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IDENTITY NEGOTIATION: STRAIGHT-ALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS IN
THE MID-SOUTH

by

Heather J. Dannison

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Counseling Psychology

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Dedication

To my family.

Acknowledgements

It is extremely overwhelming to consider all of the individuals that have helped me through this process as I have been lucky to have received support from so many. First and foremost I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Sara Bridges, who was always a phone call away during this process. Sara gave me confidence and guidance in my writing, encouraged me to go after a methodology that is known to be time intensive and lengthy, and inspired me to forge ahead on my dark days. I am especially appreciative that she infused our frequent meetings with laughter and was never afraid to pull up a youtube video so that we could derail and unwind when needed. Thank you also to the time, support, and guidance of Dr. Ronnie Priest, Dr. Elin Ovrebo, and Dr. Strohmer. Although Dr. Lisbeth Berbay was unable to remain on this committee due to her other commitments, her help on this study cannot be diminished. She taught me everything I know about qualitative research and truly inspired me to study something I was passionate about. Thank you to everyone on my committee past and present for helping and guiding this process and for doing so with patience, grace, and wisdom. Thank you also to the Counseling Psychology department at the University of Memphis. I began as a student totally unsure of my research potential and am graduating with a passion for research that cannot be extinguished.

I cannot begin to count the ways that my friends and family have also helped me through this 3 year adventure. I often felt that I could not go on, and I was picked up and inspired every time I fell down. To my husband, who was literally with me through every stage of this process, who inspired me, pushed me, fed me, took care of all of the things that I could no longer manage, and who still emotionally supported me....Thank you.

How can that be enough? I love you and cherish you, and it means the world to me that you were with me throughout this program and this project. Thank you also to my parents and in-laws who always believed that I could do this, even when I remained unsure.

Abstract

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Although recently literature related to the emergence and development of individuals who identify as straight-allies, or heterosexual individuals who advocate for the GLBT community in some way has been completed, little is known about straight-allies who also affirm a conservative Christian identity. Using narrative inquiry and queer theory, this study sought to better understand the experiences and stories of individuals who affirm to these two seemingly dichotomous identities in order to broaden the scope of research on this population. Unstructured narrative interviews were utilized along with both constant comparison and contextualization for the analysis of this work. Findings indicated that individuals who identified as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian used several different methods to live out these roles concurrently in their lives. This includes the utilization of both critical thinking and individualized interpretation of biblical texts in order to negotiate these identities. In addition, critical thinking, the impact of personal relationships with GLBT individuals, and patriotism helped participants negotiate their seemingly dichotomous identities. Findings were displayed using monologues and creative analytic practice in order to bring participants' stories to life.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer (GLBTQ) have fought for equal rights within the United States, the media has painted a picture of this fight as existing solely between two dichotomous groups: individuals who are gay themselves, and conservative Christians who are opposed to GLBTQ equality based on their interpretations of the Bible. Yet, a third group, comprised of heterosexual activists, or straight-allies, also exists and is actively working for equality for individuals who identify as GLTBQ. The term “straight-ally” refers to an individual who identifies as heterosexual and who supports or is involved in social justice efforts on behalf of individuals who identify as GLBTQ (Ambuske, 2010; Eichler, 2007; Russell, 2011). Straight-allies offer a new form of out-group activism, or “activism being done by those in a group that does not seem to directly benefit from the activism” (Eichler, 2007, p. 1). Similar to other out-group activists (e.g., white individuals that fought for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s), straight-allies have played an important role for the GLTBQ community because they have added strength and a presumably non-biased voice to the issue of equality (Ambuske, 2010). In addition, straight-allies have the potential to make political and economic change due to their numbers (Ayers & Brown, 2005). Yet, some straight-allies also identify with the group assumed by most to be in direct opposition to the fight for GLBTQ rights (Russell, 2011) - conservative Christianity.

While typically not known for its affirming stance toward the GLBTQ community, (Finlay & Walther, 2003) some individuals who identify with conservative Christianity can and do support GLBTQ people and their fight for equality (Russell,

2011). However, much of the psychological research related to conservative Christians and their views on GLBTQ issues has focused on negative attributes, such as homophobia (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Rosik, 2007; Wilkinson, 2004). As such, little is known about individuals who identify with conservative Christianity but who also seek equal rights for members of the GLBTQ community. Understanding how individuals come to support GLBTQ individuals when they have been raised and live in environments where support for GLBTQ individuals is condemnable may unlock important developmental and identity negotiation tools to support others going through a similar process. Therefore, this study explored the experiences and negotiations of individuals who hold two seemingly dichotomous identities as both a straight-ally and a conservative Christian.

Identity Development and Negotiation

Identity development is both a conscious and unconscious process shaped by three interacting elements; biological characteristics, unique psychological needs, and cultural contexts (Kroger, 2000). Occurring throughout the lifespan, identity development offers a way for individuals to understand and make sense of the world. Yet, the construct of “identity” has been a difficult one to define in psychological research because of its “vast and vague past” (Chatman, Eccles, & Malanchuk, 2005, p. 117). Early in his career Erik Erikson described identity as a sense of being the same throughout a variety of contexts and time (Erikson, 1968). Yet, later in life, Erikson and other researchers came to understand that the way that individuals view themselves, or their self-concept, may be more inconsistent or may include the possession of multiple identities throughout one’s lifetime (Chatman et al., 2005). Thus, Erikson later defined identity as “an ongoing

dynamic process whereby individuals establish, evaluate, reevaluate, and reestablish who they are and are not relative to others in their environments” (Chatman et al., 2005, p. 117). Despite Erikson’s later understanding that individuals may shift and negotiate multiple identities throughout their lives, existing models for identity development and negotiation are largely based on linear, stage-like models. However, recently researchers have begun to question the idea of continuity in one’s identity, with particular attention paid to the simplicity and generalizability of stage models (Chatman et al., 2005).

One manner in which linear, stage-like identity models have been challenged involves the integration of new experiences in the individual’s existing structures of self. In more extreme cases, these integrations may even involve shifts in beliefs and values (Chatman et al., 2005) which can cause individuals to re-negotiate existing identities to include new and sometimes dichotomous ways of viewing the world (Chatmen et al., 2005). For example, an individual who was born and raised in Memphis, TN may have a strong, cultural relationship to Southern heritage. This contextual component of the individual’s identity may need to be renegotiated should that individual move to New York City. While not losing the connection to one’s Southern identity, it would be necessary to develop a “NYC” identity to make living in a large Northern city less incongruous. Although the above example points to one way an individual could reorganize or shift their internal identities, it may also represent an example of Ogilvy’s (1977) multiplicity of selves. Ogilvy (1977), an identity researcher, stated that individuals internalize a multiplicity of selves (non-pathologically) wherein each self offers a unique perspective and interpretation of the world, including differing personalities, needs, and roles. Managing the multiplicity of selves that one may ascribe to presents challenges

stemming from the negotiation of various needs and goals. Prevailing identity models fail to specifically address these challenges. Additionally, managing identity becomes much more complex when the identities appear to be in direct opposition to one another. The complexity that comes with inhabiting dichotomous identities becomes even more apparent when considering the context in which these identities reside.

Context

Context is the situational and contingent reality of an individual, physically, socially, and historically (Tedlock, 2003). It can also relate to an individual's age, race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or ability, religious affiliation, relationship status, family background, along with countless other considerations that make one individual's life different from another's. An individual's context affects their identity development and negotiation (Eves, 2004) and contributes to an individual's understanding of equality, morality, and justice. Even geographically stationary individuals continuously encounter new information, experiences, opinions, and cultures. These encounters might alter their self-concept and understanding of reality (Tedlock, 2004) or may possibly further solidify a set of beliefs or identity. Since our current identity models utilize formulaic processes which rarely allow for multiple identity formation, and because of the importance of context in understanding the ways that individuals understand their reality, queer theory can be utilized to allow for contingent, complex and messy understandings of individual narratives.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is used to challenge our understanding of identity models and negotiation because it takes a different, more complex and nuanced account of the

processes of identity negotiation in individuals. Whereas some identity models provided linear, stage-like steps in understanding how individuals form and keep identities, queer theory conceptualizes identities as “contingent, shifting, and positioned by discursive structures rather than fixed properties of the individual” (Eves, 2004, p. 481). This allows for more contingent, de-categorized, and fluid understandings of how individuals develop and negotiate multiple and dichotomous identities. By using a queer theory lens in order to conceptualize the topic of straight-ally conservative Christians in their full, messy, and contingent contexts, the participant’s full story was honored and understood as it relates to their seemingly dichotomous identity negotiation.

Straight-Allies

Allies have been defined in the literature as “members of a dominant social group who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership” (Broido, 2000, p. 3). The term “ally” entered the literature in the 1990s in the student affairs and education research. Originally the term was used to discuss both heterosexual activists for the GLBTQ community and white students working to eradicate racism on college campuses (Broido, 2000). The term “ally” for the current research refers to heterosexual individuals who advocate on behalf of individuals who identify as GLBTQ. Currently it is estimated that 3.5% of the American population identifies as GLBTQ (Gates, 2011) and that every individual who identifies as GLBTQ gets support from at least two heterosexual friends or family members (Ayres & Brown, 2005). With numbers this high it is clear that individuals who identify as GLBTQ and their straight-ally counterparts represent a diverse group comprised of nearly every age, race, ethnicity, disability or ability, and national origin

(Mayer et al., 2008). Therefore, America hosts at least twenty million straight-allies today (Ayres & Brown, 2005), constructing a varied and diverse group of activists. Although there is some variation in the way that the literature refers to straight-allies, including terms such as heterosexual activists, social justice allies, sexual-minority allies, and a type of out-group activism, all of the definitions are essentially synonymous. In summary all the definitions of straight-allies include taking action for equality regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and recognizing their own privilege as a heterosexual.

Psychological Literature Related to Straight-Allies

Psychological research related to straight-allies is underdeveloped. However, according to a review of the extant literature, straight-allies have begun to receive more attention in the past five years. Current literature on this group has focused on key areas such as the development of a straight-ally identity (Ambuske, 2010; Broido, 2000; Duhigg, 2010; Eichler, 2007; Stotzer, 2009), motivation (Russell, 2011), and the predictive characteristics of becoming a straight-ally (Fingerhut, 2011). Although the existing literature on straight-allies does provide some understanding about this particular group, it has not provided information on how this group negotiates perceived dichotomous identities within their lives.

Development of a straight-ally identity. Much of the existing literature on straight-allies has focused on the development of affirming attitudes toward GLTBQ individuals. This includes the ways that individuals become straight-allies (Ambuske, 2010; Duhigg, 2010; Eichler, 2007), the features of forming affirmative attitudes towards GLBTQ individuals (Stotzer, 2009), and the ways that individuals perceive and understand this identity (Broido, 2000). Although much of this research is qualitative in

nature, and has relied only on small sample sizes at University campuses, this work has broadened our understanding about the ways that individuals become allies, and the way that individuals perceive their straight-ally identities.

Research related to the way that individuals develop into straight-allies reveal commonalities among advocates for the GLBTQ community. For instance, in Duhigg et al.'s (2010) qualitative exploration regarding straight-ally identity development, six themes were found among a community sample of 12 heterosexually identified participants. Themes included early family modeling, the response and recognition of oppression and privilege, and the impact of values and attitudes. In addition, the reactions to ally work from others, and the rewards from ally work impacted the development of these research participants.

Similar to Duhigg's (2010) findings that value and attitude formation impacted straight-ally development, Ambuske (2010) also found that early life experiences, such as one's values, family, and religion impacted straight-ally development in college students. For instance, research participants shared that values, family, religion, and interactions with GLB-individuals prior to coming to college influenced their straight-ally identities. In particular, positive parental guidance regarding equality for all persons, and valuing equality for all seemed to impact participants. In addition, seeing injustice towards GLBT individuals in high school also influenced later ally development. Participants also discussed having an "open-mind" (p. 27) towards differences in individuals. Religion was also stated as an influential factor in straight-ally development. Specifically, three participants discussed feeling that "their religious beliefs fit coherently with their ally identity (p. 28). One participant who identified as Catholic discussed negotiating between

what the bible and his church said about homosexuality. He stated that, “the odd thing is that we’re Catholic, which I know that they look at stuff like that they’re like, ‘Oh no, the bible says no!’ but...we were basically just told, treat everyone else as you would like to be treated...it was the biggest factor in my acceptance towards homosexuality” (p. 28). Another participant echoed this viewpoint in her own discussion about her religion and ally identity in that her personal views on equality outweighed what her church told her to believe (p. 28). In another interview, a participant shared that although she feels conflict between her religion and ally identity, that it “doesn’t bother me that much” (p. 28). In addition, a separate interviewee discussed learning that she had to show independence in what she learns at church and her ally-behaviors. Further, one participant discussed feeling that “God loves everybody” and as long as others accepted Jesus, that they would go to Heaven regardless of their sexual orientation.

In addition to addressing the impact that religion and other values may play on straight-ally development, Ambuske (2010) also found that both positive and negative interactions with GLBT individuals played a role in their attainment of a straight-ally identity. Positive interactions involved having direct, positive contact with GLBT-identifying individuals and negative interactions involved facing negative attitudes or prejudice towards GLBT individuals from other heterosexual individuals. The importance of positive experiences and facing other’s negative views toward GLBT individuals was also found to be important to ally-development in a study conducted by Eichler (2007). In addition to realizing and witnessing oppression of GLBT people (including confronting others about actions or language) and developing personal relationships with GLBT people, he also found that reflecting on attitudes in the past, being called into action, and

developing and maintaining a personal identity helped participants become straight-allies.

Research related to straight-ally identity development has focused on understanding the ways in which individuals develop into straight-allies over their lifetime, but has also been conducted to understand the ways that individuals perceive their straight-ally development. For instance, Broido (2000) completed a qualitative study that found that participants perceived their development of an ally identity by acquiring information related to social justice issues, which included the impact and existence of oppression and target group member experiences. Target group member experiences involved having direct contact with out-group individuals. Another way that participants acquired information related to social justice issues was in understanding different perspectives on social justice issues, information related to the benefits of diversity, and the importance of action. In gathering information about different aspects related to oppression, individuals utilized meaning making strategies to transform their knowledge to action. In addition to these factors, social-justice allies reported that transforming the information that they received about social justice topics transferred into meaning-making, and therefore action, for this group (Broido, 2000).

Straight-ally Predictive Characteristics. Psychological research regarding the predictive characteristics of individuals who identify as a straight-ally is underdeveloped; however, there is some information available regarding this vital area of study. Fingerhut (2011) examined the predictive characteristics that may compel an individual to become a straight-ally. In his study he found that women in comparison to men, with more education, and personal contacts in the GLBTQ community were more likely to become straight-allies. Although he had hypothesized that empathy and perspective-taking would

impact straight-ally identification, he found that these traits were not found to be associated with straight-ally behaviors.

Straight-ally motivation. In addition to research looking at the ways in which individuals develop into a straight-ally, some studies have examined the motivations behind this identity. For instance, Altmeyer (1981) found that multiple features have been found to determine attitudes, such as low level right wing authoritarianism (Altmeyer, 1981) and low needs for social dominance (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Bertram, 1994). Personally knowing an individual who identifies as GLBTQ has also correlated with positive attitudes toward the GLBTQ community overall which translates into motivation to act on behalf of this group (Altmeyer, 1981). Additionally, Altmeyer (1981) found that heterosexual individuals who came into contact with others who discriminated against or “bashed” GLBTQ individuals experienced a “boomerang” effect which increased individual’s positive attitudes towards GLBTQ people, and motivation to serve this group.

In addition to research finding that individuals become motivated to work on behalf of GLBTQ individuals through direct contact and empathy for discrimination, other research has found additional motivating factors for straight-allies. For instance, Russell (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore the motivations of straight-allies and found 12 themes in her work. They included motives based on fundamental principles, which included justice, civil rights, patriotism, religious beliefs, moral principles, and “spending” privileges, which included the recognition of heterosexual privilege. In addition, she found themes based on personal roles, relationships and experiences. These included professional roles, family and other relationships, sharing riches of marriage,

getting closure from experiences, and transforming guilt through action.

As this literature has shown, individuals who identify as a straight-ally are motivated by social justice, tend to have experiences with GLBTQ individuals, and hold affirming values. Although the existing developmental research regarding straight-allies is important, many of the studies outlined utilized small samples of ally-nominated individuals. Few, if any, have looked more specifically at individuals who may have developed into a straight-ally later in life without pre-existing positive attitudes and affirmations toward this group. Also, few studies have noted the complexity of developing a straight-ally identity in the midst of identifying as a conservative Christian.

Conservative Christians

It has been reported that conservative Christians make up one-third of Americans today, and 51% of these individuals live in a Southern state (Greeley & Hout, 2006). Eighty-nine percent of conservative Christians are Caucasian in comparison to 92% of Mainline Protestants (such as Episcopalian or Methodist Protestants), which is considered to be a more liberal category of churches (Greeley & Hout, 2006). Christianity does not necessarily relate to politics in that not all conservative Christians are Republican, however 7% more conservative Christians vote Republican in comparison to Mainline Protestants (Greeley & Hout, 2006). In addition to voting records, conservative Christians are more likely to reject abortion rights in comparison to other Americans, and 14% of conservative Christians oppose abortion in all circumstances. However, 22% of conservative Christians are pro-choice, illustrating that conservative and liberal Christians do not necessarily fit into black and white categories (Greeley & Hout, 2006).

In order to establish a greater understanding of individuals who identify as

conservative Christians, Greeley and Hout (2006) utilized data from the General Social Survey (GSS) which is a “broad-ranging inventory of behaviors and attitudes conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago since 1972” (Greeley & Hout, 2006, p. 5). For this research, a representative U.S. sample is acquired and participants complete both a 75-minute face-to-face interview and a 20-minute questionnaire. Greeley and Hout’s (2006) utilized the GSS in their work and distinguished conservative denominations as including the following denominations: Southern Baptist, Other Baptist, Missouri or Wisconsin Synod Lutheran, Churches of God, Pentecostal, Christian Scientist, Church of Christ, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Latter Day Saints – Mormons. Individuals belonging to the above listed Christian denominations are thought to adhere to more strict biblical traditions (Greeley & Hout, 2006). On an individual basis, as opposed to denominational basis, conservative Christians adhere to the following beliefs: 1) The Bible is the sole rule of faith and is inspired word-by-word from God; 2) An experience of being “born again” is integral to Christian faith; and 3) It is important to lead others to Jesus. Although these three tenets are thought to fully encompass conservative Christianity, not all conservative Christians identify with all three beliefs (Greeley & Hout, 2006).

In addition to helping define conservative Christianity, Greeley and Hout (2006) also found information about conservative Christian beliefs and values in the General Social Survey. They found that conservative Christians are more likely to oppose abortion, and denounce homosexual acts in comparison to more Mainline, or liberal Christians. In their research, Greeley and Hout (2006) found that 77% of Conservative Protestants think that GLBTQ individuals choose to be gay, but that there has been a significant decline in

opposition to homosexual sex in conservative denominations. Although it is hopeful that there has been a decline in the opposition of same-sex love in conservative denominations, it seems that these individuals are only at the beginning of fully accepting equal rights for GLTBQ-identifying individuals.

Literature Related to Conservative Christianity

Literature on Christians in psychological research has focused both on denominational and ideological differences (Finlay & Walters, 2005), including how fundamentalist Christians differ from liberal-minded Christians (Streyffeler & McNally, 1997), attendance rates and falling numbers within the church (Duin, 2009) and personality characteristics of Christian individuals (Streyffeler & McNally, 1997). In addition, the correlation between religiosity homophobia has been a focus of this research (Finlay & Walter, 2003; Rosik, Griffith, & Cruz, 2007; Wilkinson, 2004).

Literature related to denominational and ideological differences in Christian churches have echoed Greeley and Hout's (2006) findings that Christian churches have been largely unsupportive of individuals who identify as GLBTQ. For instance, Finlay and Walther (2003) stated "with few exceptions, Christian religious institutions have been unsupportive of gay men, lesbians, and bisexual persons within or outside the churches" (p. 370). They also described differing stances on homosexuality for each denomination and described the pro-GLBTQ-rights movement as being largely between gay individuals and the Christian right. In addition, Finlay and Walther (2003) looked at the relationship between religious affiliation and service attendance on homophobic attitudes in college students and found that individuals who had contact with GLBTQ-identifying individuals had lower levels of homophobia in comparison to individuals who

identified as Christian and went to church. Also, men were found to be less supportive of GLBTQ individuals than women in their research sample.

In addition to research that identifies a relationship between religious affiliation and service attendance, other research has explored the differences in personality characteristics of both conservative and liberal Christians. In their study, Streyffeler and McNally (1998) gave both liberal and conservative Christian participants the NEO-Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) in order to explore the dimensions of neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion. Results indicated that both liberal and conservative Christians scored similarly on all of the personality dimensions but that conservative Christians scored lower on the dimension of openness to experience. Streyffeler and McNally suggest with their research that there may be a connection between conservative religious beliefs and avoidance of new experiences.

Being less open to new experience is associated with intellectual rigidity which is the primary source of prejudicial attitude formation (Cullen, Wright, & Alessandri, 2002). Individuals with rigid thinking, or closed cognitive structures, have a hard time accepting ideas or people who stray from the norm and have been significantly related to one's expressed level of homophobia (Cullen et al., 2002). In addition to this finding, which connects low levels of openness to homophobia, other research studies have explored the relationship between homophobia and conservative Christianity. For example, Finlay and Walter (2003) conducted a quantitative study in which gender, number and type of relationships, ethnicity, and religious affiliation and attendance were explored. They found that individuals who attended church more frequently were more likely to be homophobic. Additionally, Caucasian participants scored higher on measures

of homophobia. However, they found that the strongest predictor of positive beliefs and attitudes toward GLBTQ individuals' was direct contact with GLBTQ identifying individuals.

Rosik et al. (2007) also measured the relationship between Christianity and homophobia and found that there is a complex relationship between religion and anti-gay thoughts and behaviors. In their study they found that individuals who make a distinction between the person and same-sex behaviors (e.g., individuals were found to separate the GLBT individual from their sexual behavior), were more likely to hold negative views toward lesbian women, but more positive attitudes toward gay men. These results suggest that there is a relationship between religiosity and homophobia, but that it is quite complex. For instance, conservative Christians were found to be more affirming towards celibate gay men and women in comparison to sexually-active gay men and women. Yet, participants also had modest affirmations towards GLB civil rights.

In addition to noting that the relationship between conservative Christianity and homophobia may be nuanced, Wilkinson's (2004) study measured research participants on authoritarianism, religiosity, and a multidimensional measure of homophobia which assessed social contact apprehension, morality beliefs, civil rights attitudes, and stereotypic beliefs about gay and lesbians. Results indicated that right wing authoritarianism (RWA) was related to homophobia. In addition, individuals with low levels of intrinsic religiosity and orthodoxy with high extrinsic and immanence tendencies (which involves maintaining religion-based boundaries, reactions to perceived threats against one's values, and idolizing the past over the present) were associated with intolerant attitudes toward gay rights.

Although some research has shown that conservative Christians may be more likely to hold homophobic views, other research has shown a change in viewpoints toward same-sex behaviors. For instance, in speaking with young conservative Christians, Chamberlain (2009) discussed the complex issue of support for GLBTQ individuals in the church today. It seems that younger conservative Christians are moving toward a more open and affirming stance toward GLTBQ-identifying individuals and that, although in general Evangelicals oppose same-sex marriage, those who are younger within the church are twice as likely to support gay marriage in comparison to church elders. There is also some evidence that suggests that the issue of gay rights and acceptance may even be pushing some young conservative Christians out of the church (Duin 2009).

Although there has been a lot of research conducted regarding Christianity and homophobia, it has principally shown that this relationship is complex. Rather than illuminate the complexity of fundamentalist Christians on the individual level as opposed to the denominational level, previous literature has focused on broad generalizations of this group. In generalizing, literature has failed to appreciate the ways that individuals who identify as conservative Christians may differ in their views from each other and from their churches overall (Rosik et al., 2007). In addition, little is known about the development and identity of conservative Christians, and particularly the negotiation of conservative Christians who ascribe to dual identities – for instance, straight ally and conservative Christian identities.

Individuals are thought to acquire multiple identities throughout their lifetime, but the way in which individuals negotiate identities, especially when they may be

conflicting, or dichotomous, is less known. In order to explore the experiences and negotiations of individuals who identify as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian, qualitative methodology was used. This was so the messy and complex realities of individuals going through this process could be illuminated. The epistemology surrounding this project was subjectivist and utilizes queer theory in order to challenge the existing categorizations and rigidity of identity models. Narrative inquiry including unstructured interview techniques was used. The following research questions will guide this narrative inquiry.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified conservative Christian?
2. What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified straight-ally?
3. Are these identities dichotomous and if so, how do participants negotiate competing discourses of values between dichotomous identities?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Individuals who identify as both a straight-ally and a conservative Christian offer a new avenue of research related to dichotomous identity development. As such, this project helps to further understand the experiences and negotiations of individuals who identify as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian with utilization of queer theory and qualitative research methodology. This chapter intends to first outline the current historical, political, and local context of both straight-allies and conservative Christians (as little research looks at both perceived dichotomous identities at once) with a focus on the intersection and tensions that these individuals may face. Further, a more fully detailed literature review of the research related to straight-allies and conservative Christians will be described and shown through a queer theory lens.

Context

As stated previously, context is integral in understanding identity development and negotiation of individuals who identify as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian. The history of the mid-south in regards to out-group activism, the current political climate, and the local context of the mid-south offer a unique intersection of tensions, values, and perspectives which affect the way individuals come to a negotiation of two seemingly dichotomous identities. In addition, these factors impact the way these identities are understood within the self and are communicated to the world.

