to this discussion because I want to believe my work matters, but evidence from this study demonstrates program facilitation and implementation, effective management, and policy are essential when considering how to best support queer students across campus and in a queer focused special interest housing community.

Evidence from this study demonstrates that community building was an essential component of a queer focused special interest community. Participants shared that it should not be expected (they felt it was) that a group of students living together would all be friends and form a cohesive and healthy community simply because they shared a similar identity or interest.

Participants felt more programming would be useful in building community. The evidence suggests that more and better-trained staff would be useful in building community. Evidence showed that student staff members lacked professionalism and knowledge of the queer community and were not able to effectively bring students together and create buy-in from program participants. The lack of confidence in student staff led participants to question the dedication and investment of the institution and professional staff members in the Office of Social Justice and LGBT Communities and Residence Life. Another factor that led participants to question institutional investment in Rainbow Perspectives was the lack of follow-through in planning the community project and implementing program requirements.

Programming, staff training and development, and follow-through are all important elements of administration that can sometimes be overlooked as trivial or tedious, but evidence from this study shows that participants took note and this impacted their experiences and perceptions of the program. Practitioners should consider developing comprehensive training models to train student staff so they fully understand their roles as student staff members, how to program effectively, balance their important roles of student vs. staff member, and the needs of the students they are serving. Additionally, when selecting staff members it should be considered who is a good fit for a queer focused special interest community. Herbst & Malaney (1999) note that in the 2-20 program it was a priority to hire an RA that was a visible and proud member of the queer community. This was not found to be a practice in Rainbow Perspectives.

The description of Rainbow Perspectives that was included in the participant application and information online explained that all the Rainbow Perspectives participants would be working on a community project. Students signed a contract detailing these expectations, but participants explained this project never transpired. This speaks to the importance of follow-

through and authentically representing the program. Since the description of the program did not match the program itself, evidence shows that participants noticed and this impacted the community created in the program and how they perceived and experienced the organization, institutional investment and support of the program. Participants in this study suggested that more requirements (e.g. a credit bearing course) would improve Rainbow Perspectives overall. Evidence indicates that requirements and administrative follow-through should be a consideration when designing and managing a queer focused special interest housing community. This study shows that living together is not enough to create a community that will meet participants' expectations; there must be elements that bring students together intentionally and purposefully.

Other administrative aspects of the program that relate to practice were revealed when exploring participants' motivations for enrolling in Rainbow Perspectives. Policies that related to the ease in which transfer students were able to secure on campus housing, housing lottery processes, policies that prohibit individuals of different genders from living together, and where on campus the queer focused special interest housing community is located, were all considerations when participants enrolled in the program. These are all important aspects of student life to consider when supporting queer students. For example, a student may want to live in Rainbow Perspectives, but it is located far away from their classes thus they have to prioritize how important it is for them to live in a queer friendly space with ease of access to academic buildings. These are important considerations when thinking about how to holistically support queer students. An administrative aspect or policy reality may be compounded when a student is balancing their need and/or desire to be living in a queer friendly space.

Future research.

Further research is needed to inform practices that support queer students on college campuses. This research study is only the second of its kind and it focuses narrowly on three research questions. Greater research is needed to best understand how queer students perceive and experience their residential living experience in and outside of queer focused special interested housing communities. Additionally, this study only had thirteen participants. A larger pool of participants would contribute to the dearth of research evidence informing the use of queer focused special interest housing communities as a tool to support queer students. Further research is also needed to investigate and explore other support mechanisms for supporting queer students to better understand what tools are most effective and meaningful to students. These areas include safe zone programs, LGBT Centers, lavender graduations, mentoring programs, and student led clubs and students organizations.

Conclusion

All individuals should feel a sense of safety, belonging, engagement, and value within a University community (Boyer, 1990). Through reviewing the current research literature relating to queer students on college campuses across the nation it is the clear that this reality has not been achieved. Although, we know there are more out queer undergraduate students entering colleges and universities than ever before (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006; PFLAG, 2001; Sanlo, 2005) evidence shows us that queer students are experiencing a sometimes hostile environment making them feel isolated and alone (Rankin, 2003).