Historical Perspective of Straight-Allies

It is difficult to discuss the history of straight-allies in the United States because little is known about the origins of these activists. However, because straight-allies and GLBTQ-identifying individuals are integrally tied together, a historical account of

straight-allies can be gleaned by understanding more about the history of GLTBQ individuals.

Foucault (1978) has stated that the definition of the homosexual brought forth the ostracism of GLBTQ individuals. He stated that although gay individuals have existed since the beginning of man (Foucault, 1978), that the “homosexual” was defined around the year 1870. That definition changed sexuality as we know it and has had implications since (Foucault, 1978). Prior to the year 1870, “homosexuality” was characterized “less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself” (Foucault, 1978, p. 30). Once homosexuality became defined as something stable and innate, as opposed to fluid and behavioral, a binary between heterosexuals and homosexuals was created. Through this binary heterosexuals found power over homosexuals because of propaganda related to the sexual dysfunction and mental illness that went along with same-sex love. This binary has had consequences and implications to all individuals which are still enforced today in that heterosexual individuals pass legislation that directly impacts the freedom and rights of GLBTQ-identifying individuals, which is merely based on their same-sex attraction and behavior.

One way that the binary of heterosexuality versus homosexuality has been marked through history is through fear and violence. For instance, during the 1950s Joseph McCarthy attempted to root out homosexuals because they were thought to be unstable and individuals who were thought to be gay were blacklisted from society (Abelove, Barale, Halperin, 1993). Later in the 1960s the Stonewall riots occurred in NYC which showcased the violence and contention within society at that time towards individuals

who identified as GLBTQ. In addition, the DSM's decision to include "homosexuality" as a mental disorder had clear implications for GLBTQ individuals as well (Silverstein, 2009).

Yet, despite the turmoil of the past, the 1970s and 1980s brought forth support for GLBTQ individuals as well. For instance, Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) was founded in 1972 when Jeanne Manford marched with her gay son Morty in the precursor to the Pride parade (PFLAG, 2012). More support came in 1998 when the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) was formed to support GLTBQ identifying students in the public school system within the United States. These early organizations and supportive people represent the earliest signs of straight-allies advocating for the rights of GLTBQ identifying individuals.

National and Local Political Context for GLBTQ-Identifying Individuals

Although current legislation has not been created that addresses straight-allies in particular, there has been great political focus on the fate of GLBTQ rights. As straight-allies work towards equality and affirmation for GLBTQ-individuals, the political climate as it relates to GLBTQ rights is important in understanding the context of individuals who identify as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian. For instance, on the national level, President Obama recently repealed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" act that barred military personnel from outwardly expressing their sexual orientation (Bumiller, 2011). President Obama also recently became the first sitting-president to openly express support of gay marriage (Madhani, Toppo, Jackson, & Kucinish, 2012). On the state level, 17 states currently recognize same-sex marriage yet 12 states have constitutionally instituted a statute that bans same-sex marriage (CNN, 2012; HRC, 2014). State-by-state

disagreement can also be found in simpler matters regarding political equality and equal treatment around the country. For instance, different states have varying and polarizing views in regards to housing rights, employment protection, hospital and medical equality, and hate crime laws for GLBTQ-identifying individuals (CNN, 2012).

Tennessee in particular is largely on the side of unequal protection for this group (Strasser, 2012). The most recent example of this has been the “Don’t Say Gay” bill which was introduced to the state senate in May 2011 which sought to ban educational material regarding homosexuality or homosexuals in public schools up until grade nine. In 2012, the bill was passed from the senate into the house and is currently at a standstill with help from Tennessee governor Bill Haslam. Despite Tennessee’s contrary positions related to GLBTQ rights, there are indications of some positive changes as well.

The state of Tennessee, and in particular, the city of Memphis, offers some hope for GLBTQ individuals and rights. For instance, although Memphis is situated within the mid-south, which is generally thought to be less progressive towards gay rights (Finlay & Walther, 2003), it still has managed to host one of the only southern community centers for GLBT individuals. The Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center (MGLCC) is a community center which seeks to “empower, educate, and advocate for the LGBT community in the mid-south” (MGLCC, 2012) and offers counseling services, outreach, and other forms of assistance and support. In addition to this support network, Memphis as a city also boasts a number of Open and Affirming (ONA) congregations, which are supportive of GLBTQ individuals within their religious community and utilize social justice activism within the city. These congregations offer religious options for GLBTQ individuals throughout the city and offer support groups, Pride activism and more. These

denominations are made up of both GLBTQ individuals who work towards equality within the city of Memphis and state of Tennessee but also individuals who are not directly affected by unequal status, such as straight-allies.

Historical Perspective of Conservative Christians

Whereas the historical perspective of straight-allies is somewhat foggy, the historical context of conservative Christians' as it relates to gay rights is much more vast and deep. Conservative Christians have historically been antagonistic toward gay individuals and of gay rights (Finlay & Walther, 2003). This past includes the support of legislation that negatively effects individuals who identify as GLBTQ, attempts to change, or "repair" gay individuals from their damned "lifestyle", and speaking out against any kind of support or acceptance of gay people (Price, 2012).

Although the current research intends to explore the experiences of conservative Christians who do support GLBTQ individuals, the case could be made that much of the anti-gay movement is religiously motivated at its core (Finlay & Walther, 2003). In particular the "Christian view of morality" (Haeberle, 1991, p. 73), which is based on interpretations of the Bible that denounce homosexuality as a sin worthy of an eternity in hell, is a major source of the negativity and bias expressed towards GLBT individuals. It may be that some conservative Christians feel that if they do not go out of their way to denounce the "gay lifestyle", they too will be guilty of sin.

One way that the Christian view of morality can be seen contextually today is in exploring the GLBTQ stances that some Christian denominations have taken. For instance, there are some denominations that go out of their way to make statements that either support or disaffirm the inclusion of gay congregants, and also to either support or

deny support to gay-rights causes, such as marital rights. For instance, in 1972 the United Methodist Church adopted an anti-homosexual statement that required “that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any ‘gay’ caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality” (Finlay & Walther, 2003). In May of 2012 this same church voted at their annual conference to deny support to same-sex marriage. In addition, the Catholic Church has condemned homosexual behavior, but makes a distinction between behavior and orientation, thus utilizing the popular “love the sinner, not the sin” proverb that many churches utilize (Burris & Jackson, 1999). More traditionally perceived conservative churches such as the Southern Baptist Church and many other Protestant sects also have made statements denouncing homosexuality as “immoral” (Finlay & Walther, 2003) Yet, other churches, including the Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and United Church of Christ denominations outwardly support GLBTQ individuals and some even place openly-gay clergy members in the pulpit (Finlay & Walther, 2003).

Intersectionality between Straight-Ally and Conservative Christian Context.

The intersection of history, and national and local politics is messy, complex and impactful for individuals in Memphis, TN (as well as other places in the United States and beyond) who identify as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian. Yet, it is within this intersection that individuals come to both seemingly dichotomous identities. Although it is clear that the historical context and power dynamics between heterosexual and GLBTQ-identifying individuals has propelled some straight-allies into action, and that the differing denominational standings may also impact some conservative Christians’ ability to advocate for GLBTQ individuals, it is less clear how individuals

negotiate and walk the line between their faith and activism. Therefore, a more in-depth literature review will be provided related to straight-allies and conservative Christians in order to explore the ways that individuals come to form, negotiate and understand a straight-ally conservative Christian identity.

Research related to straight-allies has mostly focused on how individuals develop straight-ally identities but has also looked at the predictive characteristics, and the underlying motivations of becoming a straight-ally. Although the current study was interested in the ways that individuals who identify as both a straight-ally and conservative Christian negotiate these two seemingly dichotomous identities, there had been little previous research that explored this intersection prior to this study. As such, the body of research related to both identities separately informed this research project. Although the bulk of this research is related to GLBTQ individuals, the studies vary in the inclusion or exclusion to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals. Therefore, this literature review will designate per study what sexual orientations were included.

Early experiences, parental messages, and direct contact. One of the most consistent themes found in research related to straight-allies is that individuals who identify themselves as a straight-ally have felt impacted by their early experiences and parental messages. For example, Ambuske (2010) examined the development of straight-allies in heterosexual college students through a grounded theory qualitative study and found that pre-college factors and early life experiences were important to her participants. For this study, individuals were recruited through snowball sampling and through the university's student-run pride volunteer organization at a mid-sized

Midwestern university. In order to participate, individuals had to be of traditional college-age and enrolled at the university, and had to self-identify as a straight-ally. Five participants were successfully recruited, 3 of which were female, and 2 men between the ages of 19-22. The ethnicity, race, or cultural background of participants was not reported. Three participants were student athletes and 1 worked as a resident assistant on campus. All interviews were 60 minutes in length and were recorded and transcribed in full. Interviews were guided by 5 research questions and interviews were examined using grounded theory techniques such as constant comparison, which uses “induction, deduction, and verification to develop theory” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 110). Research participants shared that values, family, religion, and interactions with GLB-individuals prior to coming to college influenced their straight-ally identities. In addition, positive parental guidance regarding equality for all persons, and valuing equality for all seemed to impact participants.

Early experiences were also found to be important on the development of affirmative attitudes toward GLBTQ individuals in a study conducted by Stotzer (2009). Stotzer (2009) conducted a mixed method study in which participants were recruited from a public Midwestern state university. In order to participate, individuals had to identify as heterosexual, indicate that they had accepting and open attitudes towards gay men, and have never had a same-sex relationship encounter. In order to be considered appropriate for this study, potential participants completed Herek’s (1994) Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men, Gay men Subscale (ATLG), and completed a 5-item questionnaire which measured participants for open and affirming stances toward gay men. Sixty-six participants met the research criteria and were then invited to complete a

semi-structured individual interview. Interviews included questions regarding their views on homosexuality, primary influences about their feelings toward homosexuality (for example: “can you think of any specific instances when you were introduced to the idea of homosexuality?”), and about formative experiences that reinforced their affirming stances towards homosexuality. Constant comparison was used to code data and to make themes. Inter-rater reliability was found to be high ($\alpha = .96$).

Stotzer organized his themes related to affirmative attitude development into three different main categories: clarification of attitudes, attitude formation of normalization, which included parental influence, exposure to LGB adults, and popular culture exposure, and the centering and revolutionizing attitudes of empathy and resistance. The first, normalization, came from experiences in their childhood that helped them realize that being gay was “no big deal” (p. 72). Although participants acknowledged that same-sex couples were “unusual”, as in “not the norm” (p. 72), they also felt that it was not abnormal. Parental influence, including indirect messages about feeling positively towards same-sex marriage, was endorsed by 58.8% of participants. Participant’s parents were found to have one of four parent communication about gay-rights including 32.3% who had openly supportive, 26.5% who had open-minded parents, 5.8% had parents who were silent on the issue of gay-rights, and 14.7% who had parents who were openly disapproving of GLBTQ rights. Although few parents were found to have been openly unsupportive towards GLBTQ individuals, it seems that even when parents were disapproving, participants still became affirming of gay individuals.

In addition to parental influence, exposure to LGB adults also helped normalize this population to participants. For instance, 55.8% of respondents acknowledged having

known a LGB adult in their childhood (friends, teachers, relatives, etc.), and 36.7% knew an LGB adult (14.7% knew two LGB adults, and 4.4% knew three or more). Stotzer (2009) found that men and women in his sample were equally distributed in having had a LGB contact in their life but there were some gender differences. For instance, 15.6% of female participants knew an LBG adult as a friend of their parents, whereas only 1 male (5.5%) had had that experience. In addition, 44.1% of participants did not know any LBG individuals growing up. Popular culture was cited as a normalizing factor for participants in regards to LGB individuals, including television shows, Broadway shows, and types of music. Some participants stated that while they had exposure to LGB individuals through the media, that sometimes it was more so as a “joke”. For instance, one participant stated that he “didn’t see it as anything more than a joke on television” and that it was not until a friend came out as gay to him that he realized that people really were gay (p. 73).

This study shows the overlap that individuals sometimes have between early life experiences and in having direct contact with GLBTQ individuals. It also shows how early experiences help inform participant’s own values. Duhigg et al. (2010) also explored straight-ally development and found importance in early family life experiences. This qualitative study utilized consensual qualitative research methods to analyze structured 45-minute interviews. Participants were recruited through a nomination process that solicited recommendations from LGBT organizations to find heterosexual activists who were well known in the community. In order to participate, potential respondents had to self-identify as heterosexual, be 25 or older, and had to have participated in advocacy for the LGBT community within the prior year. The age limit was enacted in order to ensure that participants had a “minimum level of adult

experience” (p. 4) from which to draw straight-ally identities and activist relationships. Twelve participants were found to meet all research criteria (7 female, 5 male). They ranged in age from 28-74, with a median age of 53.5 and the majority ($n = 9$) were Caucasian, with 2 participants identifying as biracial, and 1 as Southeast Asian. The majority of the sample ($n = 9$) was married, and 8 participants considered themselves to be religious or spiritual but no further questions were asked about this domain. This sample was also well educated (2 had college degrees, 2 had some graduate school, 5 had master’s degrees, and 3 had doctoral degrees).

All participants were given interview questions in advance of a 45-minute interview and all interviews were taped and fully transcribed. A team of graduate students and a faculty member coded all transcripts into domains (themes) and subcategories (core ideas) and then labeled domains and subcategories into three categories based on their occurrence across interviews. For instance, themes were labeled “general” when they occurred in all transcripts, “typical” when they occurred in half or more, and “variant” when they occurred in less than half of interviews. Six domains were established from this process and each domain had 2 to 6 subcategories.

Results indicated that family modeling was influential in developing affirmative attitudes toward LGBT individuals. For example, some individuals shared positive and some negative examples of parents’ modeling in their upbringing. One participant shared that her father had been active in the Civil Rights movement which helped form an affirmative attitude toward LGB individuals. In contrast, one individual shared that their father was homophobic but that the negative view that he had received influenced positive feelings toward LGBT individuals because it increased their awareness of

differences in social identities and judgments about those differences. Both positive and negative early family modeling was deemed as typical across participants.

Values. In addition to the importance that many studies have highlighted regarding early experiences, parental messages, and direct contact with GLBTQ individuals, personal values including those of social justice have been identified in research related to straight-allies. For instance, in a study conducted by Russell (2011) 127 heterosexual individuals were recruited who were active in the equality movement for GLBTQ individuals. Russell found participants by contacting people who had a media presence and who were publically visible. For instance, one participant was found because they were in an article about GLBTQ marriage equality. Her research took place over a period of 17 years and involved 1-3 hour interviews. Her sample was comprised of United States citizens, who mostly lived in Colorado, Massachusetts, Oregon, or Utah. Participants ranged in age from 15-82 with a mean age of 42. Eighty-two percent of her participants were White, and 17.5% of participants identified as a “person of color” (5.5% African-American, 4.6% Latino, 1.8% Asian, 0.92% American Indian, 4.6% biracial). Sixty percent of her participants were female. In regards to religiosity, 33.9% of participants indicated that they were not affiliated with a religion, 33.9% were Mormon, 3.9% were Jewish, and Christians made up 3.9%, Protestants 3.9%, and United Methodists were 3.9% of the sample. She found that of her sample 2.4 % were Buddhist, 2.4% were Catholics, 2.4% were Humanists, 2.4% were Pagan, and the United Church of Christ also accounted for 2.4%. Results indicated that some participants became straight-allies because they wanted GLBTQ individuals to “share in the riches of marriage”. For instance, some individuals discussed their happiness in being married and wanted others

to enjoy the same role in their life. Russell indicated that this theme was not necessarily directly stated as a motivation for ally work but that it was discussed as a personal value of participants that they wanted to share with others.

In addition to Russell's finding that some individuals were motivated to become a straight-ally because they wanted GLBTQ individuals to be able to experience the joys of marriage, other research has found that some individuals were motivated to become a straight-ally because of their value of social justice. For example, Stotzer (2009) had some participants express their social justice reasoning for their affirming attitudes toward GLBTQ individuals. She found that 15.2% expressed support due to their beliefs about personal freedom, and 9% discussed social justice in terms of human rights. Although not directly asked, 16.6% of respondents noted that they felt that same-sex attraction was innate, 10.6% suggested that it was a choice, and 6.1% stated that they felt that same-sex attraction was normal.

Religion. Although not a value, religion was also cited in research related to straight-ally development. For example, in a study conducted by Ambuske (2010) religion was stated as an influential factor in straight-ally development for some of her participants. Specifically, three participants discussed feeling that "their religious beliefs fit coherently with their ally identity (p. 28). One participant who identified as Catholic discussed negotiating between what the bible and his church said about homosexuality. He stated that, "the odd thing is that we're Catholic, which I know that they look at stuff like that they're like, 'Oh no, the bible says no!' but...we were basically just told, treat everyone else as you would like to be treated...it was the biggest factor in my acceptance towards homosexuality" (p. 28). Another participant echoed this viewpoint in her own

discussion about her religion and ally identity in that her personal views on equality outweighed what her church told her to believe (p. 28). In another interview, a participant shared that although she feels conflict between her religion and ally identity, that it “doesn’t bother me that much” (p. 28). In addition, a separate interviewee discussed learning that she should show independence in what she learns at church and her ally-behaviors. Further, one participant discussed feeling that “God loves everybody” and as long as others accepted Jesus, that they would go to Heaven regardless of their sexual orientation.

Religion was also found to be a motivational force for allies in a study conducted by Russell (2011). For example, Russell (2010) found that a number of her participants “called upon their religious beliefs for their pro-LGBT activism” (Russell, 2011, pp. 384-385). For instance, one participant stated, “It’s an honor to be able to speak for – for people’s rights – for human rights, to declare for justice and to identify our faith, my faith, with the issue of justice...It’s central to the message of both Jesus and the Scriptures as a whole” (Russell, 2011, p. 385). In addition to citing religiosity as a motivating force, the theme of moral principles was also discussed amongst participants. For instance, some participants made connections between activism and moral principles without citing religion, which exemplified the fact that morality is not exclusive to religion.

Personality characteristics and demographical indicators. In addition to citing social justice values, early experiences, and research, some research has also explored the predictive characteristics which may lead some individuals into activism. For instance, Fingerhut (2011) completed a quantitative study which explored the predictive

characteristics in straight-allies. Participants were recruited through an online program through Syracuse University which selects a random sample from the United States to complete a web-based survey. Two-hundred and two individuals (121 women, 80 men, 1 unidentified gender) comprised his sample. Participant ranged in age from 18-80 ($M = 43.5$ years, $SD = 12.9$) and were predominantly Caucasian (89.5%). Three percent were African American, 3% were Asian American, 1.5% Latino/a, 1% Native American, and 2% were Biracial/Other. All participants were from the United States.

The goal of the study was to determine the role that personal connections, social attitudes, and demographic variables including gender and education played in predicting heterosexual alliance with the GLBT community. Fingerhut (2011) collected demographic variables and measures for empathy, perspective taking, attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, allophilia, and action on behalf of the LGBT community. The demographic questionnaire asked questions related to the participants gender, sexual orientation, and education level. It also included a question which asked whether they had “any close friends who are gay/lesbian/bisexual” (p. 2238). Descriptive statistics indicated that 5% of individuals had donated time to an LGBT cause, 7% had donated money, 8% had attended a gay rights event, 12% had signed a same-sex marriage petition, 14% had discussed the promotion of LGBT rights with others with 23% indicating that they had initiated such discussions, and 30% had engaged in a behavior that served the LGBT community. The demographic variables were found to account for a significant amount of the variance in allied behaviors of participants. Women were found more likely to be allies in comparison to men. In addition to demographic variables accounting for allied behaviors, having a personal connection with GLBT individuals

also accounted for a significant amount of variance in predicting ally behaviors. Although empathy and perspective taking was hypothesized to be associated with ally behaviors, neither construct proved to significantly account for variance. Fingerhut also found that low indices of allophilia and prejudice were unassociated with allied behaviors, but that individuals with high indices of allophilia and low measures of prejudice were more likely to participate in straight-ally behaviors. Although it was surprising to learn that empathy and perspective taking did not influence participant's ally behavior, other indices, such as having personal connections with GLBTQ individuals, match previous research on this topic.

Recognizing heterosexual privilege and understanding heterosexual sexual identity. One factor that has been related to straight-ally development is research on the recognition of heterosexual privilege and heterosexual sexual identity in participants. For instance, Ambuske (2010) was first interested in the ways that straight-allies became conscious of their own identity as a heterosexual, which prompted participants to consider their own sexual orientation development and identity. Most participants shared that they had “never thought about” (p. 21) their sexuality but one participant shared that she had been in a brief relationship with someone of the same gender, although she did not consider herself to be bisexual. Most participants shared that they learned that some individuals were attracted to their same sex through the media.

In addition to Ambuske's findings that heterosexual sexual identity and privilege informed straight-ally development in participants, Eichler (2007) noted that self-reflection in these areas were important. Eichler (2007) utilized qualitative methodology in order to learn more about the experience of becoming a straight-ally. This study used

hermeneutic phenomenology, which seeks to understand the lived experiences of participants. Participants were recruited using a nominated sampling technique which included making contact with activism organizations for GLBTQ equality, and a local Protestant church known to be affirming. Participants were intentionally selected in order to form a diverse pool in regards to age, sex, marital/familial status, and socioeconomic status. Three participants took part in 45 minute interviews which were all transcribed fully. The first participant was a 20-year old single man involved in GLBT activism through his protestant church, the second was a single middle-age woman, and the third was a retired psychologist who had specialized in working with GLBT individuals in her practice. Eichler utilized an interview guide with all three participants and found six themes in his work. Through his interviews he found that when participants shared experiences of seeing oppression and felt that it was unfair, that participants understood their heterosexual privilege and were propelled into action. Participants in this study also discussed their realization that they may have once felt negatively toward GLBT people. For instance, one participant shared that he had not wanted an openly gay male as his roommate. Another participant shared that they had not realized that some groups or individuals felt negatively toward GLBT identifying individuals.

Self-realization around heterosexual privilege was also found to be fundamental to straight-ally development in a study conducted by Russell in 2011. She found that participants discussed “spending heterosexual privilege” (p. 385) which involved understanding their privilege as a heterosexual person and paying that back by being active for the gay community. In this theme, participants also discussed some of the risk involved in being a straight-ally. For instance, one participant, a minister, stated that,

“while there’s always risk in taking stands of any kind, my being married certainly reduced the risk of my being branded as gay and, therefore, unordainable, which is a condition in the Methodist church right now” (p. 385).

In addition to assessing the risks of being a straight-ally, participants in a study conducted by Duhigg et al. (2010) noted that a deeper understanding about the risks associated with being gay was influential in their heterosexual activism. Researchers reported that all 12 participants described this recognition as influential to their heterosexual activism. Eleven participants recognized that LGBT individuals experienced oppression because of their sexual orientation, 10 described a more general recognition of oppression in other groups, 8 recognized oppression in their own lives based on their gender, religion, ethnicity, or disability, and 3 discussed privilege that heterosexuals have over LGBT individuals. Duhigg et al. (2010) stated that this theme in particular was essential to their participants’ ally development and that the recognition of their own privilege led to a deeper understanding of self and others.

In addition to understanding heterosexual privilege, Duhigg (2010) also found that participants responded directly to their new-found knowledge. For instance, in his study the third major theme was the response to recognition of privilege that participants experienced. For example, all respondents reported a range of emotions about their privileged status including feelings of sorrow, anger, and guilt. For some, the recognition of privilege translated into action to protest injustice for LGBT individuals. One participant stated that, “I got dealt a hand where I’ve got some opportunities to make a difference that perhaps I wouldn’t have... if I were not heterosexual” (p. 7). Five of the 12 participants also talked about the behavioral reactions that followed their recognition

of privilege. For example, one discussed living in New York City in the 1980s following the AIDS crisis and how that impacted her to act as a straight-ally.

Called to action. Research related to straight-ally development has found that individuals may take the information they have gained about heterosexual privilege and discrimination towards GLBTQ individuals and transform that knowledge into action. For example, Eichler (2007) found that his research participants consistently shared that they felt “called to action” (p. 4) to be a straight-ally. For some participants this was “experienced after a time of reflection” and for one participant this time also coincided with his decision to go to seminary. Similarly, for some, action has also related to gaining closure on past experiences. For example, Russell (2011) found that respondents indicated that they wanted to both gain closure personally and collectively and that personal closure involved coming to terms with negative past behaviors towards GLBTQ individuals. Collective closure had to do with working towards equality because others had worked toward other groups’ equality in the past, such as during the Holocaust. Some participants indicated that they were motivated to be a straight-ally because they wanted to transform their guilt into action. For instance, some participants discussed not helping in the past when others were hurting. For example, one participant felt guilty that in high school he had not helped an African American student when he had been bullied. Anger was also listed as a motivating factor. One participant stated that “if there was anger in their voices, they got anger back from me...It’s – it’s just a very touchy subject with me. I have seen too much – too much pain cause around that to allow it to go unchanged”. This passage shows that the issue of equality for some heterosexual activists can be emotional. Russell’s (2011) study shows the complexity for some straight-allies, and

although she did not ask specifically about how religion impacts straight-ally behaviors, it is clear from this work that some straight-allies are indeed religious.

Resistance. In addition to citing empathic responses in positive attitude formation toward LGB individuals, and being called into action to be a straight-ally, resistance towards the maltreatment of LGB people also created empathy towards GLBTQ individuals (Russell, 2011). Examples included encountering homophobic individuals, hearing negative attitudes expressed by others, and seeing that some individuals change the way that they treat LGB individuals after they come out. Participants expressed that seeing resistance towards accepting LGB individuals had a positive effect on the way that they felt about LGB people.