It is my hope that this study and the stories shared by thirteen unique and remarkable participants contribute to the research literature by providing qualitative evidence to better understand how students at a large research extension University in the northeast perceived and

experienced a queer focused special interest housing program and how the program influenced perceptions of their sexuality and gender identity. The intention was to help institutions and student affairs practitioners improve practices to support queer undergraduate students so higher education communities can be a better place for us all to learn. Only one other study (Herbst & Malaney, 1999) has researched this type of a special interest housing community even though queer focused special interest housing communities have been suggested as a strategy to foster inclusiveness for queer students on college campuses (Rankin et al., 2010; Schueler, Hoffman, Peterson, 2009).

Evidence from this research study indicates students had valuable experiences in the Rainbow Perspectives program and felt it was a safe and accepting environment. Evidence also showed students in the program felt more confident about their sexuality and gender identity while allowing them to see queer identity as more fluid and inspiring a better understand of themselves and the queer vocabulary. The queer focused special interest housing community in this study was not without need for improvement, but through this research important areas of practice were identified such as, campus climate, space, theory, language, administration and future research. This study provided authentic student voices and experiences to campus climate research while helping practitioners better understand thus better support queer college students.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Email Invitation

Direct E-mail Invitation

To: Students in Rainbow Perspectives Program

From: Sarah Beth Bailey

Subject: Seeking Participants for a Paid Research Study

Hello «Student First Name» –

I hope you are having a great semester! I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University researching the Rainbow Perspectives program and your experiences and perceptions in the program. My goal is to learn how to better support queer college students at Rutgers.

I invite you to participate in this research so we can learn more about the Rainbow Perspectives program. Please fill out the survey below to participate. It includes questions to learn more about you and determine if you are eligible to participate in the study. This survey is confidential; only I will have access to the information you provide. **In appreciation for completing the survey, you will be entered into a drawing to win a \$200.00 Barnes and Noble gift card.**

To complete the survey please visit, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/96W5V35>.
The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

At the end of the survey you will be asked if you are interested in being interviewed for my dissertation study. If you are selected to be interviewed, you will agree to participate in two approximately 60 minute individual interviews. One interview will occur during the Fall 2013 semester and one in Spring 2014. I will ask questions during the interview that center around your experiences and perceptions of the Rainbow Perspectives program. **In appreciation for your participation, I will give you \$25.00 in cash after each individual interview. \$50.00 is available to you just two hours of your time throughout the 2013-2014 academic year.**

Your participation is appreciated and important to the success of this research study. If you have questions about this study, please contact me (sbbailey@rutgers.edu) or my advisor Dr. James Giarelli (james.giarelli@gse.rutgers.edu)

Thank you for your time and participation,

Sarah Beth

Sarah Beth Bailey,
Ed. D. Candidate, Education, Culture, and Society, Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Email: sbbailey@rutgers.edu
Phone: 848-932-7442

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Email Invitation Reminder

Direct E-mail Invitation Reminder

To: Students in Rainbow Perspectives Program that have not yet completed the questionnaire

From: Sarah Beth Bailey

Subject: Reminder: Seeking Participants for a Paid Research Study

Hello «Student First Name» –

I hope you are well. I am reaching out because you have not yet completed the Rainbow Perspectives survey I emailed about last week. To have a chance to win a **\$200.00 Barnes and Noble gift card and share your opinion about the Rainbow Perspectives program while earning \$50.00 you need to complete the survey below by Monday November 11.**

To complete the survey please visit, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/96W5V35M> . This will only take 5 minutes. Please see my previous email below for more information about participation in the study and my background. I hope you choose to complete the survey and have an interest in earning \$50.00 and participating in the study!

Thank you for your time and participation,

Sarah Beth

Sarah Beth Bailey,
Ed. D. Candidate, Education, Culture, and Society, Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Email: sbbailey@rutgers.edu
Phone: 848-932-7442

Hello «Student_First_Name» -

I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University researching the Rainbow Perspectives program and your experiences and perceptions in the program. My goal is to learn how to better support queer college students at Rutgers.

I invite you to participate in this research so we can learn more about the Rainbow Perspectives program. Please fill out the survey below to participate. It includes questions to learn more about you and determine if you are eligible to participate in the study. This survey is confidential; only I will have access to the information you provide. **In appreciation for**

completing the survey, you will be entered into a drawing to win a \$200.00 Barnes and Noble gift card.

To complete the survey please visit, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/96W5V35>. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

At the end of the survey you will be asked if you are interested in being interviewed for my dissertation study. If you are selected to be interviewed, you will agree to participate in two approximately 60 minute individual interviews. One interview will occur during the Fall 2013 semester and one in Spring 2014. I will ask questions during the interview that center around your experiences and perceptions of the Rainbow Perspectives program. **In appreciation for your participation, I will give you \$25.00 in cash after each individual interview. \$50.00 is available to you just two hours of your time throughout the 2013-2014 academic year.**

Your participation is appreciated and important to the success of this research study. If you have questions about this study, please contact me (sbbailey@rutgers.edu) or my advisor Dr. James Giarelli (james.giarelli@gse.rutgers.edu)

Thank you for your time and participation,

Sarah Beth

Sarah Beth Bailey,
Ed. D. Candidate, Education, Culture, and Society, Graduate School of Education
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Email: sbbailey@rutgers.edu
Phone: 848-932-7442

Appendix C: Participant Questionnaire (Web-Based Survey)

1. Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your answers are important in helping me determine if you will participate in my dissertation study.

This questionnaire should only take about 5 minutes of your time and your answers will be kept confidential. By filling out this questionnaire you can be interested in a drawing for a \$200.00 Barnes and Noble gift card.

If you have any questions of the survey please contact Sarah Beth Bailey at sbbailey@rutgers.edu or 848-932-7442.

2. Consent Form

Project Title: Rainbow Perspectives: A case study exploring the perceptions and experiences of students in a LGBTQQAI focused special interest housing community.

Purpose of the Study: This research is being conducted by Sarah Beth Bailey, a doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Theory Policy & Administration in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. I am inviting you to participate in this this research project because you are a member of the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing program. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of students living in the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing program at Rutgers University under the guidance of Dr. James Giarelli.

Procedures: The procedure involves the completion of one survey. The total time for your participation will be approximately 5 minutes. In appreciation for your participation, you will be entered into a drawing for a \$200.00 Barnes and Noble gift card.

Potential Risks and Discomfort: There are no known risks associated with participating in this research study.

Potential Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you, but I hope that in the future other people might benefit from this study through improved understandings of undergraduate students' experiences and perspectives of LGBTQQAI special interest housing communities.

Confidentiality: Data gathered, as part of the study will be treated with strict confidence. Information you divulge will be confidential and your name will not be revealed to any individual or group outside the research project. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data in a password-protected computer and database. Any hard copy records will be stored in a locked storage cabinet that only the researcher will have access to. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The data collected will be retained for three years following the closing of the protocol. Further, all information collected on the participants not selected for the study will be destroyed.

Right to Withdrawal and Questions: Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Sarah Beth Bailey at sbbailey@rutgers.edu or 848-932-7442 or James Giarelli at james.giarelli@gse.rutgers.edu or 732-932-7496.

Participants Rights: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Rutgers University: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research and Sponsored Programs; 3 Rutgers Plaza New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559; phone: 838-932-4058; fax: 517-432-4503; email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu.

Statement of Consent: Your participation indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in their research study. You may print a copy of this form using your browser's print option.

If you agree to participate, please click " I Agree/Consent" below.

- I Agree/Consent

3. Questions

First Name _____

Last Name _____

Current Age _____

How long have you lived in Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing?

How do you identify your race/ethnicity? _____

How do you identify your gender? (i.e. man, women, male, female, gender queer, etc.) _____

How do you identify your sexuality? (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, asexual, intersex, etc.) _____

Current Class Year at Rutgers University (i.e. sophomore, junior, etc.) _____

Are you a transfer student?

- Yes
- No

What year did you first enroll at Rutgers University? _____

Did you first enroll in the Fall or Spring Semester?

- Fall
- Spring

School/College of Enrollment at Rutgers University _____

Major/Academic Interest Area _____

Academic Minors (if applicable) _____

Involvement On or Off-Campus (i.e. Scarlet Ambassador, volunteer at Elijah's Promise, LLEGO

Vice President, Rutgers Marching Band, Aresty Research RA, etc.) _____

Where do you consider home? (i.e. my Mom and Dad's home in Maplewood, New Jersey,

New Gibbons Hall, etc.) _____

Are you interested in being interviewed for my dissertation study focusing on students' experiences and perspectives in the Rainbow Perspectives program?