Reactions to ally work. Once individuals have been called into action to support GLBTQ individuals, they may be reinforced from the feedback that they receive from this action, which may solidify individuals' straight-ally identities. For example, Duhigg et al. (2010) found that participants experienced both negative and positive reactions to their work as a straight-ally. Positive reactions came from friends and family members whereas some negative feedback came from their communities. For example, one participant shared her experiences with protestors who were against gay rights. Others had positive experiences within their community. For example, one participant shared that they felt supported at work for being a straight-ally and that it had been reinforcing to them. In addition to experiencing both negative reactions and feedback from their straight-ally work, participants also consistently discussed the rewards that they received from what they did on behalf of the GLTBQ community. This theme included participants discussing the benefits, namely feeling fulfilled in their ally work, the reward

of friendships and connections, and personal enjoyment.

Integration of existing identities. Of much importance to this current research study is the way in which participants have integrated their straight-ally identities into their pre-existing selves. This has been discussed using two themes in the current literature – for the first theme connections were made between an individuals’ activism and their professional job (Russell, 2011). For example, some respondents were lawyers, public relations professionals, and psychologists, all of which had been called to action by their careers. In a second example, family and other personal relationships, encapsulated the participants who were a friend, or family member of a GLBT identifying individual. For instance, some participants were involved in PFLAG, and other national organizations that elicit family support for gay rights and equality. It was in this way that straight-allies integrated their career identity with heterosexual activism. The second theme from the research in regards to identity integration was in Eichler’s (2007) study, in which straight-ally participants discussed the need to integrate their new identity into their existing sense of self. For instance, one participant talked about wanting to show others that they were indeed an activist for the GLBT community. Clearly, more information is needed to fully explore the ways that individuals integrate straight-ally identities within their pre-existing identities, and especially, how individuals do so when their pre-existing identities may be at odds with the goals of a straight-ally.

One example of a pre-existing identity that may be at odds with a straight-ally identity is when individuals identify with conservative Christianity. Research related to conservative Christianity that encompasses gay-rights has focused mostly on associations with homophobia (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Rosik, 2007; Rosik et al., 2007; Wilkinson,

2004) and has failed to report upon instances wherein conservative Christians may in fact work towards GLBTQ equality. In addition, research has reported on denominational differences as they relate to personality characteristics (Streyffeler & McNally, 1998).

Homophobia. Many research articles related to conservative Christians have focused on faith and homophobia. For example, in a study conducted by Wilkinson (2004) the relationship between authoritarianism, social contact apprehension, morality beliefs, civil rights attitudes, and stereotypic beliefs about gay and lesbian individuals were explored to better understand the religiosity-homophobia relationship. Wilkinson (2004) expected to find differences between religious orientations related to homophobia to be found. For example it was hypothesized that intrinsic religiosity would be related to morality concerns toward GLBT individuals and that there would be associations between religious beliefs and authoritarianism. One hundred and seventy-six heterosexual males and 306 heterosexual females ($n = 482$) at a mid-size Midwestern university completed a survey for course credit in an Introduction to Psychology course. Ninety seven percent of participants were Caucasian and there was a mean age of 18.88 ($SD = 1.23$). Six instruments were used including Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientations, the Quest Orientation, Immanence Orientation (looking at 3 aspects of religious thinking), Christian Beliefs, Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) Scale (belief in authoritarian tenants) and Homophobic Attitudes and Beliefs. Canonical correlational analysis was used. This process involves making sense of cross-covariance matrices. Using this analysis three “roots” were found. The first showed that low scores on authoritarian endorsement were associated with the view that gay and lesbian individuals were not immoral. The second root showed that individuals who were low in both

intrinsic and orthodox religious beliefs and high in extrinsic religiosity and immanence held more negative attitudes towards gay rights. The third root found that men with high authoritarian beliefs were more likely to view gay and lesbians stereotypically. This group also showed apprehension in contact with gays and lesbians. Results indicated that individuals who did not endorse items related to belief in authoritarian tenets were more likely to have positive attitudes and beliefs about gay people. There was also a “lack of morality” found in individuals who scored low in the RWA scale (related to authoritarian beliefs). In regards to homophobia and various forms of religiosity, a mixture of low intrinsic religiosity and orthodoxy with high extrinsic and immanence tendencies was associated with intolerant attitudes about gay people. It is concluded that there is a very complex relationship between the variables of religiosity, homophobia and authoritarianism.

In a similar study, Finlay and Walther (2003) surveyed 1,160 heterosexual undergraduate students to analyze anti-homosexual attitudes based on religious affiliation and attendance. In addition, relationships with GLB individuals, race, ethnicity and gender were explored in relation to homophobia. Religious affiliation, attendance, number of known GLB persons, and race was measured by self-report. The sample was comprised of 52% men, 67% white, and 94.9% of the sample was between the ages of 18-23. Eighty-seven percent of the sample reported a Christian religious affiliation, with the most identify as a Conservative Protestant (39%). Participants were asked to respond to questions such as “how many people do you know who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual” and were asked to categorize their responses using a likert scale. For instance, for this question, participants could choose between the categories of “none”, “1-3”, “3-

5”, etc. Researchers created an H-scale to measure homophobia which asked questions to respond to questions using the likert scale. An example of a question is, “Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are mistreated in our society”. Results indicated that religious variables had a strong relationship to homophobia with conservative Protestants having the highest scores of homophobia (followed by moderate Protestants and Catholics). Non-Christians were found to be the least homophobic. Frequency of religious attendance was also found to strongly relate to homophobic attitudes. Results also indicated that the more GLB identifying individuals a participant had contact with, the less likely they were to be homophobic. This study did not find racial differences although European Americans were more likely to be homophobic in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups.

Although race and ethnicity were not specifically measured in relation to homophobia, indices of homophobia was also explored in a study which sought to determine the degree that conservative religion and homophobia were related as measured by Herek’s (1998) Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG-R). Rosik (2007) also gave research participants the Religious Commitment Inventory in order to measure religious identity and measured intrinsic religiosity by using one item by Gorsuch and McPherson which asked about their view of the bible. Multiple regression analysis revealed the associations between homonegative attitudes and “respondents’ intrinsic religiousness, religious practice, and beliefs about the authority of the Bible were predicted only by the Condemnation-Tolerance component after accounting for gender, age, and the remaining components of the ATLG-R” (Rosik, 2007, p. 145). These results suggest that the relationship between religiosity and

homophobia are complex and require sensitivity.

A more nuanced understanding between homophobia and conservative Christianity was also reflected in the results of a study conducted by Rosik et al. (2007). This study utilized a survey for 155 undergraduate students (average age was 20.68, 73% of participants were female, and most identified as a Christian). Measures included the Sexual Orientation and Practice Scale (SOAP) which was designed to obtain a more nuanced assessment of attitudes toward sexual conduct. In addition, the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG-R) was also utilized. This scale measured heterosexual attitudes toward gay men and women. The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) was also used in order to measure one's religious commitment. In addition, demographic information was collected. Independent sample *t* tests indicated that there were no gender differences in the study and that there is a difference between the way that participants felt about celibate versus sexually-active GLB identifying individuals. These results indicate that heterosexual conservative Christians may distinguish between homosexual persons and their sexual behaviors for both gay men and lesbian women. Based on these results, it may be important to distinguish straight-ally conservative Christians' feelings toward sexually active and in-active gay men and women to more fully understand their views.

Personality characteristics. In addition to assessing the relationship between Christian faith and indices of homophobia, research has also sought to learn more about the differences in personality characteristics between "liberal" and "fundamentalist" or conservative Christians. One hundred and twenty-two Fundamentalist Christians were found at a specific Christian church called the First Federated Church. It is unclear why

this church was deemed to be fundamentalist. One hundred forty-eight Liberal Christians were found at the Plymouth Congregational Church and again, it is not clear why they were deemed to be liberal outside of their denominations. All participants completed NEO-Five-Factor Inventory and a demographic questionnaire which included questions related to participants' opinion about the role of religion in public life. Results indicated that the personality profiles of both liberal and conservative Christians were similar except that conservative Christians were less open to experience. In comparison to the NEO-FFI normative sample, both liberal and conservative Christians were found to be less neurotic and more extraverted. Although the results of this study are interesting, it is troublesome that the participants were not allowed to identify themselves as conservative or liberal and that they were not measured in any way on their religiosity.

Research related to straight-allies has provided information related to the ways that individuals develop straight-ally identities but has mostly focused on linear models that may not be representative. Similarly, research related to conservative Christians in regards to gay rights issues have solely focused on the negative attributes such as homophobia. However, some researchers have called for a more nuanced understanding of conservative Christians (Rosik, 2007). Also, straight-ally research has proved that individuals that identify as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally exist (Russell, 2011). What is not known is how these individuals negotiate these two seemingly dichotomous identities.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this queer narrative inquiry was to explore the negotiations of seemingly dichotomous identities for individuals who are both a conservative Christian and straight-ally. In order to fully grasp the unique development of this group, qualitative research methodology was utilized so that data could be fully contextualized within their individual settings. Three research questions guided the course of this study:

1. What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified conservative Christian?
2. What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified straight-ally?
3. Do these represent a dichotomous identity negotiation and if so, how do participants negotiate competing discourses of values between dichotomous identities?

Within qualitative work, the epistemology and theoretical orientation help guide the methodology and methods of research. Due to the deconstructive nature of this project, the epistemology surrounding this project was subjectivist and the theoretical perspective utilized tenets of queer theory. Narrative inquiry, including narrative interview techniques were utilized. This chapter will further explain the theoretical and contextual underpinnings of this narrative inquiry. In addition, the methodology, data collection methods, analysis, interpretation, representation, and timeline for completion will be outlined.

Queer Theory

Queer theory, which falls under the subjectivist epistemology, was used as a theoretical lens for this research. This theory was chosen because it looks at sexual orientation as fluid, shifting, and unstable (Eves, 2004) and aims to deconstruct the ways

in which sexuality is constructed, while viewing the heterosexual versus homosexual binary in terms of power relations. This lens has “suggested ways of rethinking gender and sexual identities that allow for different approaches to looking at lesbian genders and their relationship to heterosexuality” (Eves, 2004, p. 481). It views the binary of heterosexual versus homosexual as relational – meaning that homosexuality and heterosexuality are defined in relation to each other. Gender definitions are also salient within this theoretical lens because sexual orientation in our culture today is contingent on biological bases of sex.

As this study seeks to deconstruct some of these understandings, this theoretical orientation acted as a lens to view the methodology and methods of the project. As such, categorizations, and understandings related to gender and power were discussed within narrative interviews. Interviews were narrative in nature so that participants had an opportunity to distinguish their own experiences as a person who endorses conservative Christian ideals and straight-ally identification. By not categorizing on the behalf of participants, it was hoped that participants were more freely able to discuss the gray areas that they find themselves inhabiting and to freely discuss the complexities within their own individualized contexts.

In addition to the rejection of categorical values and dominant discourses related to gender, queer theory also allows for a contextualization of identity formulations and identities in individuals. This is because it does not view identity, much as it does not view sexuality, as something that is stable and unchanging. Instead, queer theory views identities as “contingent, shifting, and positioned by discursive structures rather than fixed properties of the individual.” (Eves, 2004, p. 481) It is in this way that queer theory

has been utilized within qualitative work in the past. For instance, Eves (2004) set out to “explore the ways in which lesbians negotiate and redeploy heteronormative discourses in the performance of gender in everyday life” (p. 482).

Narrative inquiry acted as the methodology for this study and is “the study of stories” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). The “storying” process is undertaken by various academic disciplines including literary criticism, history, philosophy, organizational theory, and social science” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). Narrative inquiry “gives new and deeper insights into the complexity of contexts” (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p. 227) and offers a different perspective in research because of its emphasis on storytelling. It can also help to “provide insight” and “attempts to understand how people think through events and what they value...through a close examination of how people talk about events and whose perspectives they draw on to make sense of such events” (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p. 228). In this examination of people’s stories, narrative inquiry seeks to show the authentic stories inherent within all of us, because everyone has a story.

Because narrative inquiry allows individualized context to come forward, this methodology is thought to be the most appropriate for the topic of dichotomous identity negotiation between conservative Christians and straight-ally identities because little is known about this topic and individual experiences are thought to allow for the true illumination of this process.

Data Collection Methods

Site selection. Since the primary focus of narrative inquiry-based research is to capture contextualized stories of individuals’ experiences, no set setting was required for this project. However, all participants were expected to live near or around the mid-south,

which provided a context all of its own. Relevant information related to the mid-south has previously been discussed within chapter 2 of this proposal.

Gaining entry. Although a particular church setting was not utilized for the purposes of this study, individuals from a variety of churches in and around the mid-south were recruited and asked to provide detailed and narrative information about their lives, their faith, and their straight-ally and conservative Christian identity. As this information was personal and in some cases, guarded and private, a discussion about the ways in which I might make participants feel comfortable were considered.

The first step in ensuring that appropriate steps were taken in data collection was to seek research permission from the human subjects review board. This involved submitting a detailed proposal and creating an informed consent document which outlined the rights of the individual, the purpose of the study, the issues of confidentiality, and the risks and benefits of participation. In addition to the legal necessity of this step it also offered a first opportunity to build rapport with potential participants. Rapport was essential within this study because of the nature of sharing individual stories to answer the research questions at hand and involved scheduling interviews across two or more sessions so that I could build up a professional relationship with my participants.

Gaining access to participants. In order to gain access to potential participants, recruitment was completed through online media (Facebook) and snowball sampling in the mid-south. Facebook was utilized as a marketing tool to gain access to individuals that meet criteria for this project. All facebook messages offered information related to the purpose, time needed to participate, and criteria for participation. Please see appendix

for information related to the specific language used for recruitment.

Criteria. Criteria for participation included the following aspects:

1. Participants must be over the age of 18
2. Participants must identify as a conservative Christian based on their own definitions of conservative Christianity.
3. Participants must attend a church service at least once a month (the church does not necessarily have to be deemed “conservative” based on the individual’s definitions).
4. Participants must also perceive themselves to be a “straight-ally” based upon their own definition of what that identity entails.

Definitions related to conservative Christianity and straight-allies were avoided due to the theoretical orientation that this study utilized and were defined generally by utilizing the psychological definitions alluded to within the literature review of this proposal. However, in order to be as inclusive as possible and to encourage any and all straight-ally advocacy, participants had very different levels and understandings of what it is to be a conservative Christian and what it is to be a straight-ally. Therefore, because of the dichotomous nature of these identities, flexibility within both definitions was given, so that individuals who identify as a straight-ally could have vast differences in comparison to each other and so that all straight-ally behaviors could be considered. Because a straight-ally development model has not been presented, individual information and context was illuminated throughout the narrative interview process in order to capture as best as possible individual’s personal development.

It should be noted that participants were welcome from any faith community in

the mid-south because although a participant may have attended a church that they did not deem to be “conservative”, they themselves may have identified that way. For instance, a member could have perceived the First Congregational Church in the mid-south to be “conservative,” even though that particular congregation has an open and affirming status towards GLBTQ individuals. However, they could have felt that their religious viewpoints were conservative and therefore, still been appropriate for this study.

Sample size. Narrative inquiry sample sizes are not necessarily standardized within qualitative data. However, there must be enough participants to fully understand the experiences that different individuals have in relation to the stated research question. Creswell (2007) states that, “in narrative study, the researcher reflects more on who to sample - the individual may be convenient to study because he or she is available, a politically important individual who attracts attention or is marginalized, or a typical, ordinary person” (p. 128). Narrative inquiry in this way is more interested in quality versus quantity, however, it was still hoped that approximately 6-8 participants could be interviewed.

Issues of positionality. Due to the complex nature of this research proposal, it is important to discuss the positionality, or my own subjectivity, and how that plays a role in this research study. As a qualitative researcher I am able to recognize that my own experiences and identities will have an effect on the research that I collect, and in the analyzing and representation that concludes this study. I come with my own biases and expectations. To say that there is a limit to my objectivity would be an understatement. In addition to my own subjectivity, it is also important to recognize the potentials for power dynamics to come into play with my research participants and to acknowledge that I will

both be affected and affect participants through this process.

The potential for both insider and outsider positionality within the confines of this study was likely. I am a Northern, liberal, queer, progressive Christian, who has always been supportive of GLBTQ individuals. My former straight-ally identity came easily in part because of my liberal and progressive upbringing in Ann Arbor, MI, which boasts a very gay-friendly environment. In researching queer theory and sexual fluidity for this project I have come to better understand my own sexuality as queer in nature. However, I am married to a pastor who has presided over a church in the greater Memphis area, and I “pass” as heterosexual. Therefore, I was an insider to many of my participants.

My own preconceived notions of conservative Christians was also a part of my positionality within this study. There are many stereotypes of this group of individuals, and I had to reflect upon this group so that I was able to truly listen to the individualized narratives that my research participants came with, and I had to recognize that my own notions, if not reflected upon, could have impacted my analysis and ability to build rapport with my participants. One of the ways that I combated these potential confounds was through the utilization of memoing and personal journals as well as the opportunity to reflect upon my own experiences and judgments throughout data collection. In addition, I was made aware of my positionality through the continual process of asking questions like, “what am I missing?”, “how are my biases impacting this process?” and by allowing myself to analyze and interpret my data as a result of what I saw, not because I thought that I would see something in particular.

Although I took the opportunity to reflect deeply upon my positionality and subjectivity, it was important to recognize that I will never be made into an objective

research tool. The queer theoretical orientation that I utilized disallows this from happening. This is because identities are looked at as fluid, changing, and unstable. In this case, my identities and notions grew based on the experiences that I had in listening to individuals' narratives. I was not hoping for complete objectivity nor did I assume that I would always be perfect at acknowledging my bias in every moment of my data collection, but it was my hope that through an engagement of personal reflection and awareness that I could be the most conscious and responsible researcher that I could be.

Primary Method Collection - Interviews

Narrative inquiry as a methodology utilizes methods that allows for the collection of narrative stories, or “life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (Creswell, 2004, p. 55). Due to the goals of narrative inquiry, methods included the utilization of unstructured interview guides. Fairly flexible guidelines are used for interview structures but it is important that researchers do not merely give questions that participants will answer in a way that sets up expectations for their own personal experiences. This is so that information can be elicited from the participants own set of experiences and stories. It is essential that within narrative interviewing that it is assumed that the research participants embrace the perspective that the “other is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

As stated above, there are different types of interviewing available within qualitative research, and this narrative inquiry mostly relied upon an informal conversational interview, or an unstructured interview. This type of interview “relies entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction” (Patton, 2002, p. 342). Unstructured interviews are the most flexible, and allowed for

questions to be asked based on the natural flow of the conversation. Because narrative inquiry seeks to elicit contextualized information from research participants, different information was able to come from each individual interview. This also meant that each interview built upon the previous interview so that research questions could expand or move in new directions (Patton, 2002). This does not mean that interviews were unfocused but that they encompassed flexibility, spontaneity, responsiveness and were personalized to each individual (Patton, 2002). Although fluid techniques were utilized within this research project, a flexible interview guide was still created in order to “provide topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject” (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

Narrative interviews were sought within this narrative inquiry. Although some qualitative researchers have noted some problems with relying solely on narrative inquiries, it is still considered to be the most appropriate method when seeking individualized and contextual stories. In order to best elicit information from participants about the stated research questions, a focus on the stories that emerged from the interview process was the primary focus.

Interview process. Due to the complex nature of this topic, interviews with participants were fairly lengthy (3 hours). At times it was beneficial to break interviews into smaller chunks because it increased the time spent with each participant and gave more opportunity for a deepened rapport between myself and the participants. It is thought that this also increased participants’ self-disclosure and comfort with this research topic.

An appropriate environment was gained through access to a private room in a public space to conduct interviews. This was to ensure the safety of myself and my participants as they worked with me on this project. All interviews were audio recorded with permission given through an informed consent. Informed consent was given before any verbal data was collected. Before and after each interview, memoing and personal journals were completed to ensure that personal reflections were gained and that notes could help guide the research process.

During unstructured interviews, questions were asked in an open-ended format in order to elicit story-based responses. Inquiries began with the words “tell me” in order to gain narrative responses with a focus on storytelling. Participants were able to offer their own voice more than I offered my own. That is, the focus of questions and prompts were on the interviewee but I also utilized the research questions of the study to guide the interview in a way that allowed for questions to be answered.

Confidentiality. Interview participant’s confidentiality was treated with the utmost priority. Interview participants were given the opportunity to utilize pseudonyms during the interview process, analysis, and representation. In addition, all taped recordings were labeled with pseudonyms, kept in a locked cabinet. They will be destroyed 5 years after dissertation completion. Analysis and transcriptions also utilized pseudonyms and will be kept indefinitely for future research related uses.

Secondary Methods - Personal Journals and Memos

In addition to utilizing the narrative interview process as a means for data collection for this study, personal journals and memos were also be completed. The purpose of this secondary method was to “document and enrich the analytical process, to

make implicit thoughts explicit, and to expand the data corpus” (Creswell, 2007, p. 290). This included my own personal reactions to interviews and interview participants, questions that came up to me through the data collection process, ideas about how queer theory related to data, or ideas for categories and themes as I worked through the analysis of data. Although this data was not utilized in the analysis or representation of this project, it helped me through the process as a means to further understand and deconstruct my findings.

Analysis

In qualitative research, analysis begins at the same time as the first data collection and these initial experiences in the field may have a large impact on the continuation of the study. For instance, research questions may begin broadly and become more focused after a few interviews based on the experiences with participants. However, more traditional forms of data (written notes, transcriptions, research journals and memos) offer an extended exposure to data because of the time that it takes to transcribe every word of interviews.

Wolcott (2001) states that analysis “...used in the narrower sense, follows standard procedures for observing, measuring, and communicating with others about the nature of what is ‘there’, the reality of the everyday world as we experience it. Data subjected to analyses are examined and reported through procedures generally understood and accepted in that everyday world, among social as well as not-so-social scientists” (p. 33). Analysis for this project was completed with two qualitative processes: categorization and contextualization, but first began with a thorough reading of transcribed data. Once transcribed data had been reviewed and re-reviewed, analysis

could begin. The first form of analysis, categorization involved open-coding line by line of each interview transcription. Open line coding is an exercise that takes you line by line in each transcription and highlighting key words or passages that help answer the stated research questions. This “content analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data. Through content analysis, it is possible to distil words into fewer content related categories. It is assumed that when classified into the same categories, words, phrases and the like share the same meaning” (Elo & Kyngas, 2007, p. 107). Once words were highlighted, they were placed into groupings. For instance, all words that related to a Christian identity were placed in the same category. From those categories, themes were created by splicing categories together. For instance, if one theme was related to Christian identity and another was related to feeling uncomfortable when judgments are made by other church members a theme might be that “Christian identity is at times challenged when other church members explicitly judge others.” All individual interviews went through this process and then codes were looked at between and among all other codes in order to create shared meaning between all interviews.

The categorization process is more consistent with post-positivistic kinds of research because it seeks more of the shared experiences of the participants and has less room for individualization of experience. Because of the deconstructive, subjectivist standpoint of this research, contextualization was also used, which allowed for more individualization, intersectionality, and contradictions between and among participants.

Contextualization is a similar process to categorization except that the open-line coding offers more flexibility to notice and understand the overlapping information,

contradictions, tensions and intersections within individual interviews and between them all. This means that some words or phrases in interviews may belong to more than one category and that the end result allows for much more flexibility within its representation. This will be further discussed in the following section.

Representation

Traditional representation is the typical fashion in which quantitative and most qualitative data is presented to the field. It typically involves articles in which an introduction, literature review, data collection, and a discussion about the results of a study. This study will be written up in this traditional format but will also be presented utilizing Creative Analytic Practice (CAP).

CAP is a fairly new type of representation and started becoming more common after the “narrative turn” in qualitative research, which was a movement that identified individual narratives and stories over typical forms of representation (Berbary, 2011). CAP is often associated with the subjectivist epistemology because it “troubles” expectations for research, is upfront about authority and subjectivity, and captures the complexity in individualized experiences (Berbary, 2011).

CAP can take many forms, such as screenplay, poem, or fiction (Berbary, 2011). For the purposes of this project, monologues were created using aspects of the interviews completed in order to paint a picture of the different experiences that participants had in relation to their dichotomous identity negotiations. Monologues were thought to be the most appropriate form because it allowed for individual voices to be represented in the first person and allowed representation to stay as close as possible to transcribed interviews. Monologues were created by taking salient aspects of multiple interviews to join them

together in order to construct monologues based on the experiences of the participants.

Chapter 4: Individual Voices

This study sought to understand participants who subscribe to two seemingly dichotomous identities in order to explore their experiences and better learn how these identities are negotiated. As such, this study represents a counter-story, which provides an opportunity to hear voices that are not generally heard in popular media. This counter story represents participants who identify as both a conservative Christian and as a straight-ally, or as someone who supports GLBTQ individuals in some way. This study utilized life-story unstructured interviews with seven participants who ranged in age (22-35), education (all participants had either a master's degree or doctoral degree), gender (4 females, 3 males), and marital status (4 single, 1 divorced, 2 married). Several of the participants were from the mid-south, but participants were also born and raised in other parts of the country, including the east and west coast. All participants resided in the mid-south at the time of their interview.

Consistent with rigorous qualitative analysis, this research underwent several steps to ensure a depth of understanding in the complexity of the data. For instance, each interview was first transcribed then a thorough reading and re-reading took place so that the interpretation could begin and so that the stories present could be found. I focused my reading and understanding of the text in order to answer the research questions of the study and also to better discern the way each participant was impacted by their own individualized context. This was done by looking for aspects of transcribed data that pertained specifically to the research questions. For instance, I would read a section of an interview and ask myself, does this relate to this person's conservative Christian identity? straight ally-identity, negotiation between the two identities? In order to both examine my own subjectivity and begin to form themes based on my own meaning making, I kept a

journal of my initial impressions and reactions. As the primary researcher in this project and the person with the “power” in the room, a review of my subjectivities was of primary importance, as I cannot completely separate myself from this work. These subjectivities and research reactions are shown throughout the study.

Although analysis begins with data collection, making the themes involved both traditional constant comparison and categorization, as well as contextualization of data. Categorization allowed me to reduce several hundred pages of transcribed data into several themes. Contextualizing analysis then allowed me to look at the intersections of data between participants and to note the similarities and differences between each participant. It was important to utilize both methods of analysis because although categorizing analysis minimizes and constricts data, contextualizing analysis allows for multiple truths and addresses the overlapping information found in the data as well as the tensions within and between the data. In accordance with the tenets of qualitative research, the development of my themes was guided by the research questions and theoretical foundation of my study.

The following steps were followed for each transcribed interview. All identifying information was removed, including real names and specific places (i.e. church names) and replaced with pseudonyms. Then each interview was given a color so that text for each interview could be designated colors for organizational purposes. Next, a thorough reading of the text was completed. Sections were then highlighted that related to one or more sections of the study - conservative Christianity identity development, straight-ally development, or the negotiations between the two identities. Each highlighted section was then given a “theme” or a signifier in order to start the organization of each meaning

unit. For instance, a section that discussed a participant's parental messages and how that impacted his or her faith, was designated into the themes titled parental messages.

Although this example only offers data going into one section, highlighted sections often were designated more than one theme in order to show and highlight the way that information can overlap different areas. Once data was designated an initial theme, I copied and pasted each section into an excel document that was organized by tabs with the overarching theme as its title. For instance, data regarding a participants' parental messages about conservative Christianity was pasted into the excel document under "parental messages," and I kept track of which participant said what by their designated color. Once this was done for all seven interviews, I then read and re-read the organized tabs of information to see if they all fit properly into the categories. Some reorganization was done after this so that data could be under the appropriate tabs. From the tabbed data, I began to organize information per research question so that data and information could be outlined in a logical and coherent manner. I journaled my personal reactions as I went through this process so that my subjectivities could be reviewed and analyzed as well.

Meaning Making and Themes Explored

This chapter is separated into three main sections, one for each research question, so that "evidence" can be displayed to help answer and explore participants' experiences in the three main areas of the study. These sections are as follows: the perceptions of self and identity development as a conservative Christian, the perceptions of self and identity development as a straight-ally, and the negotiations of the two aforementioned identities. Each section will describe some of the individualized voices in order to provide participant voice and interpretation across interviews. There are both similarities and

differences found in the way that participants discussed these parts of their lives and some of the information overlaps in some ways. For instance, the information found regarding participants' biblical interpretation and denominational considerations may both speak to some of the same information, but they will do so in different ways. Because this study is not attempting to find a common truth across participants, sections will also attempt to highlight the contradictions and contextualization found within the data. At times, I changed the participant voices in order to match tense or add clarity. My voice will be bracketed throughout this chapter.

Section 1: Perceptions of Self as a Conservative Christian

Defining Conservative Christianity. This section includes several aspects related to participants' definitions of conservative Christianity. The different ways that participants' defined their own conservative Christianity was based on how they feel the bible helps define this identity for them. In addition, the behaviors of what it means to "do Christianity" were described by participants in order to help capture each participant's definition of their conservative Christianity. Within the behavioral definition, participants shared both what they do, and what they do not do. Further, some participants utilized a binary, or relative definition, to describe what it means to be a conservative Christian in relation to liberal Christianity. For some participants, this brought forth hesitancy because some felt that it was difficult to commit to the world "conservative" because of their beliefs about gay and lesbian rights. This section concludes with an exploration of this difficulty for some.

Biblical definition. Participants defined what it means for them to be a conservative Christian in several different ways. For instance, some participants defined

it using the bible. For instance, one participant stated that,

There is 1 God, He's in 3 persons, one God in 3 persons, it's all one substance but there is 3 persons there, father, son and Holy Spirit. And that's kind of the basis, you know. And the father creates the world and all that. The son kind of redeems it with the stuff on the cross. The holy spirit lives in the followers and the son, and you know they are all kind of working together, so it's all kind of Trinitarian, real basic and essential.

This first participant utilized a fairly open interpretation of conservative Christianity that could include Christians who identify as more moderate or even liberal. His definition was Trinitarian in nature as prescribed by his denomination and personal beliefs. Not all participants described God in this way, but for some, this "basic" definition was of utmost importance.

A second participant shared her biblical definition of conservative Christianity by stating that,

I think first off you believe that Jesus came to this earth and suffered and struggled just like we did and scarified himself so that we could be forgiven for all of our sins even though you know he was blameless. So I think believing and accepting him and then I think being a Christian, Jesus was a perfect model for showing God's love and grace and mercy

This participant shared that service to the community and being rooted into a church in her community are important to her identity. The two above segments of data show the basis of these two participants' conservative Christian identities.

Behavioral definition. In addition to defining conservative Christianity biblically, participants also utilized a behavioral definition for what it means to be a conservative Christian. For instance, one participant shared that “I have my belief that would be considered conservative as far as a political stance, [for instance], I will not have an abortion.” This participant felt that because she would not undertake an abortion, that she would be considered conservative. Another way that a participant spoke to the behavioral aspect of conservative Christianity was by stating that she needed to, “do[ing] the right things to call yourself a Christian so you can go to heaven. So, following biblical principles very strictly, Old Testament biblical principles.” Therefore she felt that following Old Testament biblical principles made her a conservative Christian. The strict adherence to biblical rules, including taking the Sabbath, indicates that it is more than faith that makes her a conservative Christian. Further, a third participant shared that a conservative Christian is,

Somebody who is an active member of a local congregation, they you know, their faith is kind of affects and matters in every part of their life, work, family, and inner life in their mind, it’s the most important thing in their life, I think, a Christian should be a good person, a good citizen, good neighbor ...They’re going to shoot straight, tell you the truth, not going to be running around talking about everybody behind their back, you know, basic things, a trustworthy person, an honest person, hardworking, dependable, that’s the way, I see somebody like that as a real Christian, if they’re doing it out of that motivation, if that’s their driving force...

This definition shows the action-oriented aspects of what it means to be a conservative

Christian for this participant without speaking directly about certain biblical beliefs. However, some of these expectations are grounded in the bible, such as being a good neighbor.

In addition to participants sharing what behaviors make a person a conservative Christian, some participants discussed what behaviors they do not take part in order to practice their faith. For instance, one participant noted that dancing and music were not permitted in her church. Another participant discussed her belief that women should not hold leadership positions in her church by stating that, "...women shouldn't hold leadership. I have a conservative view of that, that there really shouldn't be women who are elders. It says in the New Testament that's not OK." In addition to these rules, another participant shared her views on keeping the Sabbath and how that aligns with her definition of conservative Christianity.

[I'm] Conservative in like the dancing, the modesty in dress. [I also follow the] Sabbath, [which] means it's a day that you don't do what you would normally do and we see it as a day that God gave us because he created the world in 6 days, rested on the Seventh. It's the same thing, we work 6 days, and we rest on the Seventh. And it's so focused around family.

Both behavioral examples of what participants did or did not do and how that relates to their conservative Christian identity are important because it denotes that their faith is more than just an internal set of beliefs. For several participants' rituals, rules, and actions help define their own conservative Christian identity and separate themselves from others.

Conservative Christianity in relation to liberal Christianity. At times participants defined their conservative Christianity in relation to liberal Christianity, showing how their definitions depended on the binary system. While the above examples show different ways in which participants defined their conservative Christianity based on behaviors and the bible, the following section will show how participants defined conservative Christianity in relation to liberal Christianity.

One way in which a participant utilized a binary in defining conservative Christianity was in stating that,

I do not believe inerrancy of the bible is what I'm trying to say. So I'm not that conservative. But I do believe in the bible, I do read the bible, and I try to use it as a model of how I live my life and how I hope to treat other people. It's something to live by.

This participant stated that he was not "that" conservative because he felt that belief in the inerrancy of the bible was further to the right of the spectrum between liberal and conservative Christians.

A second participant utilized a definition which was relative, or defined by relating to something else. She stating that,

[an] extraordinarily liberal set of churches that are, they take a lot of tradition and a lot of teaching out of scripture and I think at the very worst, the furthest that they go would be, a loss of all ...mmm...what's the right word?...a loss of, accuracy all together. So, an extremely liberal church might say that Jesus is one of many ways to get to heaven and we accept everybody. They might think of themselves as a Christian church because they teach Christianity, but, if it's just a

poly-theistic situation where you can put Jesus and somebody else in the same auditorium and pick somebody else to get them to heaven then that's not an accurate, they are equally wrong. You know?

The above participant showed her belief in conservative Christianity by contrasting her faith with that of what she considers to be a liberal Christian. She shared that her biblical interpretation of the bible views acceptance into heaven as an exclusive right to believers.

In addition to the same participant as above stating that her belief in an exclusive heaven for true believers denotes her conservative viewpoint, she later helped define herself in relation to her friends. She did this by stating that,

I find that I think that I'm probably more conservative, wow this is so crazy, I think I'm more conservative by far than my liberal friends, my non-believing friends, and I think that I'm very more liberal than a lot of my conservative friends. So I do think that I'm moderate. When I say conservative, like for me and my Christianity it is a conservative Christianity. I believe in the inerrancy of scripture, I believe that ...Christ is the only way to heaven, to God. I believe that Christ is who he says he is, that he was a perfect man who didn't have any sin, chose to have a perfect life, and went through temptation, like, the big basic tenets of Christianity.

Difficulty in defining conservative Christianity. Defining one's conservative Christianity was no easy task. Although all participants were aware that this study required them to identify as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally, many individuals discussed their hesitancy to fully identify with conservatism. This seemed to be in part because they felt as if being a straight-ally negated any conservatism that they

might claim, but for others, it was because of what the word “conservative” can mean to outsiders.

This was shown in several ways throughout the interviews. One participant shared early on in the interview that,

I don't know if conservative is the right word for me because when I hear conservative, and I ask people. You know, what comes to mind when you hear conservative? You know, and they said straight-laced, ugh, you follow the rule book to a T...you know, and then you think of conservative in politics. The uh, you know, no gay rights, no abortion, no no, there's a lot of nos...I'm not a hard and fast rule person. There's always a gray, there's always something else to be looked at. Some other variable that hasn't been considered. And uh, I don't see conservative being fair. It's very...the hard and fast rules. And that's not necessarily fair in every situation... I have, me I'm conservative in my beliefs...

This participant spoke to some of the difficulty because she feels as if being “conservative” means to not change, and to not accept gay individuals. Although she is “conservative” in many aspects of her life, she hesitates to, but ultimately and somewhat reluctantly defines herself as such.

A second participant who had previously described his Christian faith as fundamentalist shared that “The fundamentalist is a really loaded term, I guess the easiest way I've come to explain fundamentalism would be, this religious mindset that is entrenched and battling with the world around it.” His difficulty in defining himself as a conservative Christian was in part due to the challenging experience he had faced in a cult-like environment in his teens and young adulthood. He later shared that “I'm really

uncomfortable with any kind of label because that locks me into some things and I just need this space to not do that” but ultimately shared that he still identifies as “kind of conservative” because of his faith and beliefs.

Interpretation of Conservative Christian Definitions. The way that participants described their conservative Christianity was done in several ways across individuals – biblical, behavioral, in relation to liberal Christianity, and with hesitancy. The biblical and behavioral definitions were somewhat standard in that they relied on biblical information to state what they were or were not. Where definitions of conservative Christianity became messier was in the way that some participants described their version of Christianity against liberal Christianity, and some of the participants’ shared discomfort in using a category to claim an identity for himself.

When participants described their Christianity as existing on a spectrum with conservatism and liberalism on opposite sides, individuals gave evidence to the ease that comes in defining things in this way. This is because participants’ could place themselves on a spectrum between one extreme or the other in order to clearly identify their own viewpoints. Yet, individuals defined this spectrum in contextualized ways because participants did not all use the same information in making their spectrum between liberal and conservative Christians. This is because not all participants had the same criteria for defining the difference between liberal and conservative Christianity and the grey areas between. For instance, one of the participants started defining her conservatism in relation to liberalism but had to stop when she had to consider that the Westboro Baptists might be sharing one side of the spectrum with her. She became very flustered to consider that some people might lump her faith with theirs.

Others found it very difficult to claim a conservative Christian identity, even though they affirmed this identity at times throughout their interviews. This hesitancy was in part due to their lack of control for what outsiders might view a conservative Christian to be, and not feeling comfortable with who that person represents. But it also was because they had a feeling that they *could not be* both a conservative Christian and someone who is an advocate for GLBTQ individuals, because those two beliefs cancelled each other out. Considering the ease in which I gained participants for this study, it is interesting that most of them did not believe that other people like them existed.

What was consistent in this section was that participants felt that the more rules that they followed, or that their church had them follow, the more “conservative” their Christianity was for them. This conservatism impacted their perception of self because it impacts what they do in the world and in their churches, and also the way that they view others – for instance, one participant shared that only “true believers” would get into heaven, which impacts the way that she sees people in her community. Yet, not all participants had the same perception of self as a Christian – especially those who were hesitant in defining themselves as a conservative Christian. Their individual beliefs and rules account for the way that their conservative Christianity plays out in their world.

Denominational Considerations. Participants reported identification with a number of different Christian denominations. These participants’ denominational considerations contextualize the participants within the churches that they grew up in or are currently a part of by illustrating what it was, or is like to be in their churches. Their experiences come from Presbyterian, Methodist, Southern Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Evangelical, Episcopalian, and non-denominational churches. Their current

church experiences were centered in the mid-south, but many of their early church experiences were from other parts of the country, for instance, the west coast, the south, and the east coast.

Participants explored their definitions and perceptions of self as a conservative Christian by using these denominational considerations. Because different Christian denominations have different doctrines, rules, expectations, and core beliefs, this theme shows participants' experiences within their churches in order to give voice to their individual experiences. However, churches within an overarching denomination can have individualized beliefs and rules. For instance, they could each have their own rules related to female leadership, dress code, or stance on gay and lesbian marriage or membership within the church. This section intends to show the way that the participants' membership into specific denominations has had an effect on their Christian identity.

Basic denominational information. Participants discussed and described their denominations in different ways. For instance, one described her experiences in her Episcopalian church as “traditional” and “liturgical” and that there were in service rules that she had to be careful to follow. For instance, she stated that “you would recite the Nicene Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, you would do communion every Sunday.” She also shared that “there was a certain way that you would hold your hands, you would go back to your pew and kneel after communion and you would say a prayer.” This participant and others spoke to the rules within services as a part of how they conceptualized their church as conservative. For some, this was because it made it more exclusive and allowed long term members to judge one’s faith in terms of their allegiance to these actions. In addition to some participants’ experiences with rule laden church services, others had

expectations for getting new people “saved” on a weekly basis.

One participant shared his experience in an Evangelical church as being very focused on alter calls. He stated that,

I remember them saying one time that it wasn't worth turning on the air conditioning in the building if we weren't going to do an alter call. So, if we had a service there was an elaborate detailed opportunity to invite people to get saved. It didn't matter if it was a prayer meeting of church members or if it was Easter Sunday, Christmas Eve, or regular night in June. If the lights were on and someone was on a microphone, there was going to be an alter call.

In the above segment, this participant describes an alter call which can be defined as a public display of one's faith and allegiance to Jesus Christ (Webster, 2014). For him, his church's biggest priority was to someone get saved. This focus on redemption within Christ had a large impact on this participant because it painted the way that he viewed the world while he was involved in the church. Thus, his conservative Christianity in his youth had the priority of getting folks saved as number one, and other parts of his identity as secondary and not as important. In contrast to his experience, a third participant shared her experience as a Seventh Day Adventist.

To contrast the experiences of the above participant, a different participant identified as a Seventh Day Adventist who had moved from the west coast to the rural south in her youth. She stated that her denomination was similar to Baptist belief but that her church differed in their belief of heaven – Seventh Day Adventists believe that you “rest in the grave until the second coming. And then once Jesus comes everybody is risen at the same time. So we don't believe that like your grandmothers watching or looking

down on you... [It] takes the bible very literally.” She also described the rules of her denomination, stating that,

A lot of people are vegetarians. Not many now, it’s more of an older thing. All the schools I went to were vegetarian. Health message is huge. Really big on eating healthy, exercise, no alcohol is a big part of that as well...I mean our schools didn’t serve caffeine, but I don’t doubt that in a few years there will be caffeine on campuses. Because it’s a really old thing. Conservative in dress. Conservative and very modest. No jewelry typically, in schools, although you see more and more. Again it’s kind of, its shifting a bit more mainstream, its super mission focused. Very mission driven. Being a student missionary while you’re in college is a huge deal. Of course the Sabbath. Friday night through Saturday...and that is just from the very literal principal of we believe that the Sabbath, Seventh day was never changed because it was Constantine that changed it to be on Sunday for the sun God worship and so it was a man changed it what we believe. Because we can’t find the biblical principal for it being changed, so I still uphold that definitely. What else, no dancing, because that leads to sex. Of course. And I think again that’s an old principal it’s just kind of stuck around. Generally pretty conservative.

This participant’s experiences in the Seventh Day Adventist church not only show how the church has shaped her, but also highlighted her conservatism. This is in part because she views the rules of her religion as being more conservative, and because literal biblical interpretation for her meant conservatism as well. Although now this participant belongs to a non-denominational church, her early life experiences in the Seventh day Adventist

church impacted her Christian development, as well as her movement towards becoming a straight-ally. Although some participants described their churches from past or present without explaining or describing the way these churches relate to gay and lesbian members, some participants did explore this topic.

Denominational considerations for GLBTQ members. This section shows that some participants discussed denominational considerations for their church in relation to GLBTQ members. However, participants' denominational stances on GLBTQ issues did not necessarily influence their straight-ally identities. This is because although some participants stated that their church was anti-gay, they still identified as a straight-ally.

Although some members go to churches in the mid-south with a clear stance on GLBTQ individuals, others described their church's stance in more general ways. For instance, one participant discussed how his Presbyterian church stated clearly that they will not take a firm stance on GLBTQ issues. He stated that, "I've heard one of the pastors there say something to the effect of, you know what, gay lesbian sex kind of stuff we're not going to get involved in that, that's between you and God." This participant felt safer in his church because the church stated that they would not take a stance on GLBTQ issues. This was in part because his past experiences in an extremely conservative church made it so that any political pulpit statements made him uneasy. Yet this declaration from his pastor does not seem to relate much to his conservative Christian identity or straight-ally identity.

In contrast, a different participant shared that she knows gay people that go to her church which makes her believe that her church is accepting. She shared that,

We do have gay people that come to church and I actually love that because my

belief is there's no difference between sin, so and it does say that a sin against your body is the worst but that includes pre-marital sex, that includes sodomy, it's a whole spectrum of things, not just being gay. So, I love the fact that that's what's preached, you know, you're welcome here, it doesn't matter, you know, if you want to have a relationship with God, you can.

This participant's voice brings up a consistent theme that will be explored in depth in a different section, that acting on same-sex feelings is a sin, but so are lots of other things, so who can judge anyone else? However, she also stated that her church preaches acceptance and welcome to GLBTQ individuals, as long as they wish to have a relationship with God.

A third participant discussed how his church may not be the best place for GLBTQ individuals because,

I just think that there are other churches that have had the [gay] members, not even really just the church, but the members had more experiences with people that are gay. And so there wouldn't really be as much of a stigma as it would I think to a lot of people at mine, just because I, I would assume that many of them just haven't had many experiences at all.

This participant is a member of a Presbyterian church as well, but one that is more well known for its conservatism in the mid-south. Although he himself advocates for marriage equality, he belongs to a church that is not accepting as GLBTQ folks. For him, this segment confirms his conservatism because of his church's clear views on GLBTQ people. This participant therefore developed a straight-ally identity despite his church's views, which he is often at odds with.

Criticisms. Some participants offered criticisms of their Christian denomination based on their stance towards GLBTQ members. For instance, one member who belongs to the Southern Baptist denomination shared his frustration with his denomination because he felt that the stance on GLBTQ individuals' right to marry was at odds with Southern Baptist core doctrine. He stated that,

I mean, I'm a Baptist, you know, I believe in freedom of religion...Separation of church and state, core Baptist doctrine. Right there. That's our bread and butter. It used to be, and now we're the ones that are itching to trample all over it! So we've lost our principles there. You know, or we wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for separation of church and state.

For this participant, separation of church and state for him meant that gay individuals should be allowed to marry, and he felt confused as to how his denomination could oppose it based on their foundation and history. This is not to say that he felt that his church would or should welcome openly gay individuals, but that he could not understand why gay folks could not marry.

Comparing other churches to describe Christian identity. Some participants discussed other churches and denominations, both in the mid-south and around the country to further illuminate their own Christian identity. For instance, many participants discussed the Westboro Baptist Church as an example of something that they were not. In addition, a large Southern Baptist church located in the mid-south was also utilized in participant interviews as a Christian denomination that is not aligned with their individual beliefs.

As stated above, participants contrasted their faith with that of the Westboro

Baptist Church. For instance, one participant stated that,

I don't believe that the Westboro church has real Christians! Because if they were, they would know God's love and God's grace even if they were so to the extreme viewpoints as [Church in the mid-south], you know, a real Christian would not cause pain. Purposely in God's name. Or maybe that's just something they're struggling with? And it's wrong of me to call them not real Christians...I would hate to for anybody to call me a not real Christian, because of my struggles and what I'm dealing with. But I feel that they misrepresent God and misrepresent Christ and the bible and ultimately they do misrepresent the Christian faith because I can't even imagine what would cause a person to go and cause harm and pain to the family that was already devastated because, not because of a mistake they made but because the state allowed gay marriage, we're going to go protest every funeral in that state. That doesn't make sense.

This participant struggled with believing that the Westboro Baptist church was comprised of "real" Christians because of the hate that they display towards others, but ultimately stated that she did not feel right about stripping them of the Christian label. However, this segment helps describe the kind of conservative Christian that she is not – she clearly believes that being a conservative Christian should not entail doing harm onto others in God's name.

In addition to participants discussing their distaste for the Westboro Baptist Church, several others references a large Southern Baptist church located in the mid-south as a way of exploring what kind of Christians they were not. One participant stated that,

[Church in the mid-south] does preach against gay marriage. Openly. [Church in the mid-south] does, because they are Baptist and they, Southern Baptists beliefs are very conservative. Openly conservative. My beliefs should be your beliefs and if they're not, you're wrong. And it's just, there is no grace. Or there is little grace when it comes to other people's sins. And the focus is on other people's sins and not your own. I have enough sin to worry about, that I can't really focus and judge others. Because I'm trying to work through my own.

This participant shared her dislike of [Church in the mid-south] Baptist Church because of their disaffirming views on GLBTQ individuals. This passage also highlights information from a section that will be discussed later, in that she showed that part of the reason that she is a straight-ally is because she does not feel that she can judge other people's actions.

Interpretation. Participants discussed their Christian denominations past and present to illuminate their conservative Christian identity. Although none of the participants belonged to Open and Affirming (ONA) designated churches, or churches that are designated to be affirming towards GLBTQ individuals, many participants noted that they went to church with gay and lesbian individuals, who were members of their church. Based on the above segments it seems as if individuals felt in part that they were conservative because they belonged to churches that were exclusion based in terms of the behaviors that were acceptable on Sunday mornings, and that some of the churches made it clear in subtle ways that gay and lesbian individuals might be more comfortable in a different church. Some churches spoke directly about gay and lesbian individuals, while others did not, but it seems that participants could read between the lines for what would

be tolerated in their home churches.

This section shows how participants' have both come to identify as conservative Christians, and how these aspects impact their perceptions of self. Participants' membership into specific Christian denominations impacted their perceptions of self because it gave them membership into a large web of individuals based on aspects of their faith and behaviors associated with their denominations. These perceptions of self impact the way they both view themselves and view others because many of the rules and rituals associated with specific denominations are well known, even to outsiders.

Section Two: Perceptions of Self as a Straight-Ally

In addition to participants' identifying as a conservative Christian, they also self-defined themselves as a straight-ally, or advocate for the GLBTQ community. This section intends to explore the development of participants' identities and perception of self as a straight-ally. Participants utilized several explanations in defining their straight-ally identities. This includes a behavioral definition in terms of their personal value systems, such as their patriotism and belief in the separation of church and state or politics ideals. In addition, straight-allies considered the bible and science in their straight-ally identities. Further, straight-allies discussed several personality traits they inhabit that impacted their ability to become and stay a straight-ally. Participants also discussed their experiences with gay and lesbian individuals and the parental messages that they received growing up and how these experiences may have affected their straight-ally identity and perceptions of self.

Defining Straight-Ally Identity. Participants described their straight-ally identities in several different ways. For instance, participants discussed both the

behaviors of their ally identity and the beliefs that led them to this identity. For example one participant stated that voting democratically was a way that he showed his ally-ness. In addition to behaviorally addressing this identity, participants also discussed their personal ideals of equality and service towards others and how it impacted their development as a straight-ally.

Participants discussed their personal beliefs and ideals to illuminate their straight-ally identities in different ways. For instance, one participant stated that,

...my values as an ally would be that the GLBTQ community is a minority. Like we're supposed to protect the weak, it's the same thing. I think that if Jesus was here today that he would be hanging out in that community. He would be hanging out with the minority groups, he wouldn't be hanging out with the mainstream white people at country clubs. And I guess in some ways I feel like I'm supposed to be defensive of anyone who is being inappropriate, cruel.

This first participant stated that she was a straight-ally because she believed that all minority groups should be protected from the majority. She also stated that Jesus would probably do the same, showing a bit of the biblical reasons why she holds a straight-ally identity as well.

A second participant additionally shared her values and beliefs and how they helped her form a straight-ally identity. She stated that, "I hate bullying, and if the person's not there, that's the worst kind of bullying." This participant disliked bullying done behind a victim's back and felt that discrimination or mistreatment towards gay and lesbian individuals constituted a form of bullying. Since she had experienced a lot of bullying in her own life because she was adopted as a young girl, she felt very sensitive

to others in similar situations.