If you are selected for an interview, you will need to agree to participate in two individual interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes each. These interviews will occur during the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters. I will ask questions during the interviews that center around your experiences and perceptions of the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing community. All interviews will occur at a time and location convenient for you. In appreciation, I will give you \$25.00 in cash after each interview or focus group.

- Yes, I am interested in being interviewed
- NO, I am not interested in being interviewed

Comments (Optional): _____

4. Interviews

If you are interested in being interviewed for my dissertation study focusing on students' experiences and perspectives in the Rainbow Perspectives program please provide the following contact information:

Preferred Email Address _____

Cell Phone Number _____

5. Drawing

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Please enter your contact information below if you like to be entered in a drawing to win a gift card worth \$200.00 from Barnes and Noble. If you do not want to be entered in the drawing, click the [Done] button.

Preferred Email Address _____

Cell Phone Number _____

Appendix D: Individual Interview Protocol for First Individual Interview

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I am Sarah Beth Bailey, a graduate student looking to learn about your experiences at Rutgers University and how living in Rainbow Perspectives Housing has influenced these experiences. You can see I am recording this interview so I can later transcribe our conversation. I am recording our conversation so I can capture everything we are talking about. Please know no one will hear the recording, it is just a tool for me to document our conversation as accurately as possible. This should take about 60 minutes. Please let me know if at any point you have any questions or need clarification.

Your identity will not be disclosed to anyone. Please let me know if you have any questions. Are you comfortable if we begin the interview? I would like to begin by learning specifically about your experiences living in Rainbow Perspectives Housing.

1. First, I am interested in learning about your interest in Rainbow Perspectives Housing. What interested you in the program?
 - a. How did you find out about Rainbow Perspectives Housing?
 - b. What factors impacted your decision to enroll?
 - c. Who knows you live in Rainbow Perspectives Housing (i.e. parents/sponsors)?
2. Since you made the decision to be part of the Rainbow Perspectives Housing, in what ways has it met or not met your expectations thus far?
 - a. What were your expectations for the housing community?
 - b. What would you do differently if you could make the decision all over again?
3. How would you describe or explain Rainbow Perspectives Housing to another student that might be interested in living there?
 - a. How would you describe the benefits of living in Rainbow Perspectives Housing?
 - b. How would you describe the challenges?
4. How would you describe the living environment in Rainbow Perspectives Housing? (i.e. affirming, isolating, comfortable, safe, etc.)
 - a. How do you think being a part of this community influences your success at Rutgers? (i.e. socially, academically, etc.)
5. What aspects of college life do you find challenging?
 - a. In what ways has your participation in Rainbow Perspectives influenced these challenges?
6. What does living in Rainbow Perspectives Housing mean to you?
 - a. How has living in Rainbow Perspectives Housing impacted how you feel about yourself/your identity, specifically your sexuality and/or gender identity?
7. Tell me about these experiences of being an LGBTQAAI student at Rutgers University.

8. What has been your most memorable experience while living in the Rainbow Perspectives Housing thus far?
9. I feel like I have learned so much by talking with you. Is there anything else you can tell me to help me better understand your experience living Rainbow Perspectives Housing?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today about your experiences on campus and in Rainbow Perspectives Housing. This information will contribute greatly to my research. I will be in touch shortly to provide a transcript of our interview that I have typed up based on the recording. I will ask you to read through the transcript and confirm it accurately represents this interview and ensure there is nothing you want to add or clarify.

Thank you again and I will be in touch soon.

Appendix E: Interview Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

Project Title: Rainbow Perspectives: A case study exploring the perceptions and experiences of students in a LGBTQQAI focused special interest housing community.

Purpose of the Study: This research is being conducted by Sarah Beth Bailey, a doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Theory Policy & Administration in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University. I am inviting you to participate in this this research project because you are a member of the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing program. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of students living in the Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing program at Rutgers University under the guidance of James Giarelli.

Procedures: The procedure involves two individual interviews each approximately 60 minutes each in the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semester. The total time for your participation will be approximately 2 hours. All interviews will take place at a time and private location convenient for you. In appreciation for your participation, you will receive \$25.00 cash after each interview.

Potential Risks and Discomfort: There are no known risks associated with participating in this research study.

Potential Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you, but I hope that in the future other people might benefit from this study through improved understandings of undergraduate students' experiences and perspectives of LGBTQQAI special interest housing communities.