A third participant discussed his values as a straight-ally by explaining that in addition to his political stance that he would not hesitate to support one of his children should they be gay or lesbian. He stated that,

I thought about what if one of my children turned out to be gay, you know, you think about these things as a parent. And I've thought, what would I think about it, what would I do about it, so in that sense, let's say one of my children comes to me and is saying to me this thing to me, then I would, I don't see it being a serious disruption in the relationship. I would still love them and love their partner too! You know, so I kind of came to that place.

This participant felt that his development into a straight-ally from his pre-existing identity as a conservative Christian was in part influenced by his own exploration of what he would do if one of his children were gay. Since he felt that he could and would support a gay child of his, his identity became more global to accept gay and lesbian individuals in general.

The participant who stated that he would be supportive if one of his children were gay also felt that his ideals as a straight-ally had to do with leadership. He stated that,

I don't want to be against gay people. I don't want to be against fundamentalist people. Can't we all get along? You know. I don't see it as that hard, I see it as, I'm a missionary. That's a mission, you know? I can lead my community by kind of showing them why, it doesn't mean you're abandoning your faith if you are OK with gay people. So I see myself as a leader, like I want to be a leader. I must be one of those early adopters with no followers who get crucified and burned at

the stake or something. But that's a role that has to be there. In sociology you've got the deviants, so you've got the completely out of the question things, then they become alternative lifestyles that we don't really do anything about but it's not the majority either, then you've got the things that turn into the majority, then you've got the things that you really really push for, so but you've got to, every movement starts with one person. So you just kind of got to be that thing, whatever it is.

He felt that as a conservative Christian that he was probably an "outlier" in terms of his straight-ally identity, but he also valued being such. This seems to be in part because he felt that conservative Christians were often behind social movements and he felt that he could lead his church and peers into a straight-ally identity and also show how they can remain as conservative Christians as well.

Perspective Taking and Empathy. Participants who identified as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally often utilized perspective taking and empathy in order to place themselves in the shoes of gay and lesbian individuals. Perspective taking can be defined as the act of putting oneself into another person's shoes, or attempting to understand another's life or perspective. Empathy can be defined as understand another persons' emotional experience. These two personality traits allow for individuals to shift thinking from an othering stance, to a joining stance, which allows for individuals to attempt to fully explore what it might be like to live in the world as a different person. One participant shared the way that she uses perspective taking and empathy in order to help explore how and why she came to a straight-ally identity. She stated that,

[And people say that] gays and lesbians shouldn't engage in that, they, you know,

[they should] at least try to be straight, and I'm like, that's just crazy, like, do you really think they didn't try? Or you know weren't embarrassed? That would suck! Like imagine going through life and not allowing yourself to be in love. Because it's not right, because you're not supposed to love that person. Can you imagine? I can't imagine not being able to allow myself to fall in love with the right person. No matter what they are, black, white, girl, or boy, if I love them that's who I love. I couldn't imagine not getting to do that. And, I was like, as long as no one is hurting me, I just told them, as long as it's not hurting me, and my relationship with God, it's not my problem.

Another participant shared that his ability to utilize perspective taking and empathy started at a very young age for him. He shared that,

When people are hurting for whatever reason, I always been pretty making connection with that has always been pretty easy for me. And not easy, but like it hasn't been something I've hard to force, like I don't know my mom always talked about how when I was tiny, like out and seeing a disabled child and how much that would upset me. And it's not true for everything but in some ways I'm more empathetic and others I'm less.

These participants placed themselves in the shoes of a gay or lesbian person and felt empathy for them. By using perspective taking to try to imagine what their lives are like and the discrimination that they could potentially face, they opened themselves up to their world. Although not all gay and lesbian individuals experience the same rate of discrimination, surely some do, and for these participant it was the motivation they needed to develop into a straight-ally.

Personal Experiences with the Other. In addition to participants utilizing perspective taking and empathy to put themselves into a gay or lesbian person's position, participants also often cited their personal experiences with gay and lesbian individuals to help explain how they came to be a straight-ally. For instance, one participant stated that,

I think in discussing with my friend who told me she's bi [that I] definitely want[ed] her to understand that just because I'm Christian, being Christian doesn't mean that I don't accept your lifestyle...I wanted her to know that she can talk to me about any relationships she's having and that I'm going to be supportive. And I'm totally OK and accepting of it.

This participant had known several gay or lesbian individuals and recently had a friend who came out to her as bisexual. Her friend felt concerned that she would not be supported because of the participant's conservative Christian stance, however, she explained to her friend that she was accepting of her.

A second participant who had previously discussed not knowing gay and lesbian individuals until her mid-adulthood shared her experiences in becoming a straight-ally by getting to know gay and lesbian individuals. She stated that,

I think my first few [gay and lesbian] friends were work colleagues [in the arts] community. I've been [involved in the arts community] for about 4 years so by the time I started, this was already kind of well-established in me that I was working my way towards ally-hood, so, work colleagues and friends of friends. Going out and hanging out with people , and meeting partners...becoming friends with them and hearing them talk about the GLBTQ community and the fights that they're fighting in the legal system. And the rights that are being denied and

awareness of the topic

This participant shared that she started to become an ally somewhat on her own but that her straight-ally identity grew further through her personal relationships with gay and lesbian individuals. It seems that having a more intimate understanding of the legal and social struggles for gay and lesbian individuals also helped shape her straight-ally identity further.

A third participant discussed his experiences in getting to know gay and lesbian individuals in college and how that impacted his straight-ally identity. He stated that,

I never knew any gay people probably until college, I've never been really intimate with any gay folks except now, I got a good friend who recently came out to me as bisexual, which was really beautiful that she did, but it also wasn't a big deal.

By forming relationships with gay and lesbian individuals, this participant was better able to utilize perspective taking and empathy and further develop his straight-ally identity.

Just as participants felt that knowing a gay or lesbian person personally impacted their development into a straight-ally, one participant notes that it might be difficult for individuals to come to a straight-ally identity without personally knowing a gay or lesbian person. He shared that his brother had,

Never interacted with, he's never had to like think about or doesn't really know anyone that's like effected by it, which for me is like the biggest thing for gay marriage. If you like, unless you are just so opposed to it, if you know someone that is and like really wants to get married, like why, why would you do that to them?

This participant noted that it was easier for him to understand the struggles of gay and lesbian individuals because he had directly seen the impact that discrimination can play in their lives. Further, he felt that it would be very difficult to know someone effected by discrimination and to not become a straight-ally or support them in some way.

A different participant shared a similar sentiment – that it would be difficult to discriminate against someone if you directly felt the impact of it towards them. He used the example of his denomination’s stance on women holding leadership positions in his church. His church feels that women should not be positions of leadership. This participant described his experience of standing in front of a woman and realizing that his church’s view got in the way of her life. He shared that,

Well see? Now I can’t, it’s not an intellectual thing anymore, now that’s a real person sitting in front of me, so what are you going to do? You really think it’s wrong for people to be a woman pastor? Well? There you go! Look somebody in the eye and tell them that. Do you really believe it? Tell them that. Say it! What’s the point of thinking it if you can’t say it? If you’re right? I couldn’t say it. So I didn’t really believe it.

He felt that because he could not directly share the viewpoint that he had held in the past to a person directly impacted by his viewpoint, that he must not actually believe this view. This relates to his straight-ally development because it was this realization that led him to a similar belief – that he could not actually be anti-gay if he did not feel that he could tell someone effected by this view, gay or lesbian individuals that he did not believe in their rights.

Biblical Understandings. In addition to participants noting the impact of personal relationships with gay and lesbian individuals on their straight-ally development, other participants utilized biblical interpretations to influence this identity. Additionally, participants asked the question, What Would Jesus Do? to help explain their stance on gay and lesbian rights. For instance, one participants stated that,

So many of the appeals I have heard to scripture about homosexuality have struck me as bullshit. And I get tired of that. I'd always had my doubts honestly.... I was always able to say, you know you can pull from two scriptures, you're not convincing me...and we want to be convinced by fair and legitimate handling of scripture about something. I've just never heard it in a non bullshit way presented, and if somebody could hit me with that, well probably not anymore, but, I think if you're going based on scripture, I think you have a tough case to make. I've heard a lot of the cases made and none of them have gotten me, I just don't think they're fair and honest. I think they have an agenda. Same way with sex only inside of marriage... You're not convincing me here

For this participant, appeals to the dangers and sins of homosexuality fell flat for him. He described feeling that way from a young age and becoming frustrated with the way that some conservative Christians utilized the bible in order to be anti-gay. A second participant utilized her biblical understandings to posit how Jesus would treat gay and lesbian individuals. She stated,

If Jesus was here right now for example to make it in a simple context, would he be out there campaigning for gay marriage? I know that there are people that feel that way. You know? Like this is a social justice issue that maybe we should fight

for this...

This participant felt that Jesus had a strong value of social justice and that gay and lesbian rights constitute a disequilibrium of rights in our society. By using the bible and their understandings of “what Jesus would do”, they came to identify as a straight-ally.

Choice versus genetics. In addition to utilizing the bible and understandings of Jesus Christ, participants also discussed their views on the etiology of homosexuality. For instance, participants frequently discussed their views that being gay is not a choice but rather an innate attraction to members of the same-sex. For instance, one participant stated,

I feel like we're all born predisposed to different things, regardless of whether it's, I don't even know. I just, I don't use predisposed to certain things as like a negative way, and I don't even necessarily think it's like a sin. If that's not what God intended I just think that basically nobody is born as like a perfect human being, and if it is what God intended then, great! , but...I don't know! I'm definitely on like the genetic side of it, there are a lot of people who identify as GLBTQ and they're lives are made so much harder by it. I don't think it's logical to believe that it's a choice

This participant felt that gay individuals sometimes lead difficult lives because of their same-sex attraction and would not necessarily choose to be gay if the choice were available. She felt that gay and lesbian individuals were gay due to their genes.

Another participant shared her belief that gay and lesbian individuals do not choose to be gay because of the difficulty that they sometimes face due to their sexual orientation. She shared,

I think it would be difficult. That's another reason I don't believe gays choose to be gay, I don't believe lesbians wake up one morning and they're like, you know, I think I'm going to make my life a lot more complicated and start dating women. By understanding that it might not make logical sense for a person to choose to make their lives more difficult by choosing a same-sex attraction, this participant affirms that gay and lesbian individuals are not simply deciding to be a certain way in order to cause trouble for others.

A third participant shared his view on whether or not gay and lesbian individuals choose their sexual orientation identity. He shared that,

The idea that it's a choice never made sense to me, even when I was young that frustrated me, this kid killed himself. How the hell do you think he chose, do you not think if he could just switch his mind he would have? If it was that, so that really pisses me off. That is just so stupid. What it means, that whole nature vs nurture thing, I really don't know. Uh, I mean I think everyone is, I don't think it's as simple as, I think everyone is on that spectrum somewhere...It's not as simple as a stamp, gay, straight, gay, straight. , and I think there are people, the ones that I really, I don't know how people suppress it their whole lives. That just sounds like, I can't imagine how hard that is. To like live a lie every single day and, I can't imagine. But then, when there's like, the husband that leaves the wife at age 50, like, you don't think if he couldn't by now like, he really wanted to not deal with that part of his life for whatever reason. And so, I don't know what the answer is, to like, is there one gene or not, but I think it's pretty clear that it's not simply, I'm going to choose this one over this one.

These examples highlight the beliefs of straight-ally conservative Christian participants that it is illogical to consider that gay and lesbian individuals choose their same-sex attraction. Their belief that gay and lesbian individuals are born with same-sex attraction helps them utilize perspective taking and empathy for this group, and affirms their orientation. In addition, the last participant felt that sexual orientation was probably not categorical and that attraction was more complex than just heterosexuality or homosexuality.

Politics and the Separation of Church and State. Participants exploring their straight-ally identities often discussed their political stance and belief in the separation of church and state as a motivation for becoming a straight-ally. For instance, one participant stated that,

Politically? Yeah, my stance is give it to them [gay marriage]. You know like, this is a group of people that are arguing for this, they want it, you know, there is nothing scientific that says they have anything to do with their sexual orientation. It just doesn't seem fair not to let them have the insurance benefits and all the other benefits that everybody else has because our society, if what you're doing doesn't really hurt anybody else, you know, you should be allowed to do it and we make a way for you to do it. Of course the fundamentalists would come back and say they are hurting other people, they are going to influence our children and all this stuff, but I just don't believe that. How would somebody who is not even a part of your family going to have more of an influence over your family than you are? You know what I'm saying? I just don't believe that at all.

This participant feels that gay and lesbian individuals are entitled to equal rights in the

United States because they are equal citizens. This participant later went on to discuss the intersection of his faith and belief in the separation of church and state by stating that,

So if anyone was to ask me [why I believe in gay rights], I can give them a reason, separation between church and state. That's a very important thing and it doesn't work out well for anybody when those two things come together and it makes the church better and the state better when they are separate

These two passages illuminate participants' beliefs in the separation of church and state and how this belief has impacted their straight-ally identities.

Parental Influence. Participants discussed additional factors for becoming a straight-ally in addition to the above mentioned themes. For instance, some participants explored the way that their parents' views, either for or against gay marriage, impacted their own straight-ally identities. For instance, one participant shared that,

My mom, she lives here in town uh, she is respectful about it but she's against it. Uh, she even told me about it this week that she disagrees about it and thinks that it's not natural, and not how God intended relationships to be, and you know, we were able to have a respectful kind of dialogue about it, I just told her I think the science is on the side of saying people are born that way, it's not a choice, and stuff like that.

Although this participant's mother is anti-gay, he still found a path towards straight-ally hood for himself. A second participant also shared her parents and siblings anti-gay views and how she feels about it. She stated that,

My dad is...he speaks without speaking and my brother too. Both of them. And so I feel like I'm often on their case for using the term gay, don't be gay, or you're

being gay, or you look gay and that or something like that. And since high school I have gone after them, not probably realizing that I was OK with all that and maybe an ally. I just feel that that's inappropriate and I don't appreciate it. That it's rude and disrespectful. And just cruel really. I think there are probably from the two that I...maybe exposed to the most. They're not I don't think they're necessarily bashing the GLBTQ community it's just using terms like that. And not realizing that that's not ok.

In contrast to the first participant in this section, this participant felt that anti-gay language was disrespectful and cruel, while the first participant felt that it was not disrespectful, but not in line with his own views. Both examples show the different ways that family members can impact a participants' development as a straight-ally.

Difficulty in Defining Ally-Ness. Some participants felt that it was difficult to define their straight-ally identity, which is similar to the difficulty that some participants had in defining their conservative Christianity. Participants that spoke of this difficulty felt that the word choice was not quite right for them. For instance, one participant stated that,

I feel like advocate sounds like I've done more and I really don't think that I – I mean, I haven't been in a parade or anything but, I, I don't know. I feel like supporter, I would definitely consider myself a supporter.

Although some participants struggled with the wording and definitions of the word "straight-ally," all participants who took part in this study did identify with active support for gay and lesbian individuals in their lives.

Interpretation. Participants noted several themes in discussing their identity as a straight-ally in the mid-south. Participants discussed their perceptions of self as a straight-ally by exploring the facets of this identity, and in exploring the values and actions associated with this identity. This information is valuable to understanding the ways that conservative Christians come to a straight-ally identity.

Participants in this study largely came to their straight-ally identities after they had already established a conservative Christian identity. Participants' development into a straight-ally had some similarities with their development as a conservative Christian, including the way that they defined their identity in behavioral and biblical terms, and the influence of parents and mentors to become a straight-ally. One critical addition to the way that participants described their straight-ally development was the experience of knowing, either intimately or from afar, someone who identified as GLBTQ. This finding is entirely consistent with other research related to straight-ally development from psychological literature. However, straight-ally conservative Christians additionally negotiate their Christian faith systems with their identities as a straight-ally. The third section of this study will explore these negotiations more fully.

Section Three: Negotiations between straight-ally and conservative Christian identity

As shown in this chapter, participants discussed their conservative Christian and straight-ally identities in both similar and different ways. These similarities include the way that early life experiences, political considerations, and parental or mentor influences have impacted development in both areas of their lives. In addition, participants who identified as both a conservative Christian and a straight-ally also chose to define these

identities in both behavioral and relative to the opposite end of the spectrum, for instance, by comparing themselves to “liberal” Christians and by comparing themselves to people who were clearly not straight-allies, such as the Westboro Baptists and other fundamentalist Christian communities. This third section marks a departure from the developmental aspects of participants’ identities in order to focus on the negotiations of these two, seemingly dichotomous identities.

Participants who identified as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally negotiated these two identities in different ways. The very fact that these participants live with both identities concurrently in their lives gives evidence to the fact that these two identities are not as dichotomous as the media and popular thought suggest. This section will explore the ways that participants made sense of these two identities concurrently in their lives. For instance, this section will show how participants break apart the dichotomous view of these identities in order to make sense of it in their lives. In addition, participants explored the way that they bible helps them to negotiate these views. Further, participants discuss the way that their sense of power has informed their straight-ally views within their conservative Christian identities. In addition, the difficulty, or tension that comes from negotiating these identities will also be explored.

Negotiation of Identities. Although the media paints a dichotomous view between conservative Christians and straight-ally identities, participants of this study affirmed both, which shows that these identities can be negotiated in some way. Yet, participants discussed their negotiation of two seemingly dichotomous identities in different ways. They also discussed this negotiation as effecting their lives in different ways – through the way that they look at the bible, the way that they show themselves

fully to other individuals in their lives, and the impact of consequences that this negotiation has had on their lives.

Because the way that the negotiation of these two identities is so contingent upon the participants' contexts and individual lives, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to convey this information in a way that allows for linear understanding. This section will therefore show the individual voices and interpretation concurrently.

One participant explored his negotiation of his identities as a conservative Christian and straight-ally as fairly focused on a recognition of his privilege. He stated that,

And I just it's so easy to give, off these thousand benefits of the doubts and give everyone else none. And so I work very hard I try very hard, in my head at least, the problem with blinds spots are that you think you know where they are and you don't know where they are. , so, I try to be better about that and teaching was a great exercise in it because uh, if [this] kid is rude I had to think about how this kid, especially on the first day of school, this kid isn't reacting to me, they are reacting to this image of teacher they have built over fourteen years of school and in some cases they were probably done very wrong. By the people in power and giving people the benefit of the doubts gives me it's easier to like them, and to love them and to want to or not want to write them off. Because if they are a jerk, well ok it's hard to want that relationship to go any further.

This segment shows this participant also using perspective taking and his understanding of power to help him convey his straight-ally identity.

Another participant discussed her negotiations between these two identities by

stating that,

I can't imagine dealing with [being gay] – because eventually yeah, if I never got married or never got engaged to be married, I mean I would be spending the rest of my life having pre-marital sex and you know, that would be a struggle, right? But I can't put myself in the mentality of even if I get married, having sex with this person is a sin. I can't like wrap my head around that. But at the same time I need to do more research in the bible where it says – I know it says marriage is meant for a man and a woman, but where does it say that it's a sin? To be with a man, you know for a man to be with a man. Like where is that laid out? So and I hadn't come across it yet, I've, you've come across like marriage is meant for a man or a woman, that's Christian belief, so its, it's a struggle. Its like, you know, it's a little confusing because the bible is black and white but yet there is a lot of gray, There's a lot of room for interpretation, and I don't know, it wouldn't be easy relationship with God.

This participant's segment highlights some of the confusion that was found for individuals who identified as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally. For this participant, this discussion made her realize that if gay and lesbian individuals are never allowed to marry legally in the United States then they will ostensibly be engaging in pre-marital sex for their entire lives. This participant identifies her continued confusion about this issue – marking her progress in her negotiation between these two identities.

The different participant shared what it was like for them to negotiate between her two identities as a conservative Christian straight-ally stated that,

I negotiate it in...I think I would just say that the main thing would be wanting,

people to be able to make decisions in their lives that their convicted about, like, I don't think it is my role to really tell anybody that they shouldn't be able to get married, I don't think that I should have that power. And I don't think that it's my right, nor do I have the wisdom or knowledge to judge, their convictions as right or wrong, or their lives as right or wrong and I think that kind of leads back to what I was saying about oppression and not supporting it for any population, at any time. And to me that falls like so much higher on what I see in the character of God than a verse in the Old Testament that speaks against it. It's just not even like level playing fields for me. There's also a verse in the Old Testament that speaks out against eating shrimp. Like I'm not going to fight for shrimp to be outlawed. It just...doesn't make sense to me...It just falls so much higher on my priority list than trusting in one verse that some person wrote at some point in history. And allowing that verse to like destroy relationships and lives of people just doesn't seem logical or right.

This segment shows that this participant negotiates these two identities by separating her conservative Christian beliefs from the belief that she should be able to make decisions for others. Although she affirms a belief in gay rights and same-sex marriage, she does not feel that she can actually say what someone else is doing is right or wrong. She also notes that her negotiation also involves looking at the biblical interpretations of what is right or wrong with a grain of salt. She states, for instance, that the bible says that one should not eat shellfish, but that she feels that her biblical priorities are perhaps on a bigger scale than what she feels are smaller, more detailed rules. Because straight-allyhood means advocating for individuals to have equal rights, she feels that anything

that is found in the bible that is anti-gay should be weighed against the consequences of treating individuals with same-sex attraction as if they are unworthy in some way.

The above example is certainly not the only participant who shared difficulty and tension between their two held identities. A different participant also noted the tension that he has in relation to these two identities. He stated that,

two dichotomous kind of identities or whatever that don't easily fit together, but it can be kind of thrilling to try to untangle all that for me, because I'm a pretty abstract, academic, head in the clouds kinda guy so I like the project of trying to be consistent and fair and honest about all these things. And try to see how they all fit together and, you know, it hasn't been easy, but, I do enjoy it... [And] the parts of it that I do see in tension, I kind of toss them out. Because I'm convinced, or more convinced that my stance on GLBTQ issues than I am my religious stance, because in my life I've been so confused about my religious stances at different times, that , I know those can always be subject to further revelation, to use a loaded phrase... The parts that do, like for instance, not believing that scriptures support, outright condemnation of homosexuality, I don't, I just don't think its there, so any appeal that says, because Leviticus 18:22 says this, this is how we should feel, or believe. That's idiotic, I don't agree. I don't agree

This participant feels the tension between his two identities and found that by “throwing out” or dismissing the evidence that he feels may exist against gay and lesbian individuals helps him with this tension. This participant seems to have arrived at the conclusion that his conservative Christian identity must shift and change in order to embrace straight-ally ideals of equality for gay and lesbian individuals. As will be shown

as this section continues, not all participants chose to shift the conservative Christian identity in order to embrace their straight-ally identity. For instance, one participant felt that she must make concessions to her straight-ally views in order to keep up her conservative Christian beliefs.

Another participant shared her difficulty in negotiating her conservative Christian and straight-ally identities by stating that,

There is a juxtaposition where the part of me that can't deviate, like I don't want to deviate from what scripture says... Yeah, and it's not that it's a matter of safety anymore for me, I need to feel safe, and it's a matter of, my faith asking me to make, it would be easier, I've heard a lot of my gay friends say that it would be easier to not be gay. I wish I could not be gay but I am and that's the hand I've been dealt, right? It would be easier for me to not believe scripture about what it says about gay relationships, so the struggle that I am currently in is I love my gay friends, I want them to be able to marry their partners and I want to babysit and I want to see legislation pass that provides them with every single right without discrimination, and the other struggle, the other side of it is, if you don't know Jesus, I want you to know Jesus so bad. But I feel that way for all of my non-Christian friends, straight or gay.

This first segment from this participant sets the stage for her negotiation – she believes in the inerrancy of the bible. She believes that it says that individuals with same-sex attraction should not be in relationship with each other, but she also claims a straight-ally identity and wants gay and lesbian individuals to find happiness. She continues by saying that,

It means a fair bit of tip toeing. At times. I could be challenged in this area, so far no body's really challenged me...when I say that I mean, you know how when somebody just really loves you for who you are and says I love you no matter what you say, I have a number of friends that I would think would fall into that camp and they know where I stand on both of these issues. The friends that I fear would be turned away, it's almost like I've got two messages, I've got the message of salvation that I want everybody I know to meet to find salvation in Christ. [And the] things that would threaten that message I walk, I tiptoe around. I want my conservative Christian friends who don't believe in gay rights, I want them to hear the message that you're wrong for hate. You have a prejudice and you should admit it. You really believe that only straight people have the right to inherit their partner's life insurance policy? How do you, really? How does that work for you? Like I want them to hear the message that, that gay rights is...100% right. And the things that threaten that message I don't want to bring up. , so, I don't really know that many people like me. And when we see each other, we don't talk about this, it's not something that we like pal around, let's have a Christian straight-tally meeting...we don't do that even though that sounds like it would be a big relief actually...

She continues that she finds both groups of others in her life – the group that she has comprised of conservative Christians and the group she has of gay and lesbian individuals or straight-allies to be on two sides with her in the middle. She continues by saying that,

You know, knowing Christ is all you need, and being a straight-ally who is a

conservative Christian, that's a rub because I really really want them to have all the rights that they deserve and I want them to know Jesus really really badly. And if they do, they may find that scripture says, it's probably better for you not to be this way. Or not to engage in this. And I can't think of anything more hurtful than that. I can, but I don't want to. I mean, that's such a hard position to be in, I can only like, I can't imagine it. I'm straight. You know, I have, if somebody, if I was in a situation where somebody was telling me, it's wrong to be, I know you want to be married to a man, and it's wrong. And the thing that says that's wrong is right here at the church in the bible that you believe in. I don't know how I could reconcile those two, but that's what in which the scenario that my gay friends rights and children becoming believers and then find out that scripture would indicate that what you have is probably not the best option for you, the good thing, the one thing that kind of keeps me afloat in that, because it feels like despair would just way that down but then it keeps me OK is that, I'm fallible and I could be interpreting scripture wrong. I'm hopeful that I am. People have been [wrong] in the past I would love to be wrong in this, I would 100% love to be wrong. Love to.

A part of this self-identified straight-allies negotiation with her conservative Christian faith is to allow herself to advocate for same-sex rights and to belief that they are children of God, as long as they also do not participate in same-sex romantic love. Her negotiation allows her to go to a conservative Christian church which speaks out against gay and lesbian individuals and still have many gay and lesbian friends.

Clearly different participants utilized different forms of negotiation in order to

hold onto these two identities at the same time, with varying results. This information highlights some of the difficulty in allowing participants to self-identify into categories because it seems that the way that some individuals, particularly the last featured participant of this study may not be meeting some researcher's standards of being a straight-ally. Can one be a straight-ally and also believe that if you are gay you should not be invested in a romantic relationship with a same-sex partner? Does a straight-ally need to have all of their rules for what is right and wrong according to their beliefs and interpretations of the bible ironed out before they can firmly call themselves either a straight-ally or a conservative Christian?

In addition to some participants choosing to ignore some of the facets of either their straight-ally or conservative Christian identities, other participants negotiated these two identities by explaining that a sin is a sin. They may feel that same-sex behavior but they also feel that everyone sins in different ways and one is not worse than the other. For instance, one participant shared that

I have more clarity when I think of it in my own life. But I mean, I do sins every day. I'm going through all this stuff, I started drinking a little bit more, getting a little drunk you just kind of forget about everything. Well, I don't feel great about that. I feel like that's probably not the best thing to do. Would probably call that a sin. So, but I do it! I mean, the point of Christianity is that everybody is a sinner. Right? We all know that, right? Yes. So I don't like this separating out, we're not going to talk to all the divorced people. Because it's too close to home, so we're going to talk about the gay people

This participant is showcasing the belief that one sin is equal to any other sin. Other

participant stated similar viewpoints with the additional viewpoint that being a Christian involves not judging others sins because of the universality of sins for all persons. He stated that,

I really, I'm not at all concerned what it is or what it isn't, and it's not my job to decide and you know, if everything with Christianity isn't real anyway, that I, whether I think it's a sin or not, I really, I don't even really spend time thinking about it because it doesn't really matter for me. They are separate issues and I mean its, is it in the bible somewhere, I don't feel like it's the most the most like specifically laid out thing in there, there's definitely other things in there that like divorce that are pretty strongly cautioned against and I'm pretty sure last time I checked, the church had a higher percentage of divorce than the general population.

The fact that all Christians sin in some fashion, whether by drinking alcohol or having relationship difficulties or divorce in their own lives, has impacted participants because of some of their beliefs that there is not a hierarchy of sins.

Interpretation

This section shows the different ways that participants negotiate their conservative Christian and straight-ally identities. The differences relate to the way that these negotiations affect them. For some, in order to embrace a straight-ally identity, they must shift and change the rules of their conservative Christianity, and "throw out" the parts that do not fit. For others, they must put boundaries on just how accepting they are of gay and lesbian individuals so that they can continue to embrace the truth they find in the bible. Consistent with research regarding identity development, this shows how two

identities really cannot be at odds with each other and concurrently exist (Chapman et al., 2005). Yet, to discount the parts of participants that are accepting and affirming to gay and lesbian individuals because of the boundaries that they place due to their religious beliefs may not allow for individuals to be in the “grey area” between somewhat affirming and totally affirming. Meaning, all of these individuals should still be considered to be straight-allies, because if they are not, their development into a fully accepting straight-ally will cease.

Researcher Reactions

The way in which participants defined their conservative Christianity was somewhat surprising to me. I was not shocked by the biblical or behavioral definitions, even if I did not always agree that they necessarily made someone conservative. I was most interested in the participants who readily joined this study and then showed hesitancy in identifying as a conservative Christian during the beginning of the interview. However, all of the participants eventually did affirm this identity.

One theme that came out of this section that will be displayed throughout this chapter was that participants could believe in something, for instance, the inerrancy of the bible, and then make the case to be a straight-ally because they themselves were not gay. For me, this brought up some confusion. Although I felt satisfied that individuals were affirming to gay and lesbian folks, it was foreshadowing for the difficulty I would feel in learning that many of the participants made sense of these two identities by not questioning that gay and lesbian individuals were sinning by acting on their same-sex attraction, but that it was OK because a sin is a sin, and we all sin at some point. In my darkest moments of this study I felt adamant that that was not enough, that to be a

straight-ally one must truly accept gay and lesbian individuals as full humans with the right to love and act on their love as they see fit, without the designation that this basic human act was a sin. Sometimes I wanted to throw those participants out of the study for fear that by writing this I would be saying that their views were OK. Yet, I remind myself in these times that I am not the one that is categorizing and making eligibility rules for the identities that they hold and that people can come to acceptance in different ways and maybe that is OK. If we are going to say that self-categorization is the ideal, than we must be comfortable with peoples' identities at different stages of development.

Chapter 5: Narrative Representation of Data

In order to capture the individual narratives of participants for this study while fully protecting participant anonymity, three composite stories as represented by monologues were made to illuminate the stories and themes found in interview data. Monologues were chosen as the second form of representation so that participants could be represented in the first person and so that representation could stay as close as possible to the transcribed data, therefore keeping the specific words and stories of participants. These monologues will paint the picture of three composite characters, Ruth, Thomas, and Rebekah, who will describe their development as a conservative Christian and some of their experiences as it relates to their Christian development and identity. In addition, their development and experiences as a straight-ally will be explored. These monologues will also help further understand and explore the negotiations of these two identities. These monologues attempt to portray the complex nature of the developmental processes and are meant to highlight the different ways that individuals may experience these identities. Not all individuals who hold these two identities concurrently will necessarily find themselves within these composite characters, but they may find aspects of themselves within and throughout their monologues.

Monologues were developed using creative analytic practice (CAP) with help from McCormack's (2004) guide for the reconstruction of narrative data. The steps involved in this process involve the utilization of "active listening" (221) to transcripts in order to understand the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative story for the research process. McCormack suggests starting at the middle part of the story in order to organize narrative stories and understand the story turns and arches of each character. She then

recommends adding the beginning and ending to each story afterwards. Therefore, I first looked at the middle sections of participants' stories in order to build the "storylines." Then three monologues were made to address each research question. The monologues were grounded in the data collected from two to three hour unstructured life story interviews with seven participants. Story arcs, or story lines, for these monologues were found by reflecting upon the many themes related to each research question both to illuminate aspects related to participants stories that were both found again and again across interviews and also to lift up the themes that were less consistent across interviews. Each monologue represents at least four to six participants and each participants' voice is present in at least two of the three stories and is meant to be read as separate monologues. Participant voice from transcribed data is used as often as possible and is denoted in regular font. Researcher voice was also used in order to orient the reader, allow for flow in narrative story, and to help clarify information related to the character or context. My voice is represented in italics.

Monologue One: The Story of Ruth

I grew up in a small town in Arkansas, about 2 hours away from Memphis and God has always been a part of my life. However, in the particular home that I grew up in, we were Christians, in that we believed in God and we believed that Jesus died on the cross, but you know we didn't really pray or follow his will or look to him for guidance. Those were our beliefs, but it kind of ended there.

Growing up was kind of rough for me because I was adopted at age 7 and before that I was in and out of foster homes. The state wasn't sure that I would ever get adopted at all. This was because I was born premature, and you did not want to adopt me. I didn't

know how to read or write, I was failure to thrive, I had behavioral issues, and I mean the list goes on and on. No one wanted me. And actually, I don't know if this is still the case but when you *go to adopt a child* you have like two books, the baby book with all the pretty little new born babies that people want to adopt and then you have the rejected book. And I was in the rejected book. You know, those who are up for adoption because they are taken in and out of homes, not because their mother wanted to give them up but because they were neglected time and time again.

When I finally did get adopted and started going to school, my whole life changed. My foster parents were fairly well off so I found myself going from bad home to bad home to this new, wealthy environment. It was a shock to me. And so I started going to this new school in Arkansas after being adopted and I think that a lot of the students there were just raised with a lot but with no concept of what they had. And my parents had really tried to raise me almost like, I don't know, just in a very appreciative way, they wouldn't really talk about money or anything. They just tried to raise us in a very down to earth way, and so I think that being in an environment that was incongruent with that was really difficult to reconcile at that time, especially since I came from something so different.

Even though I finally got into a home at age 7, life was still kind of rough for me...I know this might sound surprising but I've been...I don't know how to say, it wasn't prosecuted but, I'd say I've been hated on for being adopted my whole life. I was told that I was a liar and that's why my mother gave me away. Because she didn't love me. And I'm just like, oh my God, was that really just said? And so, you know before

you're *seven and* there is so much *heartache*, so no, I didn't trust people. And I know that that life definitely effects who I am today. It's in my DNA, that's how babies learn.

So because I was having kind of a rough time in school in Arkansas, when I was 14 I decided to go to boarding school in *North Carolina*, because I didn't like the school that I went to in *Arkansas*. I had gone there for about 2 years, and it was very homogenous and it just did not jive well with me. *And so I got really excited about this new school because* they recruited heavily from international populations, they got a lot of students from Korea, we had some from Zimbabwe, from Saudi Arabia, from South America, and they weren't exchange students, they were there for the entire 4 years so you really got to like live with these people with such culturally different experiences, which was really unique, and the whole philosophy of the school was understanding differences between people and understandings your values and your convictions and challenging those from what you see in other people. *And they weren't unappreciative of what they had in the same way that the kids in the school in Arkansas had been. It was a better fit.*

So even though we had always gone to church at my foster parent's house, I hadn't felt that connected to it but when I got to the boarding school my roommate was this great girl who grew up in the south and she was just so admirable. And she took me to church with her and that was like, one of my happiest days... I got like a pretty tight network of friends while I was *there* and she was part of that. *And*, you know, she didn't drink, and there were a lot of things that she didn't do and when we talked about it, she was just like, "you know, that's just where my faith is for me." It doesn't mean that it's wrong, you know, she was just, very open about *the fact that that was where her faith*

took *her*. And that's just how she answered things and so I knew that I could reach out to her, and that she would be open and willing and happy to help me get involved in a church.

It was really nice because instead of actually taking me to church with her, she said, "well there's a charity event that my youth group is getting involved in this Saturday, if you want to go." So my first experience with this church and this particular group in the church was in helping the community and something that was really uplifting. We went and fed the homeless downtown, and I just jumped right in and I mean, instantly you're a part of something. *And* I felt like I could be more real with the people at that group.

So now I've been a member of that church for a while now and we recently started this bible study *and they asked me to start leading one of the groups and* we all had to talk about our relationship with God, and all of these *other* girls had had long term relationships with God. I mean, since they were kids, right? And you know, they have always been involved in bible studies and youth groups and they grew up in the church and they were there multiple times a week and they went to Christian colleges, and I'm like well, I'm a baby Christian. You know, I just started. So it's like the youngest Christian, not the youngest person, is leading this bible study. And I thought that was kind of funny, you know I'm explaining my viewpoint and my thoughts and a lot of them do have very conservative beliefs, like *in* the Old Testament. *But* I have so many issues with the Old Testament. *They were like*, "*Ruth*, you get to teach us the first chapter of the bible". And I'm like, oh my God. I don't know how I feel about that. So I did so *all this*

research and I read different versions of the bible and at the end of the day, I was like ok I just have to have faith and you know *put my beliefs out there*.

But through this process I realized that I needed to better understand what I believed in and why oh why had I been told all these things and I actually decided to completely read the bible. I mean I had read several parts of the book several times but I decided to read the whole bible by myself and really study it and make sure what I believe is what I believe. I wanted to believe the bible and nothing else. So I went through that journey and read the bible in a year and really studied it, really trying to see, if there was anything that was like a red flag for me. And anyway I found it to be very insightful and comforting but I also realized in doing that how important it was to be rooted in a church and to be serving. And at that point I still wasn't doing that as much as I had wanted to.

So once I read the bible I still felt like I still wanted more, so my fiancé gave me this book called Jesus is a Carpenter, because in the beginning he was kind of concerned...because I was still very conflicted on a lot of things. So, he bought me this and he was like, "I'm not trying to push anything on you, but a lot of the things that you're struggling with, I get it, I understand. This book might save you a lot of research". So the author went out to prove that Christ and God weren't real and in the process was converted to Christianity. Because he was like, he was given so much proof and evidence that what the bible said was real. And you know I read it and I loved it. And it made me realize that I'm not the only person in the world that is dealing with this. That's like wanting to prove the bible.

So I feel like it's been a journey but I guess I would say that yes, I define myself as a Conservative Christian because I feel like I have like a biblical point of view...and I feel like I've examined my beliefs and tried to align them as much as possible with the truths that are in the bible. Regardless of whether they are historical or not. Um, so I would say, that to me identifying as conservative would mean that I identify with the truths in the bible and I do my best to like represent those in the ways that I interact with people. I also feel like I'm a conservative Christian with family values, and I believe in gay rights including gay marriage and adoption for gay people. I don't see why if you're in love and you're willing to get married that you would not be allowed to be married. It is not for the weak. So I believe that if you want to get married, you should have the right to do that. And with all the children that need homes? Oh I am adamant about adoption. The more people that are willing to adopt, the better. A family should not be without a child if they want one because there are so many children out there that want parents that don't have them.

But I guess I still question things for myself sometimes, but my relationship with God is strong. And it's actually, it's interesting because I...have gone through so many stages of my faith and I'm friends with a lot of those people, especially on Facebook, that have all kind of stopped at like stages in their faith development...Like I'm friends with like some people on Facebook from the school in North Carolina. And it's like, that's where their faith development stopped. Like that's just where they are. And they're all still friends with each other, they're all friends, they have kids there now and that's just where they are. And so it's odd to like see them posting negative things about GLBT stuff... Like how marriage should never be allowed and the detriment that that would be

and how marriage is meant for a man and a woman. And how this is the purpose of God...you know, it's just an odd *feeling* and I feel like it just chronicles my faith development.

*So I guess I have always felt protective of gay and lesbian folks throughout my life. Like for instance, in college during my sophomore year I decided to go Greek. So I was in a sorority and the first year I was there I was actually going through rush and I was going to all the houses and getting recruited and all of that and then the second year I was already a part of a house so I was talking to girls that were coming through, and I remember that there was a lesbian that was coming through...But we didn't actually know that, that's the thing. Somebody had started a rumor, so it was either a rumor, or she had come out. But I didn't know this girl, and I had never met her, but I remember all of the horrible things that were being said and she was being cut from every house and people were saying horrible things like, you know, "you have to live in the house and I don't want to room or shower you know because it's a community shower, I don't want to shower with a lesbian, and who's she going to bring to the formals? Is she going to bring another girl, like, that can't work". And it was just, horrible things that I thought were just mean and it's like, ok, one, "what makes you think that just because she's a lesbian she's looking at you. Ok? Do you look at every guy and think oh my God, he's a God, no. And second of all we don't know that it's true and even if it is, she's a girl that wants to join a sorority *and* wants to be Greek *and* wants to get involved. I was like; can't we be more than just a social club?" I was like "isn't that what y'all preached? We're not a social club?" I was like, after that I went inactive actually. Because I just...it was just, it was just a social club and they proved it.*

I also have just known gay people in other areas in my life. Like I had some friends in college but they weren't like my best friends, I knew them and we talked, but I definitely had a couple good ones in my first job too. I just can't imagine what that could feel like to be gay or to know that isolation like if your parents were not ok with it. And they've had to deal with things that I've never had to think about.

But there are definitely people in my life that do not feel that way. Like, my fiancé works with a doctor that goes to this Baptist church in the mid-south. And she says terrible things about gays and lesbians. Openly, out loud. And she uses slurs, so she doesn't say gay or lesbian, she'll say, "faggot," she'll say all of these horrible things, meant to cause pain. And she is a very educated person. I mean, she's a doctor, she's a surgeon... She's very educated. Bob, my fiancé will tell me and he's disgusted by it. I mean, he is. He'll say, "I can't believe what the gay-hater said today." That's what we call her – the gay-hater...and it's like, I know automatically who he is talking about because it's the same one. And I'm like, "someday she is going to get sued and I hope it's for millions. I hope that she gets a gay nurse in there that she doesn't realize and she says that crap and she just nails her to the wall." It's an anger that I have for her because it's like, how dare she feel that she have the right to say those horrible things. Well she hates gays and lesbians. She hates them. It's like, are you being taught that at church or did something happen to make you hate gays and lesbians? How can she wear a huge cross around her neck and then, have the audacity to use gay slurs, to talk in hate. It's like how can you call yourself a Christian when you have so much hatred? It's like, if I lived forty years ago during the civil rights I would have said the same thing – how can you call yourself a Christian if you have so much hate, just because they're black? How can you

do that? It baffles me. Like my parents are prejudiced, my grandmother is prejudice and it baffles me. They're like, "it's just a different culture, their just different Ruth" and "you don't understand, like you want to have like this idealistic view of the world and you don't have that." I'm like, "how different are they? Yeah! It's like anybody that's not white and southern is bad. And that's a lot of people that would be bad in the world". And I'm just like, "ya'll have so much love for people yet you have so *many* closed doors and this prejudice. It might not be hatred but it's definitely prejudice against people." And so I feel like the gay community even if they aren't being passionately hated by a surgeon they're being looked at differently *and* I don't think that's right.

And that was also a test to my boyfriend at the time, we had just started dating. Of how he would handle going and having a date with a gay couple. And because, I knew that he was Christian and adamant but we were still very new in our relationship. And I had an ex-boyfriend that was adamantly against gays. And that was like, oh my gosh, we are so different. So I was like, "we're going to go to dinner with Bob and his partner, how do you feel about that? A gay couple?" And it's just like, we just had the best night, it was so much fun. And I was just like, OK I can really date this guy because not only does he say that he is OK but he can actually have relationships with them. *And if he hadn't*, we wouldn't be engaged right now

So I think *that sometimes I look around* to all the churches that I've gone to *and like* people seem so like, convicted about the things that they believe, on issues that I almost like want to say, like how do you know the answer to that? How do you know that that's right? And when people aren't willing to examine that, it makes me feel like I will be rejected for not holding those same views, so it kind of goes back to I guess the level

of inauthenticity that I've found in like my experiences in the church... And so it's usually people within the faith that I find myself kind of like, tiptoeing around for? And I feel like I'm finally getting to a point, or I have been getting to the point within the last year of being able to kind of say what I believe a little bit more...*Like* it's hard to be like both of those things...*a conservative Christian who also is supportive of gay folks...* and *to feel* like integrated in both of those things when other people come in and really can't conceptualize how that's OK. You know, it's like, it's hard to explain it and I just, I don't think a lot of people, a lot of Christians I've interacted with see that that is possible. Like it's such an all or nothing thing and so I think it's odd for them to see somebody who has reconciled those views and it's not, it's just not a problem in my life really.

And I have some very conservative friends that are adamant about gays shouldn't get married and you shouldn't have pre-marital sex and etc. but they are some of my good friends. Then I have gay and lesbian friends. It's just I'm always very open. People are not surprised when I have an opinion about something...and they're not at all surprised if it's different from theirs. So, you know, I'm not the yes man. I'm not the person that's just going to chime in and agree with you *just because*.

Monologue Two: The Story of Thomas

Well my name is Thomas, and I'm from the midsouth. I went to college in the south and came back here and also got married. Growing up, I was not in a home that went to church. We were, I guess I would say, in a vacuum of knowledge about the church and about Christianity because as an adult looking at my folks now, I know that my mom and my dad both identified as Christians, but we never went to church and we never talked about God and I didn't know about Jesus or any of that stuff. So, I didn't

really grow up in a church environment, a religious environment until *I was 15* when I started going to this summer camp. It was extremely conservative religiously. So, I started going to this camp with *my friend Paul*, I guess summer between seventh and eighth grade. *Paul* was really a ladies man, he was really popular with girls, very charismatic, good looking, and, he also really liked me. We were big pals. And so I would go to this camp and be wanting to kinda stay close to him, because all this God stuff kind of freaked me out *at first*, kind of made me anxious, *because I* couldn't take my disc man and my led zeppelin CDs, but it was fun! And so I started going there at 14, or 13 probably and went there for 3 summers and at the end of my third summer there, I decided to convert, to become a Christian.

So at camp, they would do the little devotionals and camp counselors would come and chat with us all at night, and I know now that their gimmick was to try to get kids to get saved, so at the end of the week they would stage this kind of elaborate reproduction of the crucifixion of Christ and would have an alter call, and somebody would give a little sermon and they would invite any of us who wanted to get saved to raise their hands and the counselor would come to us and would talk to us about how our life was so much better all the sudden and we were never going to be the same, and it was the best decision we had ever made and stuff like that, and the first summer I was there, I definitely didn't do it and kind of shrunk back and was afraid. *But by the second* summer I kinda thought about it but I knew that it was just going to cost me too much, you know, I was big into cursing and starting to sort of like girls and stealing stuff and shoplifting, I might of smoked pot by then, and you know, by any other standards was pretty low key stuff. So *Paul, my camp friend*, and I would kind of talk between summers about how we wanted

to go back home and make some changes in our lives but *neither* of us had actually gotten saved. But by that third summer I guess things in my life were starting to get kind of confusing, plus my parent's marriage was falling apart, and then I was just really starting to have a lot of doubts about who I was as a person, and that summer went off you know, as expected with lots of fun and it was also the last summer I could go as a camper, and I go and they gave that alter call and I just couldn't really think of any reason not to take advantage of that. And you know it's really big and emotional experience and I remember me and Paul had both gone up to each other and given each other big, you know, slobbery hugs and we were crying, and you know we were both really convinced that we were going to go home and really live for Jesus and he and I both were pretty popular guys at the camp, he much more so than me, so we got a lot of attention for the fact that we decided to make this change in our lives...I just remember people hearing about it at camp and being excited about it, stuff like that. And I remember the next day when my dad came to get us, you know my dad was *this* huge music fan, like classic rock, led zeppelin, the Beatles, all that. And he was driving us home and *Paul* and I were still on this high and said that we really didn't want to hear music like that anymore. We decided that we were going to make some changes in our lives and we'd rather him turn that off. So, he did and that was the first of a lot of that to come. I didn't want to listen to secular music, see TV shows with women in bikinis.

And I have to tell you that it felt really good to get saved. The way I describe it, and the way it felt to me was, kind of like an explosion in my chest that was warm and a physical feeling that I felt, not like a hand on my shoulder, nothing like that, but just like the word is psychosomatic...I had heard the preacher talking about acceptance,

forgiveness, that everyone is born sinful and in need of forgiveness and he said, you can have it! It's for free, you can have forgiveness. And then you never ever have to be separated from God. And He was answering questions I didn't know I had. It was, everything he said, and I hadn't known that I had needed that, it answered needs in me that my mom and dad had never met. The reality was that my life was pretty lonely and pretty trying to fit in and pretty full of not being accepted. And so then this God that I'm hearing about for the first time would accept me just as I am and He made me and He loved me. And so that just ignited my soul, and just brought me to tears, I was sobbing. And I went and talked with a lady, a little old lady afterwards and I said, I don't know how to get whatever you guys are talking about, but I want it. That's when I became a Christian. And then I woke up the next morning and I felt very, very different. I felt like a completely new thing. Old *Thomas* was gone and something different was there. And I actually felt like I had just floated out of bed, it was just such a joyful waking up. "I am different!" and it was true. It was true and at the time I had no idea what I was experiencing but now that I know scripture better, it talks about whenever a persons a new *convert*, is with God, a new creation, the old things have gone and the new things have come, and I was like, that's what happened for me, my experience with conversion was like, other people I know it takes years and years! They grow up in a church and then they are 8 years old and they become Christian and they get to high school, they make some hard choices and then college it really sinks in... That's a real normal kind of experience, but for me, it was a, hear the gospel, accept it, *and become* transformed!

After my experiences at the camp and going into high school I was very, I would say legalistic in my faith and I followed a lot of rules like not cussing, not drinking. Like,

I wasn't going to drink till I was 21, *because* that was just something that I felt like a Christian should do, and there were a lot of people like having sex and that wasn't something that I was going to do, and I think those are probably the main ones. I really prioritized youth group and we would have like Christian fellowship meetings on campus and I prioritized those which I think is good to do in your life but I would prioritize them over my friends and over things that I think now *add* a lot of value in life. Like I think I would say that I attended those things because I think it was something I thought I should be doing and not something that I really enjoyed. I would continually go to those instead of investing in relationships that actually were authentic and that I really enjoyed.

And the focus on my church at the time was really focused on getting people saved, like just about everything had the agenda of trying to get people to get saved. And we would use these gospel tracks, little paper folding things...this little brochure with provocative language to try and lead someone to try to get saved. The one I remember the most was, "if you were to die right now, do you know for sure that you would go to heaven?" and so we would walk around with just pockets full of these things and just hand them out to everybody we met, and we would have church events where we would just go swarm Walmart and just pass out tracks to people and they had a little thing you could tear off and mail it back in if you had gotten saved.

But then I started going to college here in the mid-south, and at the time I was looking at seminary so I was a religious studies major, and that kind of set me on this exploration of my faith, and through some experiences there I like loosened that up a little bit, *but that wasn't easy really either* and yeah, it took me awhile – I still didn't really drink until I was 21, I had like a few sips of whatever, but I was still pretty

legalistic with that...I feel like my first two years at *college* were just kind of growing pains, with faith and legalism...And every student at *college* is required to take some religious studies classes, and so, I had already decided to be a religious studies major, and I got assigned *to this one professor as* my advisor, and for my first class, and I...hated him. It's an interesting development because now he's one of my favorite professors, although I'm sure he doesn't know that. And anyway, I had his class, which was essentially a class on the New Testament and *my college* is funded some by the Presbyterian Church which is why we have to take these classes... But these religious studies classes are not Christian. And I say not Christian as in, they don't proselytize at all. Um, and it was really difficult, oh it was horrible. I went into that class and my professor spent the entire semester just tearing the Old Testament apart historically, and he had so much more knowledge that it was like fighting an uphill battle, and all of our tests, you know, were essay tests, and I was forced to write about these things to get a good grade, that I was angry about learning and so I went through this just horrible time. And so I just felt like every Tuesday and Thursday morning, my class was at 8AM and it was miserable and I would walk in and kind of prepare for like a beating of my faith. You know and so, it's like twice a week for an hour and a half, I was just being lectured, it wasn't even discussion. About how everything I ever believed was wrong. And so I think it was just more of like, like a slow wearing down the entire semester. And I was dating this *girl* and that was horrible and then I was playing field hockey we traveled like every single weekend except for two, and so it was just like, my life was just really spread thin, and I didn't feel like I had the time to grapple with any of the things *that I was dealing with*. And so I was just writing these essays about things I didn't believe, and I was so

angry about it, and I just didn't know how to deal with any of it, and so by the time like, the second semester came around, I was having trouble eating... it was horrible, I was a little bit of a hypochondriac, I got an endoscopy to see if I had stomach cancer, because the doctor couldn't figure out what it was, and it was just, my body reacting to like, wild levels of emotional stress. Yeah. It was so much anxiety.