Confidentiality: This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that there is some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes, demographic info (i.e. age, ethnicity, and class year) and your experiences in the Rainbow Perspectives program and at Rutgers University). Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. All hard copy documents will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office that only the researcher will have access to. All electronic documents will be stored on a password-protected computer.

The researchers and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants) at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for three years.

Right to Withdrawal and Questions: Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Sarah Beth Bailey at sbbailey@rutgers.edu or 848-932-7442 or James Giarelli at james.giarelli@gse.rutgers.edu or 732-932-7496.

Participants Rights: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Rutgers University: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research and Sponsored Programs; 3 Rutgers Plaza New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559; phone: 848-932-0150; fax: 742-932-0162; email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu.

Statement of Consent: Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in their research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.

Study Participant Print _____ Date _____

Study Participant _____ Date _____

Study Researcher

Sarah Beth Bailey _____ Date _____

You have already agreed to participate in the research study entitled: Rainbow Perspectives: A case study exploring the perceptions and experiences of students in a LGBTQQAI focused special interest housing community conducted by Sarah Beth Bailey. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio (sound) record the interviews you participate in as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recordings will be used for analysis by the research team. The recordings will include everything we talk about during the interviews except your name. Your name will not be included in the recordings as the researcher will ask you to choose a pseudonym and the researcher will refer to you by this name throughout the interview project.

The recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office and linked with a code to subjects' identity and will be retained for three years and destroyed after this time.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recordings for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Study Participant Print _____ Date _____

Study Participant _____ Date _____

Study Researcher Sarah Beth Bailey _____ Date _____

Page 2. Participant initials _____

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Appendix F: Individual Interview Protocol for Second Interview

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me again. I really enjoyed learning more about your experiences at Rutgers and Rainbow Perspectives during our previous conversation. I wanted to follow-up with you and learn more about how things are going and your plans for next year. You can see I am recording this interview again so I can later transcribe our conversation. I am recording so I can make sure I capture everything we are talking about. Please know that no one will hear the recording, it is just a tool for me to document our conversation as accurately as possible.

Please let me know if at any point you have any questions or need clarification.

Are you comfortable if we begin?

1. How are you? Have there been any new developments with you since I saw you last?
2. During our first conversation, you described the living environment in Rainbow Perspectives as _____ and/or _____. As you have now lived in the community a full semester how would you currently describe living in Rainbow Perspectives?
 - a. (If different) How would you describe events or experiences that have influenced you now describing the community differently than before?
 - b. (If the same) What has continued to contribute to how you feel about living in Rainbow Perspectives or what in general has contributed to how you feel about living in Rainbow Perspectives?
3. What are your plans this summer?
 - a. How will you adjust to not living in the Rainbow Perspectives housing this summer, as it is only open during the academic year?
 - b. How will you adjust to a new living environment that is not LGBTQAI focused/friendly?
 - c. How do you think this change will impact you?
4. I have heard the housing lottery for next year is complete. What are your housing plans for next year? (NOTE: for senior student only ask second question)
 - a. Why are you planning to return to Rainbow Perspectives?
 - i. What are your hopes for the program next year?
 - b. Why do you not plan to return to Rainbow Perspectives?
 - i. What will you miss about Rainbow Perspectives and why?
5. As you look back over and reflect on this past academic year how do you think being a part of Rainbow Perspectives has influenced your entire year?
 - a. How has Rainbow Perspectives influenced your challenges?
 - b. How has Rainbow Perspectives influenced your successes?
6. What have you learned or come to know about your sexuality or gender identity (if

- anything) through living in the Rainbow Perspectives program?
- a. How did you learn or come to know this? From whom or what?
 - b. How do you feel about knowing this? Why is this important?
7. What lessons will you take with you from this year living in the Rainbow Perspective Program?
- a. Are there relationships that you made that you will continue when you leave?
8. As you end your time in Rainbow Perspectives would you encourage other students to live there?
- a. Why? Why not?
 - b. What would you tell them?
 - c. What advice would you have for them?
9. I feel like I have learned so much by talking with you this semester. Is there anything else you want to tell me to help me better understand your experience living Rainbow Perspectives special interest housing this year?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me about your experiences. I will be in touch to send you the transcript from this interview. Thank you again for your time.