But it was eye opening for me as well and changed me quite a bit. And so also at college I started to kind of sniff around and hear from other professors who were Christians but had a conversion experience, but had never gotten saved like I had. But they were Christians and they were good people and they were smart and they loved God, and that started to really kind of be unsettling to me. Because I was convinced that they were good Christian people...but they had never gotten saved, so it started to kind of crack and then in seminary I found out, or started to do a lot of studying and found out that this whole idea of getting saved and the conversion experience was kind of an invention from about the 19th century, second great awakening. *That's* where I realized *how what the camp had been doing was* just a kind of manipulation of human psychology to convince somebody that you need to get saved, that you have sin, that they need this radical transformation experience, and that you can read conversion narratives from other faiths that sound just like Christian ones, and I mean, if you know what buttons to push and how to do it, I mean it's as much a science as farming...

So now I would say that the focus of my faith is a way of, I would say being with God and experiencing God in myself and others and in the world, and constantly growing because of that experience. You know, I feel like there is still a struggle in me to be legalistic, and I think it probably always will be a struggle, but I definitely see myself

much more able to like identify it when it comes up and examine what the motivation is behind them, like, prevalence of going to church. My *wife* is much more like, “I’m good I don’t need to go to church, its busy season,” *she*’s an accountant and I used to like, last year I really had a reaction to that. So I would say that like that is an example of a rule that still comes up for me...I find myself having negative reactions being around Christian communities who like, I don’t want to say like don’t drink because there is more to it, but who set such stringent boundaries and such stringent rules. I feel not really welcome in those communities so it’s been kind of hard for us to I guess find a solid Christian community that we can feel welcome in, but I don’t want to encouraged to do that, like there are things that are good in my personal spiritual development, but I don’t want to be in an environment and don’t want to be in a place that seems to prize those things over natural *Christian* growth.

And so yes, I feel that I am conservative, like for me and my Christianity it is a conservative Christianity. I believe in the inerrancy of scripture, I believe that Christ is the only way to heaven and to God. I believe that Christ is who he says he is, that he was a perfect man who didn’t have any sin, chose to have a perfect life, and went through temptation, like, the big basic tenets of Christianity...*But I also* feel like conservative means almost like not willing to examine your beliefs, *and so I feel slightly uncomfortable with that title too.* Because I feel like, conservative to me implies that they are never going to change and that you kind of know where they stand and where they’re always going to be and one of the things that I was saying earlier that I’ve come to value about faith is that there’s an element of question in it and I’m not who I was in my faith a

year ago or five years ago, and that's going to continue to change and I think that that's a good thing.

And I would say that five to ten years ago I would have been like, I was definitely not an ally and I would be anti-gay rights, *and* I'm really not political, so when people talk about the gay agenda or gay politics, I'm out to sea, I have no concept about what they are talking about. *So* for me ten years ago, *I would have said that the gay partnership/lifestyle is not what the bible says you're supposed to have, so it's therefore wrong. And no they shouldn't have a right for marriage or adopting children. So five to ten years ago it would have just felt like, those kinds of rights are reserved for the people who are adhering to basic scriptural foundation for what a family is. Now, ask me why I cared - I don't know aside from maybe I was involved with conservative Christians who had that viewpoint. But then I think that I began to feel very flipped from I don't care anymore really to OK this has to go stop. When that happened was when, I mean that conversion from, I don't really care about gay rights one way or the other and then I flipped over into I'm an ally. This probably happened when I began to realize that my friend from home, Paul was actually probably gay. And then I began to read stories about this or that, long term partner denied benefits or could not visit in the hospital. Or so and so had a hate crime against them for and they can't be legally married so they can't adopt. Or whatever it is. Those kind of stories. I read CNN and every day and whenever a story came on about, or whenever a story would show up about a legal issue I would read it and think God that's awful, that's just wrong. That's not OK. And then I started to compare them in my mind, this population with previous populations that had been discriminated against like the racial minorities in the US, and before that the WW2 and*

the Nazis and the Jews, the Native Americans and it just goes back throughout history of the people in power putting limits on minority groups and believing that one is better or more acceptable than the other and I felt for the first time that, you know, I think, one of the things that I thought to myself is if the GLBT community were outlawed and they were on the run – would I be a stop on the underground railroad to help them? Would I have a secret room and like store them? And help them to stay safe? And when I was like, I don't know, if I would or not, that was a shaming moment for myself. Like a self-shaming. Nobody overheard me thinking this or knew what I was thinking or going to, but I want to be on the right side of this in history. You know, I don't want to be the person who looks back and says I should have thought this through better. So, when that happened I couldn't even tell you that there was an ignition, some factor that started it. But like a gradual, growth in my awareness of the issues that that community is facing and then my own sense of justice and fairness.

So now I would say I identify more as an ally because the majority of things that I've done related to like GLBT issues have been more like supporting people that I know that are GLBT. I haven't done like advocacy on like a large scale although I would say that representing their views to others who don't know them and then advocating to those people, who may be oppressing them unintentionally, I would define *myself* as an advocate but I would say it's on a more like person to person level, *like with Paul, he ended up to be gay and he came out to me when he was visiting me after college, after I had been to hell and back with my own faith. This happened when I lived in this house near downtown* and he came out to me while we were hanging out and he was just like, "I have to tell you something" and I was like "yeah, what's up", and he was like, "I'm gay",

and I was like, “I know... It’s not like a surprise to me”. Um, but I just told him that I was really happy that he had told me that and the rest of our conversation was just really focused around how he was grappling with it with his faith, and how he was so scared to tell me because he knew I was so like convicted in my faith and he had seen me through *my whole* legalistic development. He was worried about it which was a really sad experience *because* I feel like I had spent a lot of time intentionally saying things to him, like “I have a cousin whose gay” *in order* to kind of plant the seed that I wouldn’t judge him, like “hey, *my cousin* is gay, and I love him!” You know, so I would intentionally do that, but those like little seeds I don’t think would ever outweigh how legalistic he saw me, and again he was one of my closest friends, I was so honest with him about everything that went on in my life, so yeah. He was really terrified to tell me. And I think after I voiced to him that was something that I knew and that nothing in our friendship would change, he felt very well, relieved, and also, open to immediately jump into the religion conversation of, like, “am I going to hell for this?” And he was looking to me for those answers. I guess because he saw me as someone who was strong in my faith and so, I had to answer those things in a very unexpected way and in a way I was not really prepared to do. *So I told him* that I didn’t believe that he was going to hell for it. And that I thought that Christians blow up homosexuality as this hallmark sin and that really it comes from one verse in the Old Testament. And that there’s a lot of things in the old testament that we do not follow. And that I believed that it’s something that he was born with and that it’s his right to be happy and that God in my experience of God, desires happiness and liberation and that I wished that for him too.

And so I think being able to be honest with him about that and I remember *thinking* like, I don't have the answers, I don't know about what I believe but I'll offer you what I'm convicted about. And it was just great to see like how relieved he was because I think to him it wasn't only like potential judgment from me, it was also, an element of like, faithfulness...I think I was probably the only person that he really trusted to talk about his concerns about being GLBT in regards to his faith and so I think that, had there been judgment it would have been pretty catastrophic. So it was great to be able to like affirm him in that situation.

But I have had a lot of people in my life ask about my relationship with *Paul* and how that, how I guess my faith impacts that and there have been times where I've had that conversation with a couple of friends from the college group at *my current church*, and I've been able to be pretty honest about that. But I remember being like pretty anxious about being open about my feelings. But being able to like take a step back from them about that and think like, there is no reason for me to be anxious or worried about representing my views about this person that I love so much whose like very close to my heart. And I don't know the answers to things but I do want him to be happy and I feel like God liberates oppressed people and I think the GLBT group is oppressed and so I think that my role is to like be with him in that struggle. *But I feel like the way my church friends were asking me* was like, insinuating like, of course this is something that is irreconcilable, so like, how do you deal with that, and I would say that they maybe think that people are born gay, I don't think they think it's like a complete element of choice but they label it, I would say as sinful, and I don't.

And so now I just feel like I'm constantly reminded of people like *Paul* in my life and how I need to, I mean ensure that I'm like being an ally and an advocate for him because I know his story and it's not something that's easy for him. So I'd say that's probably the way that it operates, or that it's in my face so much at this time in my life.

Monologue Three: The Story of Rebekah

My name is Rebekah and I grew up on the West Coast. Both of my parents grew up as missionary kids and I grew up Seventh Day Adventist, which is Christian. So I've always been really involved in the church. Because both of my parents were missionary kids, they went and did missionary when they first married, because that's what they thought they were supposed to do, and so I grew up with that mentality of service, missionary mentality. My parents weren't missionaries when we were kids, but they got divorced pretty early on, when I was about 4 years old. And so then my dad remarried and he remarried a Seventh day Adventist lady, and so that's always been a strong, very cultural thing. Along with it vegetarianism, so, my mom re-married a non-Christian and I think that definitely influenced her and also influenced me as well. Like for instance when my parents were younger and my brother was younger, it was very legalistic, and religion was very important – doing the right things. It came from my parents being missionaries and you have to be the perfect role models and these different countries and so after they got divorced and maybe realized they weren't so holy, I don't know, and then there was definitely less focus on religion and relationship with God, and more on the relationship with other people, and spirituality.

So I grew up in a very structured, Christian environment. I went to church every week, I went to church schools, and I went to a college that was Christian. And my faith

very much defined me and defined what I did. *And* we were involved in a lot of church programs, sports, camping. Stuff like that in addition to church Sunday school, all kinds of groups, you know, everything, so by the time I was in high school, you know, I was very, sort of on the cutting edge of being involved in it. I was really involved and trying to look for opportunities to like lead stuff myself and you know. I was all about it and when I was in college, started volunteering at a Mission Church.

So I think my mom influenced *me* big time *but* part of it too is that I grew up on the west coast so it was very different. But so, I grew up on the west coast and then when I was in my last couple years of high school I moved to Arkansas, northwest Arkansas, and it was so conservative, and so I grew up with people wearing jewelry in the church and drinking wine with their meals, and it not being an issue. So that was a drastic change for me. Just in that, realizing that my earrings were offensive to people in church. So I went through awhile where I kind of wanted to test people and challenge people. Like, I went to a Christian academy and the academy had a church where all the academy kids were supposed to or required to go to and I was not in the dorms but I went to that church because that's where my friends were at and there were these little old ladies who would tell people to go back and change because they weren't dressed appropriately. And so I would challenge that by not wearing a sweater over my dress or whatever it was. Wearing something that was a little short. And I did that for quite a while. Realizing that I was just challenging someone to say something to me. Maybe because I wanted to say "you're not being Jesus," I don't know, just very closed minded perspective of it, but *I was* frustrated with people being so judgmental. And that wasn't how I saw things. I couldn't imagine. I

can't imagine Jesus standing in a church thing saying, "you're not dressed appropriately, you need to leave". Or "you're wearing jeans, you need to leave."

But being a Christian for me has always been pretty steady in my life. To me that means doing the right things to call yourself a Christian so *that* you can go to heaven. So, following biblical principles very strictly, Old Testament biblical principles. *And* when it comes to salvation I'm pretty much an exclusivist. I really feel like it's true that you know, that Jesus is the son of God, he came from heaven to earth and was like revealed, and I just follow the line of what's in the New Testament, anybody that believes in Jesus will be saved, he promises us that, and if there is some other way for us to be saved, like the person that never heard about Jesus, that never had a chance to hear about Jesus, can they be saved, why shouldn't they be saved too, you know, maybe they can, it's up to God or whatever, but if there is something else out there like that, he hasn't told us about that, you know? You gotta kind of stick with what you know. While I hope, I love Origen, he was one of the founding fathers, well that's great! He was a Universalist *and* I hope that's true! But, it doesn't necessarily jive with what you see in the New Testament, so you can kind of hope for it on the one hand but you kind of stay faithful to what the text says on the other hand. So I definitely believe that, I definitely believe in telling people about Jesus and what he means in my life and inviting them to know Him, follow that, good with all that but in the sense of like prothelitism. Not in the sense of you know, I'm here to convert you, not in the sense of I'm going to get to the part and share Christ with you and you're going to get baptized and you know, it's another notch in my *belt* or whatever.

And I grew up *and* always thought I was pretty Republican. I just, at some point I just, maybe it's what the Republicans want to do with the budget, maybe it's smarter, maybe the Ayn Rand stuff is better for the top whatever percent of people, but it's definitely not the loving thing. *I mean*, I've seen very few Republicans give a speech about their bill where I was like "that was a loving thing." And for me it's like I just can't, I don't love being associated with either party but I just can't buy into that party. My father felt like anybody that would vote Democrat, couldn't be a Christian, so you could see the issue there. *Although my mother wasn't like that all. But he felt that like*, point blank, Jimmy Carter was a fake Christian. He looks at Clinton and Obama as fake Christians because they are pro-choice. Like, "how could somebody be pro-choice and be Christian?" Doesn't compute. But ultimately the main thing for me, I kind of separate the political world from the world of my faith. Not in the sense that my faith doesn't influence my politics, but in the sense that like, I just really disagree with the stance that the church should just run around and try to outlaw abortion or gay marriage. I just think that's a big mistake.

And it's funny because abortion for instance is another one where I believe conservatively just like my other friends *that* abortion is wrong, it's bad. I hate it, I hate it! I don't hate the people, I hate that it exists. And there, that is a real Christian value I know, and it's also a value that lots of non-believers I know have the same value, the pro-life. *Although I'm not sure that I want to be a Republican just because I don't like abortion. But it's like*, you talk to anybody that I grew up with and it's a very straight equation. "Well you've got to vote Republican for president because they appoint the Supreme Court justices and that's the only way we're ever going to turn over Roe VS

Wade.” So there is really no other option. Straight face. That’s it. But nobody ever thinks, OK we had George Bush for 8 years, we’re not any closer to outlawing Roe VS Wade, some of the most liberal justices were appointed by Reagan. So, is this really a strategy for getting rid of abortion? No! *And I just feel like*, There are 10,000 things in the world that are wrong. And gay marriage is the one thing that we have to get behind? No.

But I would say that besides abortion that gay rights the biggest fight right now, and it’s in the Supreme Court, is, we have these conservative politicians that are using the bible as the reason that gays and lesbians shouldn’t get married. And I think it’s hypocritical because that’s like saying, if you’ve had pre-marital sex because you’ve sinned against your body, right? Then you shouldn’t be allowed to get married. Or, marriage is designated for a man and a wife, if you’re a Christian. They think that America is filled with a billion Christians, we’re built for free religion, to have it, to not have it, whatever. *But* we are in a country that is not Christian based and we should not pass laws that are based on what the bible says because this to me, that is why we left, that is why we started this country, so we could have our freedoms and that to me is hypocritical. And actually they should use the bible as a reason for gays and lesbians to get married.

So I would call myself an ally. I’m a strong believer and I’m a patriot too, we’re in America. Ok? That’s the bottom line. Yes, I am a Christian, and I’m also an American and America was built on those beliefs, you know, equality for everyone. And you think just 30 years ago we were fighting equal rights for women, we were fighting for equal rights for African Americans, and it’s just like, this is just today’s struggle. You know, think about it in 20 years, we’re going to be talking about, man I remember the fight

when we were trying to get rights for gays and lesbians. And I want to be on the right side of that. And the right side of that is equality for everyone.

But here is the thing - I don't have any friends who are in that community who are in relationships with others from that community who profess to be Christian. So, that's a gaping hole in my friendship circles. I have a lot of GLBT friends that are not believers and don't want to be Christians, and I have some GLBT friends who are Christians and they don't have partners *because* they are making a choice based on what they believe that the bible says this is not for you. So, I wouldn't say that the process of sanctification is any different for any person regardless *of anything* they have going on in their lives. So for me it's like this is where gay rights breaks off for me, from, this is where I start to have where I think I'm breaking away from what a lot of my friends would say, like...for me my own personal purity, my own not being involved with someone physically before marriage. I believe *that* sex is for marriage and that's it. So, I don't engage in sex outside of marriage and my conservative viewpoint is *that* nobody should. I have lot of reasons why I think it might be hurtful for people and also especially for the church. I mean the bible is so clear about it, for people to openly engage in that, it sends a conflicted message to anybody who is watching. And there are a number of reasons that I think that for instance, it's a very visible thing that is hard to be a believer, to really feel like you're walking with God and then continuing in the sin of living with somebody and having sex with people that are not your husband or wife. So, I think a lot of my conservative friends would believe that I would be one in the same with them. Where I break off from them would be *that* if there's going to be a separation between church and

state, it needs to be very, very separate. The government is not to moralize. What's the purpose of the government? It's not to moralize.

But, I mean I'll come out and tell people that I don't believe sexual orientation is a choice, and that I believe and am comfortable with the idea that you know, you're kind of born with a sexuality and that homosexuality is not a perversion and then I think that, if we grant that sexual orientation is something that a person is born with, and that is just a part of their development, we have to say, God loves them and God designed them that way too. And I find a lot of meaning in that, because it makes God a lot bigger. Anytime there's creativity or something out of the norm that is still healthy. I think that points to a creative God, so if we're going to have GLBT folks that live their lives in a healthy life affirming way, I think God's on their side as much as He's on the side of me looking for a *husband*. Or having kids and the people for whom that's a big deal... I think they got some control issues, they're wanting to control who God endorses. And I think that in some ways that's a Christian conception too, to say that their sexual orientation doesn't diminish their dignity as people created in the image of God who deserve attention and respect, now that's the tough part. It's a lot easier to vilify people based on their morality, but the tough part is to say even rapists, convicts, are made in the image of God, and deserve dignity and respect. So that's kinda how I deal with it faith wise.

Interpretation of Narrative Stories

These three monologues illuminate participant voices using creative analytic practice in order to show larger pieces of participant voice while protecting the anonymity of participants. Although each monologue shows unique aspects related to the way that participants' develop and perceive themselves as conservative Christians, they

also share commonalities as well. This section will offer interpretation of each narrative story and highlight both the similarities and differences between them.

The first monologue is Ruth's story about her life as a young girl in foster care who gets adopted into a family of wealth and her experience as moving from poverty to wealth and all that comes with that shift. She also discusses her difficulty in being a young adult and being known by her peers as someone who had been adopted. This experience plus her experiences in a diverse setting in her boarding school both seem to point to the importance that her ability to utilize perspective taking has had on her life. Ruth also discusses her introduction to church life through a friend at boarding school and how she explores her faith experiences through education and critical thinking, which includes her experiences in reading the bible in full as well as other religiously oriented books. Ruth ends her story of conservative Christian development by stating that she is still on her journey and that in comparison to her Christian peers, she is in a different place because of her life experiences. She paints the story of becoming a straight-ally largely on her experience as being othered or made to feel different in her young adulthood.

Because Ruth knew what it was like to be made to feel different based on things in her life that she could not control (being adopted for instance), she was able to use perspective taking for gay and lesbian individuals. Her Christian identity and straight-ally identity have made her sensitive to the discrimination of gay and lesbian individuals from Christian people in her life. For Ruth, her straight-ally identity and conservative Christian identity are built and layered on top of one another to make a cohesive whole. Her negotiation seems fairly uncomplicated – she believes that gay and lesbian individuals

should not be discriminated against and does not like it when people say things to that extent. She personally knows gay and lesbian individuals who have been discriminated against and so she seeks to live her life in a way that allows her to embrace her individual view on what the bible says but to still be in community with people that feel differently from her.

Thomas's story represents a number of participants' who were not brought up in an active conservative Christian household but who came to that identity in their youth through church outreach activities, and in Thomas's case, church camp. Thomas describes his three year camp experience and discusses his religious conversion at the camp. This conversion experience for Thomas was powerful and changed his life in many ways, including giving him a priority for "saving" others around him. Although further educational opportunities in college shifted that importance for him in his current life, he still describes some of the rules and legalism that was and is present in his life. His personal relationship with God and his own version of what it means for him personally to be a Christian are also explored. Thomas also explains how his straight-ally identity was forged by his experiences and education. By following legal battles that gay and lesbian individuals have had to partake in, his awareness grew about the discrimination of gay and lesbian people as well as his understanding that one of his closest friends was in fact, gay. Thomas began to understand the legal needs for gay and lesbian people as being a part of the larger civil rights movement. Thomas discusses his outspokenness about gay rights and also talks about his straight-ally support on a person-to-person level. This person-to-person level is mostly with his friend Paul, whom he supported as he came out so that he could help Paul realize that he was still loved by God. His experience

with his friend and his greater awareness of the discrimination that is faced by many gay and lesbian individuals propelled him into a negotiation of faith which allows for acceptance for same-sex attraction.

The last monologue is the story of Rebekah and her experiences and perception of self as a conservative Christian with a lifelong connection to a church. Rebekah's religious identity offers the viewpoint that is also found in several of the participants of this study, which is that she has held a conservative Christian identity for most of her life and it has not shifted very much from her youth. Rebekah also shares her perception of what it means to her to have a relationship with God and to go to heaven someday. In addition, Rebekah's story also discusses a fairly regular theme across participants, which is the connection between her political and religious identity. Rebekah then goes on to bridge her patriotism to her straight-ally identity. For her, this is largely political because of her firm belief in the separation between church and state and her belief that the fight for gay rights has similarities to the larger civil rights movement overall. For Ruth, she feels that her patriotism and belief the equal rights should be bestowed to all. This has led her into a straight-ally development. She negotiates her faith and straight-ally identity by understanding sexual orientation as genetic and that gay and lesbian individuals are entitled to respect and dignity.

These monologues offer stories and voices from participants who identify as both a conservative Christian and a straight-ally. The themes of these stories align with the previous chapter's information showing individual voices and also offer some new themes as well. The next section of this chapter will give interpretation and insight into the themes found in the monologues of Ruth, Thomas, and Rebekah.

Monologue Themes

The monologues of Ruth, Thomas, and Rebekah highlighted many of the themes found in interview data from the participants in this study. First, a discussion of early life experiences of narrative characters and how these experiences impacted the conservative Christian and straight-ally identities of participants will be discussed. In addition, the influence of parents and mentors, as well as the impact of education and critical thought will be shown. Legalism, or the excessive adherence to rules, will be highlighted in reference to the composite characters. Next, the political considerations, including the patriotism of narrative characters will be discussed. Further, the biblical interpretations and personal relationship with God that participants have will be highlighted. Finally, the influence that personal relationships with GLBT individuals will be shown on how composite characters developed a straight-ally identity will be discussed.

Early life experiences. Early life experiences offer the contextual basis for participants' lives and offer the starting point for the participants' conservative Christian identity. Early life experiences included church membership from a young age in many cases, and also youth groups, and service trips for others. However, for some, the absence of church or a religious identity was also important in participant's development of a conservative Christian identity.

These two sides are shown in the monologues. For instance, both Ruth and Thomas's narratives offer stories which show later-in-life Christian identity development. As shown in her story, Ruth was in foster care until the age of 7 and did not have a strong and active faith life prior to becoming adopted by a family. She discusses being a "baby Christian" in comparison to her peers at her current church because most of the people she knows in

her young adult program are individuals who have been exposed to bible studies their whole lives. Perhaps because she had to grapple with faith in a different way than Thomas, she has also pushed herself to do more research on her own about the legitimacy of the bible for her and to intentionally push herself into more clarified thoughts regarding the bible and God.

On the other side of this coin is Rebekah who was born and raised into a conservative Christian home and who was actively involved with church activities from a young age. Rebekah discusses her parent's involvement with mission as acting as a backdrop for her own Christian development. Because her parents had gone abroad as missionaries, she valued service in her own Christian identity. Thomas represents several of the participants from similar backgrounds. This is not to say that they did not grapple or educate themselves to further their own conservative Christian identity, but that they had a root system that allowed for more influence over their lives. Early life experiences also encompass the way that parents and mentors influenced by conservative Christian and straight-ally identities.

Parental and mentor influence. Parental and mentor influence can be described as any contact with a close friend or family member which influenced a participant towards or against any behaviors or identities they may hold. For instance, Rebekah discussed her parents in relation to her Christian identity because she grew up knowing about her parents' involvement as missionaries. Ruth and Thomas in comparison had less parental involvement but both had others in their lives that brought them to faith. For instance, Ruth had a good friend at boarding school that helped make it safe for her to join a new

church, and Thomas described his experiences at camp and with his religious studies professors as individuals who influenced his faith life.

All of the participants of this study named either parents or other mentors in their life as having a profound impact on their conservative Christian identity. Other examples include relationships with a youth or senior pastor, involvement in church activities and gaining friends through church as a gateway to a more active faith life, and romantic partners that encouraged development as a conservative Christian. There were few stories from interviews across participants wherein a parent or mentor discouraged or encouraged someone to stop development as a conservative Christian, but there were many instances where participants shifted their thinking about the bible or themselves due to an influential person. For instance, several participants mentioned the influence that professors had on them in their lives who challenged them to really consider their faith and the bible in order to come into their own personalized Christian identity.

In addition to the influence of parental or mentors on participants' conservative Christian identity, participants also noted the influence of GLBT individuals on their identity as a straight-ally. This is consistent with psychological literature on straight-allies – knowing someone who identifies as GLBT allows individuals to build empathy and perspective taking and seemed to be important for participants of this study. Knowing the “other,” and getting to understand the plight of individuals who face discrimination due to their sexual orientation seems to be a critical incident in the formation of a straight-ally identity.

Legalism. Legalism can be defined as excessive adherence to a rule and also influenced participants and composite characters in this study. For instance, Thomas's

monologue discusses legalism in that during his conservative Christian development he was very legalistic at a time in his life. For him, this meant not drinking, abstaining from alcohol, drugs, and sex, mandatory attendance to church, church meetings, youth events, and an emphasis on getting individuals saved. Thomas eventually “loosens up” in order to shed some of the restrictive behaviors that he did in his teenage years and choose to create more freedom for himself in terms of what would bring him closer to God. Several participants, particularly those who grew up in a conservative Christian household discussed their relationship with legalism. Most participants had worked hard through research and self-exploration to avoid legalistic behaviors in their current lives but had dealt with it as they were still developing their own relationship with God.

Legalistic behaviors and modes of thought most likely differ between denominations and individual churches. The rules involved and the messages about legalism could also differ wildly depending on the context but it seems as if participants had to undergo a form of self-acceptance and education in order to move past the need to follow rules in order to get to heaven. However, legalism did not seem to always be connected to a heavenly reward.

For some participants, legalism was tied into a perfectionistic personality. For instance, one participant shared that she felt that her legalistic phase was reinforced throughout her life by her parents and mentors and that it felt familiar to her because she had always been in a high achievement environment. It is telling that all of the participants who discussed legalism claimed that they no longer felt the push to act legalistic in order to feel that they had a valid relationship with God, or to go to heaven.

For most participants, this involved gaining additional education and utilization of critical thought.

Education and critical thinking. Education and critical thinking describes participants' experiences in developing their conservative Christian identity through research, critical thought, or other forms of education and their confidence in sharing their beliefs with others. For instance, in Ruth's monologue, she describes reading the bible in full and reading a book called Jesus is a Carpenter in order to quell her doubts about God. Thomas also discussed his experience in furthering his Christian development in college as a religious studies major.

Although Rebekah's monologue did not specifically discuss readings or further education that helped her hone her conservative Christian identity, her monologue did reference her critical thought in terms of teasing out her political and religious identities. This was something that frequently happened across interview participants. For instance, many participants disclosed that they belonged to the Democratic Party even though their parents, friends, church members, etc. did not necessarily know that about them, and that they were at odds with these other people in their life. It does not mean that because participants became Democrats that they were using critical thought but that because they grew up surrounded by Republicans or conservative individuals, that they must have utilized some form of critical thinking to determine that they were not the same as the others in their lives.

Aspects related to participants' education and critical thinking was also shown in the monologues of Ruth, Thomas, and Rebekah's in reference to their straight-ally development. For instance, Ruth shared a college story wherein a potential sorority

recruit was discriminated against because some people thought she was gay. Ruth felt differently about the situation because she examined the facts and used reasoning to realize that this was a rumor, and even if she was gay, that she would not care. In addition, Thomas's monologue points to his education about world news and politics and how his awareness of legal struggles for gay and lesbian individuals impacted his development of a straight-ally identity.

Political Considerations. In addition to participants discussing their education and critical thinking skills as important to developing a straight-ally identity, participants also discussed their political identity in relation to these other held identities. This section describes incidents of participants describing their political affiliations in order to more fully describe their conservative Christian identity, or to contextualize their development as a conservative Christian in contrast to their political identity. Rebekah's monologue gives an example of the use of political considerations for participants. Rebekah is shown contrasting her own political beliefs, which currently align with the Democratic Party, against her conservative Christian beliefs in order to showcase that they are dissimilar. Rebekah discusses how her church home and family are both Republican because they value pro-life policies but that Rebekah has seen through her years that Republicans have been unable to overturn Roe VS Wade, and that she has found her political leanings to be more in line with the Democratic Party because of this. Interestingly, most participants' discussed their political beliefs throughout the unstructured interview process and of those who shared, most discussed their Democratic leanings while also stating that their families and friends might be surprised to learn this about them.

Political considerations were also found in terms of exploring participants' straight-ally identities. For instance, Rebekah felt that one of the ways that "proved" her straight-ally identity was in voting democratically, and advocating for same-sex marriage. The notion that a belief in the legal rights of GLBT individuals makes one into an ally might be challenging for some, yet when you consider the context for Rebekah to come to this place, it is fairly remarkable. She was raised in a conservative southern Christian home and has been surrounded by like-minded individuals who support the Republican Party and are firmly anti-gay for her whole life. Yet, she came to support gay individuals and gay rights in line with her political shift to the left. Perhaps for Rebecca, she had to change one of her central identities, her political identity, in order to encapsulate her straight-ally identity.

In addition to the political considerations that composite characters discussed in relation to their identities as a conservative Christian and straight-ally, characters also showed how their views regarding the need for a clear line between the state and church are indicative of their straight-ally stance. For instance, both the characters of Thomas and Rebekah shared that they are patriots and that they believe in the separation of church and state because the United States was founded on that principle. They also both shared that although they are Christians, they recognize that not all citizens are Christians, and therefore should not be kept to biblical rules. Further, the desire for a separation between church and state also relates to both character's desire of same-sex marriage in this country. Rebekah shared that she feels that pre-marital sex is a sin so she hopes that same-sex marriage is allowed so that gay and lesbian individuals do not have to continue to have pre-marital sex if they are to be in a relationship with one another.

Personal relationship with God. Composite characters noted a personal relationship with God as they discussed their conservative Christian development and identity. This theme is found in all of the monologues. For Ruth, Thomas, and Rebekah, a personal relationship God meant prayer, intentional actions to bring them closer to God, such as service, church leadership, or evangelism, and a set of rules based on their own belief system, in contrast to adherence to rules made by others. In order for participants to develop a straight-ally identity, the personal relationship that they have with God had to give them some autonomy for what is right and wrong, particularly for participants who were raised in a conservative Christian environment. This was shown in the way that participants interpreted biblical references to the problems with same-sex relationships, and the way that characters reconciled and negotiated their conservative Christian and straight-ally identities. As represented by the composite characters of this chapter, participants felt that their personal relationship with God was important so that they could take what they needed from the bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ to help form their straight-ally identity.

Civil Rights. In addition to participants discussing their personal relationship with God and how that impacts their ability to act as a straight-ally, composite characters also spoke of the connections between the civil rights movement from the 1960s and the gay rights movement of today. Ruth questioned herself in her story about whether or not she would have acted during the 1960s for African American rights and stated that she wanted to be on the right side of history. This was in contrast to her parent's discriminatory views towards people of color and gay individuals. Thomas also discussed the connections to the past and stated that he could see how the gay rights movement of

today will be looked at in the same way as other civil rights movements. These connections are particularly important because all of the participants, which are the source of these monologues and composite characters, were currently in the mid-south, which is known historically for its role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It is possible that this theme came up for participants because of the contextualized role of their current city. Perhaps living in a place that was known to be discriminatory and their awareness of such led them to be more open minded towards other similar scenarios.

Personal Relationships with GLBT folks. Although the importance of personal relationships with GLBT individuals was discussed in chapter four as well, its necessity in the development of the lives of conservative Christians cannot be downplayed. All of the composite characters discussed how one-on-one contact with a gay or lesbian person informed their views. Ruth discussed her friendships with gay individuals and spoke of its importance in her life by noting that she would not be engaged to her fiancé if he had not been able to be in relationship with gay individuals as well. Thomas discussed his relationship with his childhood friend Paul and how their friendship gave Thomas the opportunity to help explain his faith in open and accepting ways so that Paul could know that he would still be loved. Rebekah also shared that she knows gay and lesbian individuals. As other studies have shown regarding straight-ally individuals, this component of their development is often present because it allows for perspective taking and empathy, and gives individuals exposure to the “other.” By knowing gay and lesbian individuals, participants were able to place a face with the gay rights movement and to see how discrimination directly impacts gay and lesbian people.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Research related to the exploration and negotiation of individuals who identify as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally has been very limited. Although there is existing literature regarding the motivation, predictive characteristics, and development of both separate identifications, there is no known research that looks at the intersection and negotiations for individuals that affirm both identities at the same time. This research offers a counter-story, or story that is not often heard, in that it explores the development and negotiation of individuals who self-identify as both a conservative Christian and straight-ally. This research attempted to answer three broad questions: 1.) What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified conservative Christian?; 2.) What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified straight-ally?; 3.) Are these identities dichotomous and if so, how do participants negotiate competing discourses of values between dichotomous identities? A narrative inquiry was completed on seven participants in order to collect their stories and experiences in order to answer these questions so that a complex understanding could be reached and so that narrative stories could be heard. By using narrative inquiry, this study has given insight into the ways that individuals hold a straight-ally conservative Christian identity and has furthered the fields understanding of this complex identity negotiation.

Using narrative inquiry, interviews were analyzed using contextualization and categorization to further understand the behaviors, values, messages, psychological processes, self-perceptions, motivations, and negotiations of participants who subscribed to both a straight-ally and conservative Christian identity. As the primary researcher, my role was to find and illuminate the voices of participants who spoke about their own

individualized developmental processes and contextual considerations that have brought them into a straight-ally conservative Christian identity. The research questions of this study acted as the guide through analysis and interpretation. Participants discussed their experiences which lead to the themes highlighted in chapters four and five that were present for the participants of this study in a way that shows how these developmental processes took place and how they negotiate these identities as well. These data were represented both by traditional themes which helped show the similarities and differences between participants but also through Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) so that monologues could more fully bring participant narratives to life. Composite characters were brought to life by use of monologues that showcase the experiences of participants and help answer the three research questions of the study. This also allowed for a further protection of confidentiality so that individual voices could be heard but that individuals could not be distinguished from one another. Further, the monologues offer a counter story, or story not often told, regarding southern conservative Christians, so that the primary discourse related to conservative Christianity could be challenged. This research also opens up new questions and avenues for understanding individuals who self-identify as a conservative Christian in order to fully see individuals as they are, as opposed to what the media and outsiders might assume that they are. Both types of representation (traditional and CAP) were organized by theme and showed the tensions, contradictions, and negotiations for participants. Each monologue showed a different glimpse of identity development and negotiation for three different composite characters in order to show how participants perceived their seemingly dichotomous identities and lived within their worlds.

It is hoped that by reading these stories that a greater level of awareness has been reached regarding individuals who come to two seemingly dichotomous identities. In addition, it is possible that clinicians may be able to identify underlying themes that will help them to better understand how individuals come to the negotiations of these two identities. Understanding the tensions that could be present when living in two different identities could be of great help to clinicians as they work to understand more about identity development. This chapter will connect these findings to queer theory, and will further discuss the participant's context and how their positionality has impacted the results their own understanding of their intersecting identities. In addition, the connections to previous literature related to this topic and the limitations and future directions of this area of research will also be outlined.

Connections to Queer Theory

Queer theory allowed for the basis of understanding identity negotiation and categorization of participants because it views the world outside of discrete categories and into a more fluid and complex understanding. Queer theory was also used for this study so that participants could gain ownership over their own participation in this study - by using queer theory, participants were able to self-identify as both a conservative Christian and a straight-ally so that their own place in their developmental process could be illuminated. Further, queer theory made it possible for individuals who exist in a grey area of identity development to be studied. Normally studies require stricter allegiance to categories in order to control for variables, yet the process of negotiating two separate identities is not that clear. It was in this way that queer theory allowed for a contextualization of identity formulations and identities in individuals. This is because it

does not view identity, much as it does not view sexuality, as something that is stable and unchanging and allows for non-linear understandings of developmental processes to exist. Most research related to developmental processes limits realistic movement from one developmental stage to another by boxing participants into different categories based on sometimes innocuous criteria (Chapman et al, 2005). By shedding the developmental boundaries, participants of this study were able to be shown in less restrictive and more contextualized based processes. Queer theory additionally influenced the analysis and interpretation of participant stories because it drew my eye towards participants' understandings of their own categorization, binary systems or reluctance to accept binary systems, and helped me look at not only the commonalities but also the tensions, differences, and contradictions as well.

Queer theory is paramount to the understanding of the developmental processes for participants' because it views participant's negotiations and identities within conservative Christianity and straight-ally hood to be contingent, shifting and changing. Participants met with me one time each and their data is only representative of the time that we spent together in the spring of 2013. Although a developmental model may be able to be developed based on the findings and experiences of these participants, it is informed by queer theory that any linear model would be invalidating at best, and too simplistic to be realistic at worst. Instead, this study is viewed through a queer theory lens which shows their experiences and negotiations as contextually based and ever-changing.

Contextualization

Context is based on a person's surroundings, the time that they inhabit, the geographical location and their culture. Participants were shaped by their context in many

ways. One of the most salient ways that context impacted participants of this study was the different geographical locations that they inhabited in their lives prior to participation in this study. For instance, several participants had grown up on the west or east coast which showed them different rules for conduct, gender roles, appropriate dress, alcohol use, etc. and also impacted their straight-ally development. It is possible that they may not affirm either a straight-ally or conservative Christian identity as much if they had only grown up in the south. Additionally, while this study was taking place several large scale policies were enacted in the United States giving more equal rights to GLBT individuals which also had to have had an impact as well on participants. It is impossible to tell the extent that context has had on this research or on the individuals who participated in this study, but its importance cannot be diminished. With the policies and public polls bending towards affirmative rights for gay and lesbian individuals and because more than ever Americans support same-sex marriage, it is not known how different this study might be if it had taken place 10 years ago and 10 years in the future. However, it would most definitely have differences due to the changing political landscape.

Connections to psychological research

A review of literature for this study found that studies related to both conservative Christians and straight-allies was largely absent from the field. However, literature existed for both straight-allies and conservative Christians separately. This study was informed by the intersection of this work in order to set the stage and to give a point of reference for the results of this research. There were many similarities between this study and past studies related to straight-allies and many differences related to past research

related to conservative Christians.

Research related to straight-allies has been focused on developmental processes (Ambuske, 2010; Broido, 2000; Duhigg, 2010; Eichler, 2007; Stotzer, 2009), motivation (Russell, 2011), and the predictive characteristics of becoming a straight-ally (Fingerhut, 2011) and shows many similarities to the findings of this study. For instance, this research pointed to the important of early family modeling and the recognition of privilege on the development of a straight-ally identity, which was also noted by at least one participant in this study as well. In addition, participants often pointed to the affirmative or disaffirming views of their parents to inspire their own affirmation of gay and lesbian individuals.

A literature review of straight-ally individuals also found that contact with GLBT individuals was important to their development of an ally and that women who were highly educated were the most likely group of individuals to affirm straight-ally identities. This was also shown to be true in this study as all of the participants had at least as bachelor degree and most were working towards or had a master's degree as well. Further, all participants discussed their contact and relationships with individuals who identified as GLBT as a motivating factor in their straight-ally identities. Although Fingerhut (2011) found that empathy was not associated with straight-ally behaviors, every participant displayed empathy towards others, and particularly towards GLBT individuals in their narrative interviews.

Several researchers looked at the motivation of straight-ally identities, which overlaps with the evidence shown in this study. For instance, Altmeyer (1981) found that individuals became motivated to act in affirming ways towards GLBT individuals when

they were a witness to bullying or discriminatory acts. This was also noted in several of the participants – for instance when the narrative character Ruth discussed her anger towards her fiancée’s boss who frequently used anti-gay language when speaking at work. Further, Russell (2010) found that civil rights and patriotism were both motivating factors for straight-allies. These factors were also noted in participants of this study, as shown in chapters four and five.

Previous literature regarding straight-ally individuals seldom discussing participant religiosity as a part of their research, however some studies collected information related to participant’s religiosity, which showed that straight-allies held conservative Christian identities. For instance, Ambuske (2010) found that participants felt like their religious beliefs were cohesive to their straight-ally identity, but it is not known if these participants also identified with a conservative Christianity. In addition, Russell (2011) collected demographic information about her participants and found that over 30% of them identified with Christianity, but it is again not known if they felt that theirs was a conservative faith. She found that some individuals understood the message of Christianity to be pro-gay and that other participants connected their religious beliefs with activism. Although these studies noted a religious connection between their straight-ally participants, these studies did not discuss conservative Christian identities.

In contrast to previous studies regarding straight-allies, this study expanded the research of this area because it also incorporated the way that participants negotiated their straight-ally identities into their conservative Christian identities. Although there were many similarities in the experiences of straight-ally individuals of this study to previous studies, the opposite is true in relation to research related to conservative Christians.

Although most of the research related to conservative Christians found anti-gay correlations, this study showed that not all conservative Christians are homophobic.

Previous literature related to conservative Christianity found that most individuals who affirm this identity oppose abortion and believe that gay individuals chose their sexual orientation (Greeley & Hout, 2006). In addition, research has found associations between conservative Christians and low levels of openness (Streyffeler & McNally, 1998) and intellectual rigidity (Cullen et al., 2002) and that service attendance was positively related to homophobia (Rosik et al., 2007). All of these findings can be contrasted with the stories and experiences of participants of this study who displayed openness, affirmative attitudes towards GLBT individuals and belief that sexual orientation is innate.

Although a review of the literature shows both commonalities and differences in the findings regarding straight-ally and conservative Christian identification, it is important to note that the purpose of this study was not to prove or disprove ways in which individuals come to these identities but to illuminate the experiences of individuals with dual identities in order to learn more about their experiences. Although participants frequently noted similar information in relation to straight-ally research, it may be that there were more similarities and differences that were present, but that they may not have noted them specifically within their interviews.

Connections to Counseling Psychology

Counseling Psychology as a field is focused on the balance between science and practice, the utilization of a strength's perspective, and in viewing clients holistically. This research project is well suited for counseling psychology because of its methodology

and theory because it allowed participants to be shown within their context. In addition, it viewed conservative Christians outside of their normally anti-gay stereotype. This study showed participants within a holistic light and was not solely focused on one area of their lives, but on the intersectionality of their multiple identities and it is hoped that this research will add to the field in some way.

This research adds to the field of counseling psychology in several ways. First, it is a reminder that clinicians are not bereft of bias and subjectivity in terms of their potential to let experiences and beliefs of clients get in the way of fully seeing others. It could be that a client who comes for counseling may risk not being fully heard or seen as subscribing to both a straight-ally and conservative Christian identity if a clinician does not allow for that possibility to exist in his or hers own mind. For instance, my bias as a liberal Christian had to be checked fairly consistently so that I could see the full potential of participants who identified with a straight-ally identity in ways that sometimes surprised me. In addition, this research gives further information and transferrable knowledge regarding individuals who subscribe to seemingly dichotomous identities. It is a tricky, somewhat transitional place for individuals as shown through the participants of this study and individuals who affirm two separate identities are most likely in need of basic counseling skills, including empathy, perspective taking and a non-judgmental stance to help them cope with their negotiations.

Research Limitations

Although this research and information will provide new information regarding seemingly dichotomous identity negotiations to the field of counseling psychology in some ways, it was not without limitations. The limitations for this study mostly related to

the qualitative nature of the design including the sample size, demographic characteristics of participants, and methodology. Yet, due to the lack of research about this population, this methodology is still the most appropriate design for this study. However, most research related to straight-allies has been done qualitatively, and more quantitative research is also needed in this area. Although this research does not add quantitative information to the field, it did offer an expansion of information because it explored the negotiations of straight-allies who also identified as a conservative Christians. It also allows readers a more in-depth understanding of participant experiences and negotiations through story-telling, which would be extremely limited in a quantitative design. In addition, this study was not set up to be generalizable and instead offers transferrable results. Transferrable results allow clinicians and readers to take parts of this study to apply to their lives, relationships, or clients, but to also understand that straight-ally conservative Christians will not all hold the same experiences or beliefs. For instance, readers may relate to aspects of the monologues or themes found in this research, but may not relate to everything that participants spoke to. This allows for transferrable knowledge, as opposed to generalizable, because it allows readers to take some information to apply to themselves or others, and to leave other information behind that may not be as applicable to them.

A second limitation to this study is that the sample was found using snowball sampling, which is common in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Although I did not personally know most of the participants prior to this study, the pool of participants was limited to the connections that I had within my community. Perhaps due to the snowball sampling used in this study, all of the participants held graduate education, which most

definitely had an effect on the findings of this study. For instance, one of the themes found was that critical thinking was necessary for many of the straight-ally participants of this study and all of the participants placed themselves into graduate education. Several of the participants also were from the counseling field, where they have received education about social justice, white privilege, and the utilization of a non-judgmental stance, which was also impactful on these results.

A final limitation of this study was also a strength in the design. After meeting with participants it became clear that their dual identities were sometimes kept as a secret from others and that people in the lives of participants may have been surprised by their straight-ally identities. Due to the need for confidentiality, member checks were not completed and participants did not read or give input onto the monologues in chapter five. This was done thoughtfully because of the risk that participants would have been able to pick out their own stories and glean the identity of other participants, and so that they had limited contact with me as a researcher. None of the participants reached out for feedback or information related to the study after their interviews were completed.

Future Directions

Ideally, this study can be a jumping off point for future studies on seemingly dichotomous identity negotiations. Hopefully this research has shown that more research should be conducted that looks at conservative Christians in a more nuanced way and that stereotypical and media-influenced propaganda regarding both advocates for GLBT individuals and conservative Christians should be avoided. Future research should attempt to more consistently operationalize conservative Christianity and perhaps get to know why people self-identify into categories the way that they do. In addition, future

research should quantitatively explore identity negotiations for conservative Christian straight-allies in order to more fully understand the impact that graduate education and patriotism may plan on straight-ally identification. For instance, future studies could look to see the effect of patriotism and graduate education on straight-ally identification in order to know more about this population.

Conclusion

The voices of conservative Christian participants in this chapter have spoken of their developmental processes and contextual considerations that have brought them into a straight-ally identity. These voices speak to the themes that were present for the participants of this study in a way that exemplifies how these developmental processes took place and how they negotiate these identities as well. It seems that several factors influenced participants to take on a straight-ally identity including graduate education, critical thinking, confidence, personal relationships with GLBT individuals, and patriotism as well as the messages that they received growing up from parents or mentors, their belief that being gay is innate, and the awareness that everybody sins. Participants negotiated their conservative Christian and straight-ally identities in several different ways, but it is clear that this negotiation caused shifts and changes in their lives over all. For instance, for some, their straight-ally identity would be a surprise to extended family members or parents, and participants spoke of their need to look at the bible differently or to prioritize the message from Jesus Christ – that all individuals are worthy of love in order to manage their new identity within their old identity. For others, they managed this discrepancy by making rules – for instance, by stating that they were OK with gay individuals as long as they stayed celibate. Others did not have these rules

for their GLBT friends and family members. Participants' context and positionality within the mid-south also impacted their identities and negotiations because of the cultural view on religion and religious activity, as well as the hesitancy to be too forceful with affirmative attitudes towards GLBT individuals. It is hoped that by reading these stories that a greater level of awareness has been reached regarding individuals who come to two seemingly dichotomous identities, that of conservative Christianity and straight-ally identifications. In addition, it is hoped that clinicians may be able to point to some of the underlying themes of this study in order to better understand this population and to help them negotiate these seemingly dichotomous identities in their own lives and lives of their clients.

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Appendix

Unstructured Interview Guide

What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified conservative Christian?

- a. Tell me about your experiences in the church as a child or young adult
 - i. Did you grow up in the church?
 1. If so, what denomination did you grow up in?
 2. If not, tell me about when you started going to church
- b. How did you come to be a “conservative Christian”?
- c. What does it mean to you to be a “conservative Christian”?
- d. Tell me about a time that you had to define your Christianity to others, how did you do that?
- e. How do you understand the religiosity of GLBT individuals?

What are the perceptions of self as a self-identified straight-ally?

- f. How did you come to be a straight-ally?
- g. What does it mean to you to be a straight-ally?
- h. Tell me about your experiences as a straight-ally
- i. Tell me about a time that you had to define your identity as a straight-ally to others, how did you do that?
- j. How do you understand GLBT individual’s sexual orientation – is it a choice or innate?
- k. How does this understand impact your work for the GLBT community?

How do participants negotiate competing discourses of values between dichotomous identities?

- l.** How do you make sense of your identity as a conservative Christian and straight-ally together
- m.** Tell me about a time that it was difficult to be both a conservative Christian and straight-ally
- n.** Tell me about a time that it was easy to be both a conservative Christian and straight-ally
- o.** How do you explain these two identities to people – do you?
- p.** Do people at your church know that you are a straight-ally and vice versa?

Recruitment

FACEBOOK BLURB:

IRB approved qualitative research study seeks individuals who identify as a conservative Christian and as an advocate (or “straight-ally”) for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. Participants must go to church at least once a month, be over the age of 18 and reside in or around Memphis, TN. Please contact hjdannison@gmail.com for more information or to participate. Thank you!

POSTER INFORMATION:

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

“Identity Negotiation: Straight-Ally Conservative Christians in the Mid-South”

Qualitative research study seeks individuals who meet the following criteria to take part in 1-3 hour interviews about their personal experiences relating to their identification as a Conservative Christian and as an advocate (or “straight-ally”) for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community.

Criteria for participation include the following aspects:

1. Participants must be over the age of 18
2. Participants must identify as a conservative Christian based on their own definitions of conservative Christianity.

3. Participants must attend a church service at least once a month (the church does not necessarily have to be deemed “conservative” based on the individual’s definitions).
4. Participants must also perceive themselves to be a “straight-ally” based upon their own definition of what that identity entails.

Although no incentives will be offered or given to participants, interview participants may benefit from this research project because their unique voices will be heard and the identity negotiation that they may struggle with may be better illuminated through the interview process.